Virginia Tech football coach Frank Beamer announces plans to retire at season's end, concluding a 35-year coaching career that includes 29 seasons in Blacksburg.
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“Being on scholarship has allowed me to attend my dream school and play the game I love without having to worry about the financial burden that would be placed on myself and my family. As the daughter of a single mother, one of the best moments of my college career was being able to call my mom and tell her that I had earned a scholarship. To the donors who make these moments happen for us student-athletes, thank you. Thank you for supporting us as we follow our dreams.”

Morgan Conklin
Senior | Midlothian, Virginia

“I am extremely fortunate to have most of my education paid for while playing the sport I love at such an amazing university. To be honest, without my scholarship, I most likely wouldn’t be able to attend Virginia Tech because I’m an out-of-state student, and tuition is so expensive. I can’t thank the Hokie Club enough for all the hard work they do to provide athletes an opportunity to receive a great education from a school like Virginia Tech.”

Jordan Coburn
Senior | Ellicott City, Maryland
Q: A Hokie is …
A: Someone who follows Virginia Tech and is always proud to admit so. They do not have to have been a student there to be included in the Hokie Nation. A Hokie believes in “Ut Prosim” and strives to live up to that motto.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because …
A: Virginia Tech is known worldwide. We are located in rural Southwest Virginia, but our supporters can be seen almost anywhere you go. They proudly wear orange and maroon and are always quick to shout, “Go Hokies.”

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
A: I feel like I have always been a Hokie fan. I can remember listening to the radio of the exploits of Bob Schweikert, George Foussekis and Kenny Edwards when I was a teen. I even remember attending one football game at Miles Stadium. When I became a student at Tech in 1967 and attended my first game at Lane Stadium, I knew that I would be a Hokie for life.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: Living in Pulaski County, Virginia, even though we are close to Blacksburg, there was little information and communication for the Hokie Club in the early 1980s. A small group of us Hokies decided to try to organize a Hokie Club in our area. This coincidently, was the time that Frank Beamer was named head football coach. We had him speak at our first event, which was one of the first events he had done since becoming a coach. I am not sure who was more nervous, Frank or our group that was just hoping that we would have people attend. Needless to say, the event was a success, and the Pulaski County Hokie Club has more than 160 members today.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?
A: My best memory is sitting in the Superdome on January 4, 2000, during the national championship game, thinking about some of my friends and other naysayers saying that, “Tech will never get close to playing for the national championship in any sport.” I kept thinking to myself, “Well, I am sitting here in the Superdome and we are playing for the national championship in any sport.” I kept thinking to myself, “Well, I am sitting here in the Superdome and we are playing for the national championship in football, and I am not dreaming!” Even though we lost the game in the last quarter, we proved that we belonged on the field.

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Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions? If so, tell us your best.
A: Putting Virginia Tech decals on my “Hokie car” and arriving early to tailgate. Also getting into the stadium at least one hour before kickoff to watch the team warm up and watch the stands fill up.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.
A: Getting up early on a fall day, the sun is shining, no wind in Blacksburg, and a big football game against a big rival starting at 3:30 p.m., and then tailgating with fellow Hokies, exchanging football tales and discussing a big Hokie victory after the game.

Q: Do you have any gameday superstitions?
A: I'm not a superstitious person, but I haven't missed a home football game for more than 48 years and that is one streak I hope to continue for many more years.

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Curtin wins individual crown at 2015 ACC Cross Country Championships

Tommy Curtin felt Syracuse runner Justyn Knight make his move with roughly a couple of hundred meters left during the 2015 ACC Men’s Cross Country Championship race, and he immediately remembered the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships this past June when Knight ran by him in the 5,000-meter race to finish sixth.

“I was definitely worried,” Curtin said. “He’s a good kicker. He kicked past me at outdoor nationals in the 5K last year [Knight finished sixth; Curtin seventh]. I know he’s good as well. We’ve traded off those wins before.

“But I’m confident in my kick, so I knew when he slid past that I’d be able to get right behind him, hang on and get him at the end.”

The redshirt senior from Leesburg, Virginia, did just that, blowing past Knight in the final 100 meters and crossing the finish line first to claim his first ACC cross country title.

“Playing my kick perfectly and beat a very competitive field,” Curtin said.

Behind Curtin, the Hokies finished in fourth place with 120 points. Syracuse, with three runners finishing in the top five, won its third straight ACC team title. NC State claimed second, followed by Virginia.

In addition to Curtin winning the ACC title, the Hokies also took home the ACC Freshman of the Year award. Peter Seufer led all Tech men’s runners, finishing 24th with a time of 24:37.3.

Stuart Robertson was the second finisher for the Tech men’s team, coming in 24th with a time of 24:21.0. Neil Gourley (24:33.8) finished 30th, and Darren Barlow (24:41.2) came in 39th. Brent Musselman was 43rd with a time of 24:52.1.

On the women’s side, the Hokies finished sixth; Abigail Motley was 43rd with a time of 24:52.1.

The Hokies also took home the ACC team title with 71 points. Abigail Motley in eighth place with 213 points. Virginia won second, followed by Virginia.

Curtin led a pack of five or six runners coming down the stretch until Knight made his move. But Curtin had a little extra in the tank and hit the throttle in the final 200 meters.

“It feels like you’re going all out, and then at the end, we hit that downhill stretch,” Curtin said. “I could hear Coach Thomas yelling, ‘One more gear, one more gear.’ At that point, when you’re moving at what you think is your top speed, it’s all about whoever wants it more, whoever has that gear you shouldn’t have, but you get it because you want it.”

Curtin now has won five ACC individual titles in his career between track and field and cross country. He finished second at the 2013 ACC Cross Country Championships and took a redshirt season last year.
Beamer leaves a legacy of success on the field, more so off of it

Where to begin?

How do you write a farewell tribute about the most important person in the 143-year history of this university? How do you tell that story, knowing that no combination of words can capture his impact?

We knew this day was coming — the day Frank Beamer would no longer be the football coach at Virginia Tech. We just never knew when. On Nov. 1, he told us, announcing that he was putting his headset away and hanging up his whistle at season’s end, retiring and formulating the game plan for the next phase of his life.

Tearing up several times during a news conference the following day, he explained his reasoning in simple terms — it was just time. In doing so, he left us with lumps in our throats and tears in our eyes.

Frank Beamer has coached for 29 seasons at Tech, 20 of which I have witnessed personally. But I lived all of them, dating back to my days as a hayseed farm kid from Craig County. So his pending departure hits close to home.

I’ve interviewed Coach Beamer hundreds of times over the years. Our interviews never amounted to interviews. They always morphed into conversations, and usually ended with him telling me, ‘You know what I want to say. Make me look good.’ That trust was humbling.

By now, you’ve heard the many stories and eloquent tributes. You know about the win totals, the bowl streak, the championships, and the awards. You know about the big victories — the kick at West Virginia, the 1995 Sugar Bowl, the win at Miami to claim the first ACC title, winning at Ohio State, and others.

Those seem so hollow now that he plans to retire, at least to me. Just a jumble of numbers and facts.

Numbers define a coach’s legacy. A man’s legacy, though, is defined by how he treated and impacted those around him.

So remember that Coach Beamer turned down his raise in 1990 when he found out state employees weren’t getting one. Remember that, the first time I met him at the football media day in 1996, he walked up to me, shook my hand, and said, ‘Jimmy, how are ya doin’?’ He already knew my name.

Remember that, a couple of years ago, a Tech student came by unannounced and wanted to get the football team involved in Operation Christmas Child, an initiative in which shoeboxes packed full of toys get shipped all around the world. Most coaches would have dismissed her. Coach Beamer invited her in — and had his team participate.

Remember how he treated people, always taking time to sign an autograph or pose for a photo. Remember his loyalty and how he turned down opportunities at BC, Georgia, and North Carolina. He belonged to us, in Blacksburg, stalking the sidelines at Lane Stadium and squinting into the sun on glorious autumn afternoons. His humble, determined, hard-working nature fit Southwest Virginia’s culture.

Remember him giving second and third chances to players when most wouldn’t.

Remember seeing Mrs. Beamer and him at basketball games. Go read Tere Williams’ Facebook page to get a feel for what that meant to her.

