WHAT'S INSIDE:
Quarterback Michael Brewer traveled a long, winding road to get to Tech

HOKIES
TAB FUENTE
AS NEW
FOOTBALL COACH
The former Memphis coach turned around the Tigers’ fortunes and looks to build on all that retiring head coach Frank Beamer and his staff have set in place
HAPPY HOLIDAYS, HOKIES!

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Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer coached his final regular-season game on Nov. 28 in Charlottesville when the Hokies met Virginia in the two teams’ annual Commonwealth Clash. Tech’s head coach for the past 29 years announced on Nov. 1 that he planned to retire at the end of this season, ending a 35-year head coaching career.

In a game that resembled both Beamer and his program over the course of nearly three decades, the Hokies got behind by seven on two occasions in the second half, but rallied to tie the game both times. They took a 23-20 lead on a Joey Slye field goal with 1:38 left and then sealed the win on Chuck Clark’s interception with 59 seconds remaining.

Following the game—which marked Tech’s 12th straight win in the series and Beamer’s 20th over the Cavaliers—the players hoisted Beamer onto their shoulders and carried him off the field. He clutched the Commonwealth Cup in his right hand as he went out.

“I told them in there [the locker room after the game] that I really appreciate them letting me be a part of this thing,” Beamer said. “It’s a great group of coaches and a great group of kids, and if we hadn’t come out on this end of it, I would have said the same thing. Winning and losing doesn’t change that. I’m really, really proud of them. I’ve got to say thanks to the administration, Whit [Babcock, Virginia Tech’s AD] and his staff could not have treated me any better—better than I deserve. I really appreciate what they’ve done.”

“BEAMER GOES OUT WITH WIN OVER UVA”

“I’m really appreciative of the Hokie Club for raising money for student-athletes to play the game they love and to give us the opportunity to receive a great education. It’s a blessing that we could have such an opportunity. I thank all those who raise money and those who contribute. I’ll never take that for granted.”

Ronny Vandyke
Redshirt Senior | Lorton, Virginia

“I’m extremely thankful for someone to give and help pay for my scholarship. To give me the opportunity to play the game that I love and have been cherishing since I was 4 or 5 years old and to have the opportunity to get a degree for free and have a chance to play at the next level … it’s just truly a blessing. Thank you to all those who have helped make this happen, not just for me, but for all of us.”

Isaiah Ford
Sophomore | Jacksonville, Florida
The Donor File

William T. Stewart IV

Hokie Club Level: Diamond Hokie
Currently resides: Richmond, Virginia
Graduation Year: 2007

Family: Susan (mother); Bill (father); Elizabeth (sister, class of 2006)

Q & A

Q: A Hokie is ...
   A: Anyone who bleeds orange and maroon, but also truly lives by the school motto of “Ut Prosim” or “That I May Serve.”

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because …
   A: The fans and the alumni show their support through the good and the bad, with unwavering love for the university and the student-athletes who represent it on a daily basis.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?
   A: I am not even sure where to begin. Ending Miami’s 39-game regular-season winning streak in 2003 was one of the most electric atmospheres I’ve ever witnessed at Lane Stadium, and it was also my parents’ first experience at Lane Stadium. I would have to put the Nebraska (2009) and the Miami (2011) wins at home and beating the Buckeyes at the Horseshoe last year up there, too. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the basketball win over No. 7 Duke at Cassell Coliseum in 2005 during our first year in the ACC. I have also never been prouder to be a Hokie fan than attending Coach Beamer’s last game at Lane Stadium and seeing the love and support from the Hokie Nation.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
   A: Once I graduated, I didn’t really know the best way to stay involved. But when I started my first job, one of my managers (a Tech grad and a rabid fan) introduced me to his Hokie Rep and also put me in contact with David Everett (Director of Major Gifts for Intercollegiate Athletics). I have been involved ever since.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
   A: Growing up a fan of a school from the Big Ten (Danny Coale caught the ball!), I knew I wanted to go to a school with a top athletics program. So I tagged along with my older sister while she was visiting colleges, and she ultimately picked Virginia Tech. I visited when she was a freshman, and I knew Blacksburg was the place for me as well. Virginia Tech has felt like home ever since.

Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions?
   A: I am not very superstitious, but I try to attend as many games in person as possible, home and away. For some reason, I think my additional voice yelling in the stadium might help push the team toward a win. Plus, I would rather show my support in person. Oh, and I may also wear the same outfit to the next game if we win.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.
   A: Arriving mid-morning on a sunny fall Saturday for a full day of tailgating with family and friends before a night game at Lane Stadium. Of course, the Hokies would win!

Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?
   A: The school motto of “Ut Prosim” has resonated with me since I was a student. I think it is really important to provide the student-athletes who represent the university in such a positive light the opportunity to further their professional and their athletics careers.

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Ford breaks two Tech records in regular-season finale

Tech receiver Isaiah Ford broke two single-season records in the Hokies’ 23-20 win over Virginia in the regular-season finale in Charlottesville.

Ford, a sophomore from Jacksonville, Florida, caught six passes for 121 yards in the game, including 32-yard reception for a touchdown. The touchdown catch marked his 10th of the season, breaking the previous school record of nine shared by André Davis (1999) and Antonio Freeman (1993).

“I said at media day last year that I wanted to score 10 touchdowns, and I couldn’t do it last year,” Ford said. “That was definitely one of my goals coming into this year, so to achieve it this year really was a blessing.”

Ford’s six receptions gave him 63 for the season, which also is a school record. Jarrett Boykin held the previous record of 61, which he caught during the 2011 season.

Ford has caught at least two passes in every game of his career (25) — also a school record.

Curtin earns All-America honors

Virginia Tech cross country runner Thomas Curtin earned All-America honors following his 22nd-place finish at the 2015 NCAA Division I Men’s Cross Country Championships held Nov. 21 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Curtin’s finish was the fourth-highest finish by a Tech men’s runner at the NCAA Championship. He was the top finisher for the Tech men’s team, which finished 27th. Other Tech finishers were Stuart Robertson, who came in 144th with a time of 31:21.9, and Neil Gourley, who was 157th with a time of 31:30.6. Daniel Jaskowak and Peter Seufer came in 190th and 205th, respectively, while Brent Musselman was 218th and Darren Barlow was 239th.

Santamaria chosen for SEED group

Virginia Tech kicker Michael Santamaria, a redshirt freshman from Athens, Georgia, received notification recently that he had been chosen to be a part of SEED — Student-managed Endowment for Educational Development at Virginia Tech.

SEED, which was started in 1993, is one of the largest undergraduate student-managed equity funds in the nation. It consists of a group of around 30 students who, under the watchful eye of finance professors, manage an approximately $5 million equity portfolio for the Virginia Tech Foundation.

Students in SEED learn how to gather data on industry sectors and individual companies, model company financials, perform valuation analyses, trade stocks, reposition the portfolio to respond to market conditions, and prepare periodic reports on the portfolio and its holdings. They also compete in stock pitch contests held at other universities.

Day trading is not a part of SEED. Rather, the group looks for undervalued companies with potential for future growth.

SEED students, who do not receive college credit, are selected for SEED each semester through a competitive process, and Santamaria went through that process to be a part of the group. The process required a written essay, a transcript, a resume, and a formal interview—one of which required a 30-minute presentation.

Santamaria gave a presentation to a committee on why he liked Proctor & Gamble, which sells a lot of consumer products, as an investment. The company’s Pampers diaper brand continues to be highly successful and China’s eliminating of its “one child” policy offers room for growth. (Please note this is not investment advice—just a broad recap of Santamaria’s presentation.)

Santamaria, a business major, plans on pursuing a career in financial planning or wealth management in the future.
Like most Americans, Tech football fans began their Christmas shopping around the end of November.

They received a gift when the Hokies won three of their final four games — all three on the road — to become bowl eligible. They received another gift when Frank Beamer and the Hokies beat UVA, a gift they’ve received many times, but never gets old. They received yet another gift when new football coach Justin Fuente asked Bud Foster to stay on the staff — and their beloved defensive coordinator agreed.

That last one went a long way toward giving Hokie Nation a holly, jolly Christmas. But that’s only a stocking stuffer compared to what Fuente could — could — bring Tech fans down the road.

Tech AD Whit Babcock hired Fuente for many reasons — core values, fit, character, his work as the coach at Memphis, recommendations from those in the profession and others. But Fuente’s philosophy on offenses and his staff’s ability to get production on that side of the ball ranked right up there, too.