Remember the signed note I saw once in Dave Cianelli’s office, congratulating him on winning the ACC championship in track and field.

Remember how Ace Custis and Kylie McColdrick paid glowing tributes to Coach Beamer on Facebook — and neither is a football player. Remember the appreciation of all student-athletes in all sports for what he, and his football program, meant to their respective sports.

Remember him giving second and third chances to players when most wouldn’t.

Remember how Mrs. Beamer and he sat in the front row at the convocation following the April 16, 2007 shootings on Tech’s campus — and wept.

There are so many others. The cold conclusion is that this wonderful human being is retiring and leaving a beloved university. The reality of that slaps so hard.

But Coach Beamer says it’s time. That leaves AD Whit Babcock and his staff preparing to fill his position. For sure, they’ll never be able to replace him.
Hoop dreams and black socks

Buzz Williams and the Hokies started what figures to be an exciting 2015-16 hoops season on Nov. 14.

The socks HAD to be black, and I HAD to have them now! The pursuit would take me to multiple suburban Minneapolis malls and ultimately would prove fruitless. The athletic sock makers clearly weren’t paying as much attention as I was. I would eventually take the court wearing black socks, but they were my dad’s dress socks. They looked ridiculous, and I felt really cool. I was, after all, the missing member of what should have been the “Fab Six.” We would have to work on a new alliterative name for the group once I received my invitation.

The year was 1991, and the “Fab Five” was all the rage in college basketball. Had I been looking for black athletic socks the next year, I could have found them at any mall in the country. Billied as “the best recruiting class ever,” the University of Michigan basketball team, under head coach Steve Fisher, was taking the college basketball world by storm. Their shorts were baggy, their heads were bald, and of course, their socks were black. Their shorts were baggy, their heads were bald, and of course, their socks were black. They would eventually start five true freshmen on their way to the national title game, as luck would have it, was played at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. Jalen Rose was my man, and when we were about to create a chance meeting on a street corner at the Final Four, I was hooked on hoops for life.

“Truth be told, I had already been smitten with basketball. I was the finest 4-foot, 2-inch shooting star… my man, and when good fortune created a chance meeting on a street corner at the Final Four, I was hooked on hoops for life.”

Every year after the title game was over, I begged my parents to let me stay up until 4 a.m. when I got cut from the basketball team my sophomore year. I was devastated, but opportunity would soon present itself. The athletic team, under head coach Flip Saunders, unfortunately, passed away recently. I have heard people eulogizing him over the past few weeks, and it brings back great memories of hanging out in the Wolves’ locker room. Flip was an awesome guy, and I have heard people eulogizing him over the past few weeks, and it brings back great memories of hanging out in the Wolves’ locker room. Flip was an awesome guy, and I have heard people eulogizing him over the past few weeks, and it brings back great memories of hanging out in the Wolves’ locker room.

I had moved to Richmond for baseball in 2010, but had made some connections within the VCU athletics department through mere luck. They work harder than everybody else. However, they don’t do it with much to do with me, though. Buzz Williams, and the members of his program, are the type of people who create the special circumstances that can turn around a program. Joe Smith was also.

My playing days had already long been over, but I loved basketball more than ever. But my career in baseball took off first. I missed basketball in the five or so years that followed without it – and then VCU came into my life. I had moved to Richmond for baseball in 2010, but had made some connections within the VCU athletics department through mere luck. They work harder than everybody else. However, they don’t do it with much to do with me, though. Buzz Williams, and the members of his program, are the type of people who create the special circumstances that can turn around a program. Joe Smith was also.

While many may not be wearing black socks when they start accomplishing things is yet to be determined. I will be, though, probably paired with nice loafer, recognizable as the guy lucky enough to call it.
Keeping up with Compliance

The compliance corner answers questions concerning the governance of intercollegiate athletics and its impact on our athletics department. Have a question? Please send it to inside@hokiesports.com and we’ll answer it in upcoming issues. Now, here are a couple of questions that we’ve received from Tech alumni and fans over the past few months, with responses from Tim Parker, Senior Associate AD for Compliance & Governance:

Q: Looking back at some recent cases, it seems the head coach often gets punished when he says that he wasn’t aware of violations occurring under his watch. Jim Boeheim at Syracuse comes to mind. What if he really didn’t know what was happening? Is it fair to suspend him? Megan in Blacksburg.

TP: “Those are certainly fair questions to ask. However, NCAA regulations specifically address this exact scenario. Bylaw 11.1.1.1 states that ‘an institution’s head coach is presumed to be responsible for the actions of all staff members who report to him and that the coach shall promote an atmosphere of compliance and monitor the activities of all staff members.’ Therefore, a coach may be suspended if the NCAA enforcement staff determines that the bylaw has been violated. Bylaw 11.1.1.1 states that ‘an institution’s head coach is presumed to be responsible for the actions of all staff members who report to him and that the coach shall promote an atmosphere of compliance and monitor the activities of all staff members.’

Q: How long are players suspended by the NCAA for accepting benefits from agents? I recently saw where the kid from Ole Miss [Laremy Tunsil] was reinstated after missing seven games. Is seven games the standard? Thanks, Tom from Christiansburg.

TP: “The length of the suspension varies depending on the total amount of the benefits and the specific facts of the case. In the case you mentioned, Tunsil received the use of three separate loaner vehicles over a six-month period though he did not pay for them. He also received a four-month interest-free promissory note on a $5,000 down payment for purchasing a used vehicle, two nights of lodging at a local home, an airline ticket purchased by a friend of a teammate, and one day use of a rental vehicle.

Under NCAA rules, a player is generally required to miss 30 percent of his sport’s contests for accepting impermissible benefits greater than $700. However, the penalty can be longer or shorter depending on any aggravating or mitigating factors connected to the case. For instance, last year, Georgia running back Todd Gurley was suspended for four games after accepting more than $3,000 in cash for autographed memorabilia. He could have missed more games, but his full disclosure and Georgia’s due diligence resulted in a less severe penalty.

Keep in mind that student-athletes not only get suspended, but also are required to make financial restitution (pay the value of the extra benefits to a charity) and often perform community service.”

Q: Can student-athletes participate in DraftKings or FanDuel, two fantasy sports websites? Under the law, those sites aren’t considered gambling, and we all know the NCAA comes down hard on gambling. Just curious. Thanks, J.C. in Blacksburg.

TP: “No. Neither student-athletes, nor any other staff members in our athletics department may participate in these particular types of contests. At the end of September, the NCAA staff issued a ruling pertaining to DraftKings and FanDuel, defining ‘sports wagering as putting something at risk — such as an entry fee — with the opportunity to win something in return, which includes fantasy league games. Because of this, student-athletes, coaches, administrators and national office staff may not participate in sports wagering, including fantasy league games with a paid entry fee.’

The penalty for participating is harsh. Student-athletes found to be wagering on these sites will automatically lose a year of competitive eligibility.”

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TP: “The length of the suspension varies depending on the total amount of the benefits and the specific facts of the case. In the case you mentioned, Tunsil received the use of three separate loaner vehicles over a six-month period though he did not pay for them. He also received a four-month interest-free promissory note on a $5,000 down payment for purchasing a used vehicle, two nights of lodging at a local home, an airline ticket purchased by a friend of a teammate, and one day use of a rental vehicle.

Under NCAA rules, a player is generally required to miss 30 percent of his sport’s contests for accepting impermissible benefits greater than $700. However, the penalty can be longer or shorter depending on any aggravating or mitigating factors connected to the case. For instance, last year, Georgia running back Todd Gurley was suspended for four games after accepting more than $3,000 in cash for autographed memorabilia. He could have missed more games, but his full disclosure and Georgia’s due diligence resulted in a less severe penalty.

Keep in mind that student-athletes not only get suspended, but also are required to make financial restitution (pay the value of the extra benefits to a charity) and often perform community service.”

Q: Can student-athletes participate in DraftKings or FanDuel, two fantasy sports websites? Under the law, those sites aren’t considered gambling, and we all know the NCAA comes down hard on gambling. Just curious. Thanks, J.C. in Blacksburg.

TP: “No. Neither student-athletes, nor any other staff members in our athletics department may participate in these particular types of contests. At the end of September, the NCAA staff issued a ruling pertaining to DraftKings and FanDuel, defining ‘sports wagering as putting something at risk — such as an entry fee — with the opportunity to win something in return, which includes fantasy league games. Because of this, student-athletes, coaches, administrators and national office staff may not participate in sports wagering, including fantasy league games with a paid entry fee.’

The penalty for participating is harsh. Student-athletes found to be wagering on these sites will automatically lose a year of competitive eligibility.”
Gabrielle Bishop, a versatile member of the Tech women’s swimming and diving team, graduates in May with a degree in construction engineering and management, along with getting a minor in green engineering. She wants to pursue a career in construction and currently has several job offers. She hopes to make a decision on her future by the end of the fall semester.

Q: Why did you decide to major in construction engineering and management?
GB: “Coming into Tech, I knew I wanted to do engineering. I didn’t know what type, so I went to a couple of information sessions, and I had heard about civil engineering before. This is when construction engineering management had just kind of started and was getting its feet on the ground. I went to those CEM sessions, and everything just kind of clicked. I liked everything that the professors had to say and what the seniors had to say. I was drawn more toward that because how it involves more than horizontal building. It involves vertical, horizontal…you can go in any way. There’s also the management aspect. You don’t always have to stick with the same job. So there are more career opportunities with it, and I liked that openness.”

Q: How have you managed to graduate in four years in engineering and still be a student-athlete? Most student-athletes who pursue engineering take five years.
GB: “I’ve taken heavy course loads. I’m in 19 credits this semester. It’s a heavy course load, but it’s doable. It’s a lot about time management and communication with my coaches. A lot of the classes that I have, especially my junior and senior years, have conflicted with practice times, and I’ve had to work with them to rearrange some practices. “As far as dealing with the work, it doesn’t bother me. There is a goal I have in mind to have a career in this construction industry, and I’m going to get it done. I’m going to make sacrifices now and reap the rewards later.”

Q: You haven’t done an internship, but that hasn’t stopped companies from pursuing you, has it?
GB: “We recently had our career fair, and I was able to get six interviews. I just got a call from one of the companies for a second-round interview. I also received an offer from another company yesterday [Oct. 21]. It’s pretty exciting to be able to get out in the field and know that I have some opportunities ahead of me. I’m most interested in commercial construction, and that would be things such as building office buildings, sports venues, entertainment buildings – like a theater or an Imax – hospitals, educational buildings. I would start out in the field, kind of working with my hands and building from the ground up. I’d be labeled as a field engineer. I could work my way up or move into the office setting. I could do more things such as estimating or scheduling. Hopefully, in the next five years, I could work my way up to a project manager position and excel from there.”

Q: So what are your future plans?
GB: “I’d like to make a decision [on her job offers] before the beginning of the spring semester, so hopefully by the end of December or the end of January, just to have something in my mind and not have to worry about where I’ll be living. Before I graduate, I want to take the FE, which is the engineering-in-training exam. This sets me up to get my professional engineering license within the next five years. I’d have to gain five years of experience, which is defined by the state. Then I’ll apply for that [the FE exam] and pass that. Then I’ll be awarded my professional engineering license. “All that is really saying is that I’ll be able to stamp off on documents, and if I receive plans, I can sign off and say that this is structurally sound and safe. I’d be able to open things up, things like that. It gets my name on the line and bumps up the responsibility I’ll have on a project.”

Michal Szuba is a freelance specialist on the Tech men’s swimming and diving team and helped the 200-yard freestyle relay team to a bronze medal at last year’s ACC Championships. He graduates next May with a degree in finance, with plans to pursue a career in the banking industry.

Q: Why did you decide to major in finance?
MS: “I like math, and I think finance is really interesting, especially investing. It’s kind of exciting. I like the stock market. Stocks are changing every couple of seconds, so you have to follow them, and you’re always trying to do your best [to make money], so that’s exciting. In the future, I’d like to work in this area.”

Q: Did anyone influence you, or try to lead you down this path?
MS: “Yes, my sister suggested this to me. She is three years older than I am, and she was studying economics in England. She thought it would be best if I went this way, and I’ve found it exciting.”

Q: Finance is one of the most difficult majors at Virginia Tech. How have you managed to balance your time between academics and athletics?
MS: “It’s been hard, but if you’re focused on school and swimming, you can do it. Good time management is really important. We [the members of the swimming and diving team] don’t have much free time, so school and practices come first and then free time. It’s all about time management.”

Q: What are your future plans?
MS: “I haven’t decided yet, but I’d like to go back to Europe and live in London. My sister lives there, so it would be kind of nice. Or maybe I’ll end up back in Poland. I haven’t decided yet. I wouldn’t mind working for a company like PwC [a global financial services company]. They’re worldwide. They’re here in the U.S., the U.K., and even in Poland. But I’ll go to Business Horizons [a career fair at Virginia Tech] next semester and talk to some companies. I could see myself as an investment banker. I know it’s time-consuming, but it would be exciting. Maybe I’ll do it for a year and see how it goes. “My dream job would be to open my own company, and maybe one day, I’ll do it. That would be exciting, just to start something from the beginning and see it grow.”
The meeting occurred late in 1992, and David Braine pulls the memory of it from his head quickly and with the utmost of clarity. Tech’s athletics director at the time, Braine walked in, and Dr. James McComas, the head of Virginia Tech, met with the Hokie executive vice president, sat there.

“Do we need to make a change with our football coach?” McComas asked.

“No,” Braine said.

That lone answer saved Frank Beamer’s professional life and ultimately marked the first spark that ignited the Hokies’ football program into the national atmosphere. Tech made a bowl game the next season – and won it – and the head man has been winning ever since, currently standing as college football’s all-time winningest active Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) coach.

His unprecedented run, though, will come to an end following this season, as Beamer announced his retirement plans on Nov. 1, one day after the Hokies’ 26-10 win over Boston College. He told his coaching staff and players, and then the following day, met with the Hokie Nation to offer some insight on his decision.

At a news conference held at a packed McConnell Auditorium in the Merryman Center, Beamer shed tears with his family and with many in attendance as he told Hokie Nation it was simply time to hang up his whistle, particularly in light of the program’s struggles the past three seasons after winning 10 or more games for eight straight seasons from 2004-11.

“I have always said I think I will know when it’s time, and I think it’s time,” Beamer said.

“There have been some differences of opinions out there, and any time you have a public life, there will be that. The last thing I want is for Hokies to be divided. I want everyone to be in the same direction, and I think it’s right in that regard, and so I think this is the right time.”

Beamer’s decision will end a 29-year run at Tech and a 35-year coaching career. He had won 277 games going into the Hokies’ Nov. 12 game at Georgia Tech, including a 29-13 victory over Tech. The 277 wins ranked sixth all time among FBS coaches.

His Tech tenure got off to a slow start. He inherited NCAA sanctions that limited the number of scholarships that were available, and the Hokies went 24-42-2 in his first six seasons while he tried to guide the program through those sanctions. Many fans called for his ouster, but Braine, who often watched film with Tech’s coaching staff on Sundays following the games, made the bold decision to keep him.

Beamer, who turned 69 in mid-October, certainly validated Braine’s decision. He guided the Hokies to four ACC titles (2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010), five ACC Coastal Division crowns, three BIG EAST Conference titles, two “major” bowl victories, six BCS appearances and a trip to the 1999 national championship game. He earned five conference Coach of the Year honors (three in the BIG EAST, two in the ACC), and in 1999, he received eight national Coach of the Year awards.

Beamer came to his decision days before the Boston College game, waking up one morning and telling wife Cheryl that he planned on retiring. He told his son, Shane, on Friday before the team left to travel to Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Following the Hokies’ victory, Cheryl Beamer asked her husband if he wanted to reconsider his decision, and he said he was at peace with it.

“When you’re in love, you know it’s the right thing to do, and it’s the right thing for Virginia Tech. I think it’s the right time for me.”

“It’s a tough business. I think it’s a younger guy’s business, talking about practices and games. Everything is critical. Every loss is critical. After you do that a number of years, I think it wears on you a little bit. I knew what I was getting into. I chose the profession, and I’m not bad-mouthing the profession. I’m just saying it’s a tough profession.”

“The hardest thing I’ve had is that so many people are counting on you and then when you let them down – and people express it differently and all that – but still, that’s kind of my deal. I didn’t want to let Hokies down. That’s the hardest part about being average the last few years. That’s another thing I’m proud of. At one time, average wasn’t so bad. Now, average is unacceptable, really. That’s a good thing. I’m proud of that. Tech fans deserve better. We’ve beenaverage for too long.”

Beamer’s decision rocked Hokie Nation, though all knew the day eventually would come. It also saddened many in the athletics department, as Beamer served as the face of the department – and arguably the university – living its core values each and every day.

Following the team meeting, several players went to Beamer’s office to offer well wishes and to show their appreciation for the opportunities he gave them.

“I’m glad that he announced it this week so that we could celebrate the right way and honor him the right way.”

Like Rogers, most were surprised at the decision. Most expected this type of decision to come – if it were to come – at the conclusion of the season.
IHS extra | frank beamer decides to retire

Nov. 28, 2000
Beamer turns down the North Carolina job after agreeing to take it and signs a five-year deal to remain at Tech

Dec. 4, 2004
Beamer gets an Orange Bowl win, as Tech knocks off No. 12 Cincinnati 20-7

Jan. 1, 2009
Beamer gets an Orange Bowl win, as Tech knocks off No. 9 Miami to win the ACC title in their first year in the league

Aug. 21, 2010
Tech announces extension of Beamer’s contract through Dec. 31, 2016

Aug. 6, 2015
Tech renames Spring Road next to Lane Stadium in honor of Beamer (“Beamer Way”)

Aug. 27, 2014
Beamer signs contract extension through the 2019 season

Nov. 1, 2015
Beamer announces plans to retire at the end of the season

But Beamer wanted to be up front with his players and coaches.

“I have always wanted to be honest with people,” he said. “If I know something, I can’t keep it a secret, and I don’t want to. My players and coaches deserve to know what’s going on. For me, it was the right thing to do.”

Speculation had been surrounding Beamer’s future for roughly a year, dating back to December when the longtime coach underwent throat surgery that kept him from coaching in the Hokies’ Military Bowl win over Cincinnati. He returned for spring practice, and he told media members at July’s ACC Kickoff that he was energized for the upcoming season.

The surgery and subsequent recovery led to Beamer losing a lot of weight. But he said that his health was not a factor in his decision to retire.

“After this operation, I don’t know that I’ve had quite the energy that I once had, but that hasn’t been an issue at all,” he said. “My health is good, and I’m thankful for that. Full speed ahead.”

Beamer’s legacy extends far beyond wins and losses on the field. He ran his program the right way, without a hint of scandal, and his players graduated. The program has increased its NCAA Academic Progress Rate scores each of the past four years.

In the community, he started a charity, which he named after his mother, and uses it to promote reading among young children. He often has read to kids at elementary schools, and he speaks to various civic groups within the community on a regular basis. He also speaks at various university functions, all with the intent of helping the school.

“It’s a place that’s been tremendous to me, and I hope I’ve been good for it,” Beamer said. “We’ve kind of grown together. Like I’ve always said, I hope everything has gotten better. Bigger and better. I think, for the most part, that is true, and I hope that’s true in every regard.”

Beamer served as the face of the school when he helped students, staff personnel and administrators overcome the tragedy of April 16, 2007. He attended the convocation the day following the tragedy, and he later spoke to family members who lost loved ones on that fateful day.

He and the football program helped the university rebound to the thriving place it is today.

“There were lots of ways to reach Virginia’s Blue Ridge. From the convenience of Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport to the beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway. To learn more, visit FLYROA.COM.
but did.

"I went to a Richmond race [NASCAR] right after that, and someone said, 'You'll probably always be remembered for the tragedy that happened at Virginia Tech.' I said, 'No, what we're going to be remembered for was how Virginia Tech reacted to that tragedy and how they came together and got closer. Cared about each other. That's what we'll really remember about that deal.' And that's really Virginia Tech right there."

Those in the audience at the news conference in which he addressed his retirement plans included university president Dr. Tim Sands, current athletics director Whit Babcock, Braune, and Traci Weaver, the wife of former AD Jim Weaver, who passed away this past July. Jim Weaver’s leadership, and particularly his investment in facilities, helped Beamer take the Hokies on an unprecedented run of 22 straight bowl games.

That accomplishment may be Beamer’s biggest. Tech’s bowl streak currently is the longest active streak recognized by the NCAA.

For sure, Hokie Nation will remember him in many ways. "He is who he is," Beamer said. "Honest, sincere and respectful." For sure, Hokie Nation will remember him in that exact way – and in so many others.

What others are saying about Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer

"Frank Beamer is one of the most respected coaches in college athletics and for good reason. What he has meant to college football, his players, staff and fans is immeasurable. He is a man of integrity, class and humility, and I am tremendously pleased that part of his career has been spent in the Atlantic Coast Conference. I wish Frank, Cheryl and his entire family nothing but the best." – ACC Commissioner John Swofford

"I know he wanted to win a national championship. I’ve told him, ‘You’ve already won one.’ I said, ‘Your national championship is the type of man you were and that legacy of how you treated people and the way those kids loved you’. I said, ‘That’s your national championship. And those kids won’t forget him. So that, he is proud of.’ – Cheryl Beamer, wife of Frank Beamer

"Congratulations Frank Beamer on a legendary career. Thanks for everything you’ve done for Hokie Nation and Blacksburg.' – U.S. Senator and former Virginia Governor Mark Warner

"I remember him sitting on my couch, the smile he had on his face, the enthusiasm and him really impressing my mom with his delivery. That was special because he made her smile and made me believe that he wanted me in that moment, and for him to take his time to come down there was really a special moment." – Former Tech quarterback Michael Vick

"Coach Beamer has been so much more than a football coach to me. Everybody always asked me when I first got into the league, ‘Why did you go to Virginia Tech over some of these other schools?’ It’s that personal connection, that personal touch that those coaches just created with me and a lot of other players that they were able to recruit and get to come to Blacksburg. But Coach Beamer has been so much more than a football coach to me and a lot of other guys. We still talk to him to this day."

"Best college coach ever. This man is a living legend. Coach, you’ll be greatly missed, but respected in the highest regard for what you did for young men’s lives. I’ll never forget, thank you." – Former Tech defensive back Antonio Exum

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The NCAA certainly frowns upon gambling of any type, and with his scrappy beard and country-boy outlook on life, Wade Hansen wouldn’t exactly fit the image of a man sitting at the poker table ready to wager his hard-earned capital on the flick of dealer’s wrist. But Hansen isn’t afraid of risk. He quickly tells you that he plays the odds that are in his favor, and then he patiently waits to collect.

The starting right tackle on the Virginia Tech football team’s offensive line went all in, in gambling parlance, with his life-altering decision more than two years ago. He pushed all his chips to the center of the table, venturing everything that someone, somewhere, would actually gamble on him.

Tech head coach Frank Beamer and his staff did. Now both sides feel they hit the football jackpot. “It’s made me who I am today,” Hansen said. “So I’m happy for the change.”

The change being that he transferred from a Division III school in small-town New York to Virginia Tech. He looked at other places during his search, spraying emails to locales such as Syracuse, Connecticut, East Carolina, Maryland and West Virginia.

At the time, Hansen wanted a scholarship. Virginia Tech offered him a shot.

Hansen spent two years at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a private school in Troy, New York, near his tiny hometown of Raymertown. RPI’s specialty is engineering, and Hansen originally wanted to pursue a career in that. Playing football and being close to Raymertown, a spot not far from the Vermont border where his family run a dairy operation, made the decision to go there rather easy. He could get a degree, play football and still get to the woods for hunting and fishing, two hobbies he cherishes in his spare time.

But it all came with a hefty price. Division III schools do not offer scholarships, and RPI’s tuition hovered around $60,000 a year. Hansen received financial aid, but even with that, the costs mounted.

“I played two years, and it was fun. It was a good time, but I felt that RPI was putting a financial burden on me and my family. The only way to relieve that was to continue to apply for more financial aid, or go somewhere where there was an opportunity to become a scholarship player. I sat down with my family, and we thought that was a good idea. We weren’t getting any positive feedback from the financial aid offices.”

Hansen cast emails in many directions, but only hooked two responses – Virginia Tech and Georgia Southern. Tech defensive line coach Charley Wiles told Hansen to make a highlight video and post it on YouTube, and Hansen put together some highlights of his sophomore year.

Wiles liked what he saw. Hansen was a 6-foot-5, nearly 300-pounder with decent athleticism. He also played hard. Images of John Engelberger came to mind. Engelberger, a former All-American, came to Tech as a walk-on himself.

Wiles invited Hansen down for the spring game, and Tech’s staff ultimately offered him a preferred walk-on spot. “As soon as I set foot on the campus, I knew I wanted to come here,” Hansen said.

If only things were so simple. Hansen started feeling poorly on his return trip home to New York, and that served as a precursor of things to come.

Before the end of the semester, he had been...
diagnosed with mononucleosis, Lyme disease and strep throat. He spent six weeks in bed. By the end of the semester, he had lost 30 pounds, and his grades dropped nearly as much.

“I had to take summer classes at two community colleges just to get my grades up to transfer here,” Hansen said.

By then, Hansen was committed to play his hand. He came to Blacksburg, and a few days on campus only reaffirmed his decision. He loved Southwest Virginia, which conjured memories of the dairy farm in rural Raymertown, and fishing and hunting opportunities were plentiful.

On the field, he sat out the season while meeting the NCAA’s residency requirements for transfers. He still paid a lot in tuition, but he was less than 10 days from graduation and had a chance to earn a starting position — and that coveted scholarship.

That happened on a chilly April day two days before the annual Maroon-Orange Game when Beamer delivered him the news.

“I’m going to take care of you,” he told him. At that point, the dealer folded. In spite of paying his way at Tech for two years, the biggest gamble he possibly could take – playing in a big game – was over. He came off the bench in Tech’s Military Bowl win over Cincinnati, but still played 60 snaps. That propelled him into the offseason and into spring practice when he knew he’d have a chance to earn a starting position – and that coveted scholarship.

“I just had that goal,” he said. “That was my biggest thing. You go as hard as you can on all the time, and someone will take note. Until then, you’ve got to keep chugging along. You’ve got to keep working. You’ve got to keep doing what you’re doing. Never settle to be good enough. That was the big thing my dad told me when I played Pop Warner. I never settled to be good enough.”

Hansen has started every game this season. He’s on the verge of wrapping up his career. He’s on the verge of wrapping up his career. By then, Hansen was committed to play his hand. He came to Blacksburg, and a few days on campus only reaffirmed his decision. He loved Southwest Virginia, which conjured memories of the dairy farm in rural Raymertown, and fishing and hunting opportunities were plentiful.

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Chuck Clark remembers the day vividly. He was a senior at King’s Fork High School in Suffolk, Virginia, and his mother, Lashonda, told him and his siblings to go through their closets and gather together any old clothes or shoes that were too small or simply no longer in style. They loaded the stuff into the trunk of their vehicle, and then they went to a rough section of Portsmouth.

“We went and found a bunch of homeless people in Portsmouth, and we pulled up and opened our trunk and let them go through and get what they wanted,” Clark said. “I’d tell him and his siblings to go through their collections, asking fraternities, sororities, students in her classes and other on-campus organizations to be a part of it. As a result, he has collected close to 2,000 boxes in two years.

Henry, a junior pursuing a human nutrition, foods and exercise degree, always wanted organizations to be a part of it. As a result, she received that shoebox.

“Before receiving the box, I had no hope or future to look forward to,” she said. “That box meant someone took the time to pack it for me, and the world didn’t seem like such a bad place any more. I do this because I know it will change a life somewhere overseas because it changed mine.”

Tech’s football players packed 120 shoeboxes in time to beat the Nov. 10 deadline. Samaritan’s Purse needs the shoeboxes in by this time to allow for shipping to various parts of the world.

“There are not enough words to describe how much it means to these kids to provide them gifts. So you’re not going to know just how special to get presents. So what I had to give them was a sense of hope,” Henry said. “I am forever grateful. The players may change mine.”

The players, though, were quite aware of their impact. This season on the field may not have turned out exactly how they wanted, but they have refused to let that blur the bigger picture – their obligation to live up to the university’s motto Ut Prosim (“That I May Serve”).

“This is an opportunity to give back to kids and make sure they have a great Christmas as well,” tailback J.C. Coleman said. “I love kids, and I’m glad to be a part of something that is going to make them feel blessed.”

Clark agreed.

“I’m about to turn 21, so getting presents at Christmas isn’t that big of a deal to me,” he said. “For someone who is 2 or 10 or 15, it’s special to get presents. So what I had to give up monetarily, that’s not anything compared to the smile you can put on someone else’s face.”
Senior Transition Seminar beneficial for Tech student-athletes

A panel of five guests recently offered invaluable insight to a group of student-athletes getting ready to wind down their playing days and pursue their future professional goals.

by Jimmy Robertson

The NCAA constantly hammers home its overarching point that student-athletes more than likely will go pro in something other than sports, and Virginia Tech Athletics Department should figure its student-athletes for that type of future.

Coordinated by the Office of Student-Athlete Development, the athletics department held its Senior Transition Seminar on Oct. 19, bringing in a panel of five guests to address an array of topics and answer questions from more than 100 student-athletes who gathered at the McConnell Auditorium in the Merryman Center for the event. The purpose of the event was to provide insight to student-athletes getting ready to transition into the professional world.

The panel consisted of former Tech student-athletes Wayne Robinson, who serves as the senior pastor at New Millenium Christian Center in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Jasmine Reeves, a university recruiter for Amazon. It also was comprised of Tori Fitzpatrick and Sean Hubbard, two representatives from Kohl’s, a national department store chain. Carl Ehrlich, a former Harvard football player who founded his own company, rounded out the panel.

Kevin Jones, a former Tech football player who serves as an assistant AD in the athletics department, moderated the event. He serves as a good resource and example for Tech’s student-athletes getting ready to transition into the professional world.

“The biggest thing, and it’s what makes people happy, and what makes many of you happy, is that you’re chasing after this goal,” Ehrlich said. “The challenge after sports is to find that next thing that you’re going to be great at, and it’s going to be different things – your job, your family. Finding those things and throwing yourself into those new projects is key. You need something new to be great at.

“Right now, your goal is being a college athlete,” Jones told the audience. “But I think the story is half told because being a college athlete is not a long-term thing. It’s four or five years. Then what? That’s not a score tactic. That’s reality.

“When sports are over, what are you going to do with yourself? Are you going to be out of school not pursuing your passion, or are you going to be pioneers in something? Breaking barriers? Serving people who are helping people? Showing other Virginia Tech athletes how it’s done? Coming back and being a mentor to others?”

Therein lies the big challenge for student-athletes across the country. Nearly all realize that they are not, or probably will not, play professionally in their respective sports. But they spend so much time focusing on their sports while in college that they tend not to focus on their futures – and then the future becomes the present.

All the panelists urged the student-athletes to begin thinking about their futures immediately.

“You should know which employers are coming to this campus and are hiring. You should have gone online and pulled down their information, so that you can have an intelligent conversation with these people when they come. You’ve got to know more about the company than anyone in the line. That’s the only way to distinguish yourself,” Fitzpatrick said. “You need to have consistent and substantive communications with academic advisors on both sides of the Drillfield,” Robinson told the group.

All the panelists agreed upon – doing an anonymous internship while in college.

“Most of Tech’s student-athletes complete internships, and many do more than one. For most, this is part of their degree requirement, and it also gives them added experience to put on a resume, thus enabling them to distinguish themselves from hundreds of others who might be applying for the same position,” Robinson said.

“If you tell me that you really want to be a manager, and I look at your resume and I see that you’ve been flipping burgers and other things, I thinking that you haven’t done anything to prepare yourself for this,” Hubbard said.

“Have you done an internship or have some other experience, those things really, really impress me.”

The 90-minute seminar served many purposes, not the least of which was to remind student-athletes to start planning early. It reminded them to form a plan and reinforced the value of personal relationships with academic advisors and networking. It also stressed to them the importance of internships and educating themselves on companies of interest.

In addition, it served to point out that student-athletes have inherent advantages over other potential employees.

“I had so many skills that I used playing soccer and now I use them every day – work ethic, time management and leadership,” said Reeves, the first All-American in Tech women’s soccer history and the first to be drafted by a professional league. “‘That keeps me going. If you fall back on what you already know, it’s going to take you a long way. But if you try to reinvent yourself, it’s going to take you quite a bit longer.”

Many of the student-athletes in attendance will be going pro after graduation next spring. Not in sports, but in fields of their choosing, and for sure, this seminar was the Office of Student-Athlete Development’s latest way of guiding them down that path.
SHAVE FOR THE BRAVE EVENT
ANOTHER Success

For the sixth straight fall, the Virginia Tech baseball team held its annual “Shave for the Brave” event, with more than 50 players, coaches, staff members and friends and family of the Hokies gathering on Oct. 29 at English Field to have their heads shaved and to bring awareness and raise funds for childhood cancer research. The team also held its Halloween game, dressing up in costumes for a softball game as a way to entertain fans.

The event was held in association with the St. Baldrick’s Foundation, which supports childhood cancer research, and the “46 Mommas Shave for the Brave” organization. Thanks mostly to funds donated through the Internet – on the team’s official donation page (https://www.stbaldricks.org/events/VTBaseball) – the program is on pace to reach its targeted goal of $30,000 for the second straight year. In all, the team has raised almost $135,000 in six years.

For those still looking to support the cause, please go to the team’s donation page link and then sponsor a Hokie. The team is still raising money in hopes of winning the “Battle of the Bald” and take home the Bald Cup – a college showdown to see which school can raise the most money by Nov. 30. The Hokies are currently in second place (see complete standings here: http://www.stbaldricks.org/college-battle).

This event marked the ninth of the 2015-16 academic year for 19 Ways – the baseball team’s initiative to find 19 ways to make a difference in the community.
Every young soccer player in America, both male and female, loves to attack. The fun lies in pushing the ball up the field and either scoring a goal, or passing to a forward for a shot attempt.

But team success in soccer, like with every other sport, usually comes about because of how well a squad plays defense. And that requires having defenders with selfless attitudes and rugged dispositions.

Jordan Coburn, a defender on the Tech women’s soccer team, possesses such qualities. While cordial and pleasant off the pitch, she proudly plays with a chip on it.

Coburn has been a defender since she took up the sport as a toddler, so those in the New River Valley looking for tackling tips would be wise to heed the counsel of this Wikipedia of soccer defending.

When asked why she always has been a defender, this Maryland native listed an array of skills necessary for the task and then injected a bit of humor.

“Chugger would argue that I’m not the fittest on the team, so being a center back, you don’t run the most,” she said. “But you can say that it just came naturally.”

“I joke with Drew [Kopp, Tech’s associate head coach] because he was a center back, and I ask him, ‘Why are these center backs always unfit?’” said Chugger Adair, the team’s head coach since December of 2010. “With Jo [Coburn], we really crushed her in her first year. We had a couple of overtime games her freshman year when she struggled late in the year. So her sophomore year, we really stressed fitness, and she got herself to a level that was sufficient. She’s maintained that and proven herself on the field.”

That goes without saying, as Coburn has started every game in which she has played in her career and played an instrumental role in the program’s unprecedented success. As a sophomore, the two-time All-ACC choice helped the team make it to the College Cup for the first time in program history, and the Hokies followed that with a trip to the Sweet 16 last season.

Her career coincides with that of Adair’s as the head coach. In fact, Coburn and Adair have a special connection – she was his first recruit.

The story of how she ended up at Tech is interesting. She played for a prestigious club team in Bethesda coached by current Maryland head coach John Morgan, who was an assistant at Maryland when Coburn played for him. But he and the Terrapins never recruited Coburn, though he spoke highly of Coburn to Adair.

“We saw value in her,” Adair said. “Everyone has different things that they look for, different fits and that sort of thing.”

“They haven’t made the NCAA Tournament the past couple of years,” Coburn said. “I definitely think I made the right decision.”

Coburn picked Tech over East Carolina, College of Charleston and George Mason. The beauty of the campus struck her, and the tight-knit relationships on the team sold her. It actually convinced her right from the start,
and down the field in following Adair's fast-afraid to mix it up with opponents. On a well with her teammates.
to stay there. She is a natural fit at defender.
what he saw.
the field, as he evaluated her – and he liked
snow falling, he watched Coburn and her team
also taking in one of Coburn's games. With
D.C., to visit some of the attractions, while
pleasure, taking his children to Washington,
that he wanted to see her play again.
So he told Coburn on her visit to Blacksburg
staff, Adair wanted to be sure of his first recruit.
I thought, 'This is where I want to go.'" he said, smiling.
Jordan Coburn

The Hokies won the game 2-0, but Coburn
the player, but the official gave her a red card.
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"I'm probably a natural defender. I like
my best cheering from the sideline." Adair said.

"You need to be physical and willing to go in
tackle and sacrifice yourself if you need to,
to save a goal," Coburn said. "You need to be
voice because you're one of the players on the
field besides the goalie who does see the entire
field, so it's important that you're constantly
communicating with everyone all the time.
"I'm probably a natural defender. I like
the physical aspect of the game. I like going
into tackles and being a defender. Your main
priority is to keep the ball out of the net, so
you're used to making tackles."

Depending on how the rest of the Hokies'
season goes, Coburn could end up starting
more matches than any player in Tech history,
a record currently held by Kelsey Mitchell (88
from 2009-12). Coburn has missed just three
matches in her career – two by injury and one
after receiving a red card.

That happened in the Clemson match last
season. She hauled down a Clemson player to
prevent a goal and readily admits she fouled
the player, but the official gave her a red card.
The Hokies won the game 2-0, but Coburn
had to sit out the next game, Tech's 2-0 loss
to Notre Dame.

"It was extremely hard," she said. "I had
never sat out of a collegiate game before, but
knew that I would have to suck it up and do
my best cheering from the sideline."

"It [the play against Clemson] probably
saved the game for us, to be honest," Adair said.
Adair didn't like the call either, but he liked
that Coburn saved a potential goal. Those
types of plays never get in the headlines, but
they win games. He has witnessed Coburn do that
troughout her career. Earlier this season, in
a match against Georgetown, she twice stopped
scoring threats – once when the Hoyas got
behind the Hokies' defense and she made a
tackle, and then another time when she
simply beat a Hoya in a one-on-one matchup.

"After the game, the Georgetowner coach was
watching it, and he texted me," Adair said.
"He knows her well and thought it was a great
tackle. It probably turned the game. It wasn't
in the box score. But with the game tied at 1, it
probably saved the game for us and put us in a
position to win. That's what she's been doing
for us for four years."

Coburn departs next spring with a degree
in public relations and a minor in business
skills to use, having delivered presentations
to Tech's Board of Visitors and to Tech AD
Whit Babcock's senior staff members about a
summer trip to the Dominican Republic – part
of a leadership course that numerous student-
athletes have taken the past four summers. She
plans on pursuing a career in sports marketing
and would love to work for Under Armour,
headquartered in her home state.
In the short term, she and her teammates
will be playing in the National College
Cup tournament yet again – the program's eighth straight
appearance – and hoping to extend her career
for as long as possible.

The alternative is a sobering thought.
"We will miss her," Adair said. "She's been
a large part of our success over the years. She
does the things that need to be done for our
team to be successful. That's important in
this sport."
Lindsey Owens started playing volleyball at a young age and Virginia Tech is reaping the benefits of her development, as the outside hitter recently recorded her 1,000th career kill.

Lindsey Owens still remembers the day in fifth grade when she joined her first club volleyball team. The girls were asked to fill out a form, and one of the questions required them to indicate what position they wanted to play. Owens was introduced to the game a bit earlier at the local YMCA, but her overall knowledge of the sport was still minimal.

“I didn’t know any positions because we just rotated around in a circle at the YMCA,” Owens recalled with a laugh. “I looked at the girl’s paper next to me, and it said, ‘setter,’ so I just wrote that down.”

Now one decade, numerous prestigious high school awards and more than 1,000 college kills later, it’s hard to imagine Owens as anything else but a vicious outside hitter for the Hokies. Luckily for Virginia Tech fans, Owens only spent one season as a setter before her growth spurt kicked in and her club coaches had no choice but to move her to the front row.

She since has evolved into one of the best players in the Atlantic Coast Conference and objective No. 1 on any opponent’s scouting report. Owens’ journey to Blacksburg started with humble beginnings, even before her birth. Her mother, Theresa, was born in Vietnam, and her family immigrated to the United States from the war-torn country right after she turned 8 years old. They bounced around for a while, spending time in a refugee camp while waiting to get sponsored by someone to take them in. Owens said her mother’s family lived with some nuns in a Nevada church upon arriving in America before eventually settling in Florida.

Theresa went to college at the University of Florida in Gainesville, though not without the help of student loans. While there, she met Lindsey’s father, Roger, who was unable to go to college because he needed to work to make money for his family. Owens and her parents moved to Orlando shortly after her birth and began to set down roots, and her love of volleyball grew. It wasn’t long into Owens’ high school career that it became evident she possessed the opportunity to do something that her parents, or anyone else in her family, for that matter, couldn’t - earn a college scholarship.

Playing club volleyball for the Orlando Volleyball Academy, she earned AAU All-America honors right from the get-go as a freshman – a feat that she accomplished four times while leading her team to three national titles. Virginia Tech’s coaches noticed quickly and started calling her.

“When I was offered a scholarship, we were in the coach’s office, so we kind of had to contain our excitement until after we left,” Owens said. “But definitely on our way home, we were super excited. Being the first in my family to get an athletic scholarship really lifted a weight off their [her parents] shoulders and made them realize that paying for volleyball for eight years was worth it. I have a little brother who now will have a lot more funds from the family to go to college.”

Owens wasted no time getting acclimated to the college game. She was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team after recording one of the best rookie seasons in school history. Her totals in both service aces and solo blocks led the team and ranked her third all time among Hokie freshmen, while she finished third on the squad in both kills and digs.

An All-ACC first-team performance followed as sophomore when she led the team in kills and placed second in digs and third in aces.

She hit her first snag this past offseason when she underwent surgery on her right shoulder. The wear and tear on her hitting shoulder over the years had caused her to develop bicep tendinitis, so doctors performed a procedure in March to remedy the problem and cleared Owens to begin playing again in July.

“arz was just blown away. It was beautiful, the coaches were great, and it seemed like a really good culture to be in. Our team is very family oriented, and that was something I wanted because I was leaving my family from back home. Coming to a new family was good.”

After committing to Tech, Owens concluded her prep career by leading Bishop Moore High School to the state title. She earned Florida Player of the Year honors and was named both the MaxPreps Medium Schools National Player of the Year and the PrepVolleyball National Senior Player of the Year.

Next came the good news from the Tech coaching staff.

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“All I missed was our spring season, but it was a bummer,” Owens explained. “As a competitive person, I saw everyone else getting better and improving, but I had to sit out, so it’s almost like I was regressing. Coming back this season has been hard. I hadn’t hit in almost six months, so it was really hard to understand that my body wasn’t going to let me do certain things that I wanted it to do. I just had to realize that and slowly work my way back instead of just expecting myself to immediately be the player I was before I had surgery.”

If she isn’t the player she was before the surgery, she certainly is fooled people. She appears to have picked up right where she left off, and as of Nov. 4, once again led the Hokies in kills and service aces while tallying the second-most digs. At her current pace, she will finish the season as the school’s top five in all-time kills.

The future looks good for Owens on the court, and one could say the same about her outlook off the court as well. A biology major with a focus on animal and poultry science, Owens wants to become a veterinarian.

Going to vet school is the obvious next step, but Owens is a little more educated about what she wants to do than she was as a fifth-grader copying off of her teammate’s paper.

“Most people plan on applying [to vet school] the summer before their senior year, which is coming up for me, but I’m going to wait until I graduate so I can build my résumé,” said Owens. “Because volleyball is so time consuming, it takes me away from what all the other applicants can do, like getting volunteer hours and internships. I’m going to wait until I graduate so I have my senior year – when I have fewer classes to take – and can use that time to build up my credentials with volunteer hours and research.”

It’s a wise plan, as applying to vet school after the proper experience is far from a sure thing. Owens has volunteered at home over the summers at a small animal clinic, and she recently shadowed an equine vet, but her main goal is to work with large animal exotic – zoo-type creatures like wildlife and safari animals.

“This upcoming summer, I actually got into a program that goes over to Thailand,” Owens said. “We will get to work with elephants and wild cats in addition to a couple days at a dog shelter. I’m very excited about it because it’s right in the field of what I want to be doing. It will be my first actual hands-on experience with that, so I’ll be able to see if this is something that I actually want to do.”

Owens said she probably will apply to the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine located in Blacksburg, but the University of Florida in her birthplace will certainly be beckoning. It’s not too far from her hometown of Orlando, which just happens to be home to one of the largest theme parks in the world – Disney’s Animal Kingdom.

“If everything works out, I would love to get involved with Animal Kingdom and Disney,” Owens said. “I absolutely love Orlando and Florida, and raising a family there in the future is ideal. I just like the whole culture – they treat their employees so well. That would be my perfect situation.”

Lindsey Owens has started every match in her career except one and could finish in the top five in school history in kills.
HOKIES AIMING TO BE Trophy Team
BY END OF THE 2015-16 SEASON

The Virginia Tech wrestling program is one filled with plenty of substance, given the program’s recent string of performances at the NCAA Championships.

But the Hokies added some style this past fall. Head coach Kevin Dresser and his staff oversaw the addition of splashy graphics to the walls of the hallway and wrestling room, as well as the installation of plaques honoring those who have earned All-America status while at Tech, and those reside along the hallway that leads to the coaches’ offices and the wrestling room.

Given his program’s success thus far, Dresser may need to find an additional hallway for All-America plaques – the current one may not be long enough.

Tech saw four wrestlers – half of the eight who qualified for the NCAA Championships – earn All-America honors last season, propelling the team to a 10th-place finish – earn All-America honors last season, propelling the team to a 10th-place finish in the hallway that leads to the coaches’ offices and the wrestling room.

Dresser also lost another senior in Chris Moon, a 165-pounder who injured his shoulder in February. Moon was a two-time NCAA tournament qualifier. He leaves behind more than just wins, though. Carter set the program standard for a 165-pounder who injured his shoulder in February.

Dresser and the Hokies weren’t satisfied. They’re really good wrestlers and good athletes. The No. 1 guys in our weight classes are really talented and athletic guys across the board. Sometimes you win with tough, physical guys, and sometimes you win with talented guys. If you can get both, then you’ve really got a shot.

“Devin has set the bar high at Virginia Tech,” Dresser said. “Gosh, he was a heckuva head stud.”

Still, as great as last season ended, Dresser and the Hokies weren’t satisfied. After five wrestlers who made it to the quarterfinals of their respective weight classes lost, and only strong performances in the consolation rounds enabled Tech to secure a top-10 finish at the event, which was held in St. Louis. That performance marked the program’s third straight top-10 showing at the NCAA Championships and arguably cemented the program as the university’s top intercollegiate sport.

Getting to the podium requires finishing fourth or better in the team race at the NCAA Championships.

“There are a couple of things that need to happen,” Dresser said. “If we can stay healthy and if we can mentally improve, those are the two keys, and then we have to have a little luck. If we can do that, then I think this team has the potential to be our best team ever. But it’s far from automatic.

“This team has some of the most talented wrestlers top to bottom that we’ve ever had. Just about all of these guys can really wrestle. They’re really good wrestlers and good athletes. The No. 1 guys in our weight classes are really talented and athletic guys across the board. Sometimes you win with tough, physical guys, and sometimes you win with talented guys. If you can get both, then you’ve really got a shot.”

Here’s a look at each weight class:

125 pounds – Kevin Norstrom was up and down last season, but he went 16-15 overall and qualified for the NCAA Championships. He finished in seventh place at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational and took fifth place at the Midlands Championships. Norstrom finished in fourth place at the ACC Championships and went 1-2 at the NCAAAs. Dresser hopes to see more consistency out of him this season.

133 pounds – Joey Dance returns to the weight class following a terrific regular season – and a disappointing NCAA Championships. The junior from Christiansburg, Virginia went 28-4 overall and only lost twice during the regular season. He won an ACC title and also took home titles at the Virginia Duals and the Midlands Championships. He finished second at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational.

141 pounds – Dennis Gustafson may figure in at this weight class once he returns to the mat in January. He took a redshirt year last season, but tore his ACL and is still rehabilitating.

Gustafson went 25-15 as a freshman and won the ACC title at this weight class in 2014.

149 pounds – Carter had two seasons that are completely opposite of each other,” Dresser said. “His freshman year, he didn’t have a very good season, but he had a good NCAA tournament. Last year, he had a good season and a bad NCAA tournament.

“We need to put the two together this year. There’s no question that he’s capable of going a long way. The weight class is super loaded (nationally) this year. There are a lot of studs in that class. But Joey is capable of being the head stud.”

157 pounds – Everyone is eyes are on this weight class, as Tech searches for a replacement for Carter. Solomon Chishko, a redshirt freshman, leads all contenders heading into the season. Chishko wrestled unattached at several tournaments while...
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taking a redshirt season and finished with a 24-7 mark. Gustafson also could figure in, though he would be a smaller wrestler at this weight class. “Salomon is a tremendous wrestler,” Dresser said. “I think he’s capable of being a top-10 guy right away. The question with him is how is he going to grind? Is he going to be a grinder? You’ve got to be a grinder to be a top-10 guy week in and week out. He’s got to be able to grind. There’s a big difference between redshirting and wrestling a couple of Opens versus being the guy every week.”

While pursuing his doctoral degree at Tech, Carter also works out with the wrestling team, something legally allowed by the NCAA since Carter is part of the regional training center. He figures to make Chishko that much better. Carter is part of the regional training center.

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At the NCAA Championships, though, he rebounded, winning two matches and advancing to the semifinal round. In his first-round match, he was behind 9-2, but rallied to tie the match at 11 and then won in sudden victory over Rutgers’ Kenneth Theobald. “Sal has improved,” Dresser said. “When he came to us, he wasn’t a great wrestler, but he’s elevated himself to a great wrestler. He’s so tough. He got to the round of 12 last year on toughness. “I’m curious to see how he progresses. Last year, he came out of nowhere. No one knew him, and he surprised some people, including Devin at the Hokie Open [when Carter was attempting to move up to 149 pounds]. He’s not going to surprise anyone this year. He’s made a name for himself, and now he’s got to go out and defend that name.”

149 pounds – Sal Mastriani returns at this weight class after a season in which he went 24-12 and qualified for the NCAA Championships. Mastriani won the Hokie Open at this weight class, along with winning the Virginia Duals. He also finished eighth at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational and fourth at the Midlands Championships.

Mastriani struggled at the ACC Championships, where, as the No. 2 seed, he lost in the semifinals to the No. 3 seed Christian Barber of North Carolina and then to No. 5 seed T.J. Miller of Virginia in the consolation round.

157 pounds – All-American Nick Bergida, another New Jersey native, is a top-10 recruit nationally out of Iowa. Bergida, who got hurt a little last year, but he did OK. We’ve got three guys at 165, and I’d give McFadden the edge based on what I’ve seen, but we’ll see how they all progress.”

Bergida, another New Jersey native, is a redshirt junior who went 12-11 last season.

174 pounds – State champion Zach Epperly returns at this weight class and comes into this season with expectations of doing great things – perhaps things that have never been done before at Tech. Epperly earned All-America honors last season as a redshirt freshman by placing seventh at the NCAA Championships.

Epperly, who came in third at the ACC Championships, really came on toward the end of the season. He beat Pittsburgh’s Tyler Wils 3-2 in a dual meet, and Wils went on to wrestle for the national championship. He lost to Matt Brown of Penn State 2-1 in the quarterfinal round of the NCAA Championships, and Brown won the national title. In the consolation round of the NCAA, he pinned Blaise Butler of Virginia – and Butler had beaten him three times during the regular season.

Epperly, who went into this season ranked No. 2 nationally in this weight class, finished his season with a 24-8 record, and Dresser expects to see more from him this season.

When you make All-America as a freshman, you’re pretty special,” Dresser said. “With that said, I think he’s got a lot more. He won a lot of close matches last year. My battle cry with Zach is that we need to separate ourselves from the masses. We’re going to have close matches with the top guys in the nation, but we need to separate ourselves from everybody else. The sky is the limit for that guy.”

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Tae Leeroy, who wrestled some at 184 pounds last year, and freshman Cody Hughes are the backups at this weight class.

184 pounds – Dresser and his staff have two intriguing options at this weight class. Austin Gabel returns after missing the second part of last season with a torn ACL and MCL, injuries that required surgery. Gabel received medical clearance on Nov. 1 to begin wrestling, and his presence on the mat gives the Hokies some experience. The fifth-year senior went 13-11 last season. The previous two seasons, he qualified for the NCAA Championships at 174 pounds.

The other option is talented Zack Zavatsky, who took a redshirt year last season. He went 15-1 while wrestling unattached. He came to Tech as a top-75 recruit nationally and a top-10 recruit at 182 pounds. The Pennsylvania native won a state title his senior year of high school in a state noted for outstanding wrestling.

“Zack, Zavatsky is a really, really good wrestler,” Dresser said. “He can flat wrestle. How can he handle the grind? On a good day, he’s the best guy at this weight, but he doesn’t have good days all the time. The guy that is the most consistent, that we can count on … Austin’s done a good job. But from an injury
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standpoint, can we count on Austin?
“You’ve got two guys that are both really good and both capable of being All-Americans. That will be the most interesting thing to see how it plays out. Austin won’t be cleared until after the first four weeks. He’ll get cleared [for practice] by Nov. 1.”

197 pounds – Jared Haught, a redshirt sophomore, returns after a season in which he went 16-18 overall, but qualified for the NCAA Championships. He went 1-2 at the NCAs, with his lone win coming against unseeded Braden Atwood of Purdue.
Haught brings a rugged style and a blue-collar work ethic to the mat, as well as toughness. David Reck will be challenging him for time.
“Jared is in the conversation of being an All-American this year.”

Heavyweight – All-American Ty Walz returns to lead the way at arguably the Hokies’ deepest weight class. Dan Garwood and Brandon Taylor return as well, creating great competition at this class.
Walz, though, leads the way. He lost his second-round match at the NCAA Championships, but came back to win three consolation matches, including a 2-1 upset of No. 4 seed Austin Marsden of Oklahoma State. He lost in sudden victory to Jimmy Lawson of Penn State, but in the seventh-place match, he beat Minnesota’s Michael Kroells, giving him five wins in the event.
Walz went 28-9 last season. The two-time NCAA qualifier finished in third place at the ACC Championships.
“He’s one of the most improved guys we’ve got,” Dresser said. “He just works so hard and spends so much time in all phases of being a college athlete. I think he’s got a chance to be a high All-American again. But heavyweight is a game of inches, so Ty’s got to understand that there is no automatic.”

Dresser’s talented squad will once again grapple with a difficult schedule. Tech’s non-conference slate features the likes of Iowa State, Penn State, Northern Iowa, West Virginia and Edinboro. Edinboro finished third at the NCAA Championships last March, while Penn State came in eighth. Iowa State (No. 14) and West Virginia (No. 20) were top 20 teams. In the ACC, NC State, Duke and North Carolina are much improved.
In all, Tech’s schedule features nine teams that finished in the top 25 at the NCAA Championships.
“We’ve got to be good every weekend because we’ve got a lot of team goals this year,” Dresser said. “We break down every day and say, ‘Trophy Team.’ You’ve got to be in the top four in the nation to get a trophy. So the battle cry is ‘Trophy Team.’
“We’re going to raise the bar, and we’ve got to be good at the ACC’s and throughout the year. If we want to be good at the end of the year, we can’t just show up at the end of the year. We need to win an ACC title. We need to progress every weekend. We need to try and beat Penn State and beat Iowa State. We need to win those. The biggest match of the year is the next match.”
Tech opened the 2015 season Nov. 7 against Iowa State, with the Hokie Open slated for the next day. The Hokies begin ACC competition on Jan. 31 at Virginia.
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