There is more offense today than at any other time in the history of college football. As of Dec. 1, 13 teams averaged more than 40 points a game — and all 13 qualified for bowls. In 1999, Virginia Tech led the nation in scoring (42.7 ppg), 12th in total (504.4 ypg) and 24th in passing (186.2 ypg). They haven’t been shabby running the ball either, averaging 186.2 yards per game on the ground.

Interestingly, Fuente believes in running the ball, which seems counterintuitive to most coaches who run “spread” offenses.

“We want to change the tempo,” he said. “That doesn’t mean we want to go at such a speed that we hang the defensive side of the ball out to dry, so to speak, by making them play the whole game, but we do want to control the tempo.

“We have been a run-the-ball-first team. We have made big plays through play-action pass and moving the pocket and getting the ball on the perimeter, and that’s what we’ll continue to try to do.

“I believe that’s the best way to have success as a team. [If] you can run the football, you’re better on defense. You’re better on offense. You’re better on special teams. And then you can make some big plays through the play-action pass and getting the ball to the edge. We’ll continue to change the tempo and start with running the football.”

Tech’s current staff certainly leaves some good pieces in place. Bucky Hodges, Isaiah Ford, Cam Phillips, and Travon McMillian and the return of four startinglinemen are nice places to start. Of course, Fuente needs to find a quarterback, whether it is Brenden Molley, Dwayne Lawton or an incoming freshman, to develop some consistency.

The Hokies have struggled with consistency on offense the past few seasons, partly because of a playing a lot of younger players and partly because of injuries. Their top two tailbacks missed this season, and their starting quarterback, Michael Brewer, missed five games.

That inconsistency is a primary reason why the Hokies have lost 14 games by a touchdown or less in the past four seasons — to by five points or less.

Maybe Fuente possesses the secret sauce to fix that. But he cautions fans about lofty expectations of scoreboard explosions.

“We’re not,” he said when asked if his team would start scoring 60 a game. “We didn’t when we started at the last place either. The key is to find a way to win the ball game. Just try to win the game, and that’s all that matters.

“I know some people are going to expect that, and there’s nothing I can do to stop it. But it’s far-fetched. I hope we can get to that. It’s going to take some time. I’m hopeful we can get it done.”

Tech fans are, too, but they need to be patient. Fuente isn’t exactly Santa Claus, but he could deliver some nice presents sometime during the course of the season. Of course, Fuente needs to find some gifts that will make Tech fans happy.
Justin Fuente has been introduced as the next head football coach at Virginia Tech. This is something that I am exceptionally excited about—a feeling I know that I share with a majority of Hokie Nation. In my first interaction with the 29-year-old, I found him to be humble, sincere, knowledgeable and driven. I thought the process of his hiring and the execution of the announcement was remarkably smooth and well done by all associated. An A-plus, as Whit Babcock might have said.

I also look forward to perusing many columns about Fuenté’s success and the building of his program as it unfolds. I got the impression that the acorns for fans to be involved in the program would continue to be there. As I have tried to be this year, I enjoy being a witness to all the excitement and success of the program including the access for fans to be involved in the program. And in this column, I wanted to write about bridges. I feel they are immensely intriguing — and valuable. But to you about bridges. I feel they are immensely intriguing — and valuable. But to me, and to many Hokies, he now represents the bridge between the “Beamer Way” and the future at Tech.

And that is a necessary bridge. Bud, possibly more than anyone else besides Frank Beamer himself, has been responsible for the culture within not only the football program, but also the university. It is imperative that culture survives. Bud recognized that, and so did Babcock. There is winning on the field, and there is winning in the way you win. You do that by treating people kindly and doing it consistently. Beamer never wavered from that principle. Neither has Bud.

From the moment I met Bud this past summer, he has been exceptionally gracious and welcoming. As much as I would like to think that had something to do with me, I recognize it’s the only way he knows to be. It’s the way he was taught — by Beamer.

Bud is unquestionably an excellent bridge, but I find it reassuring that there are so many other bridges that Tech is fortunate enough to have — people who are determined to maintain the Virginia Tech way of doing things.

Mike Burnop is a bridge, an extremely sturdy one. For me, he served as a bridge from Bill Roth. He has taught me how someone who is fortunate enough to speak for this community should go about doing so ever since my arrival in Blacksburg. I marvel at Mike’s ability and effort in that regard. I am also awed by his devotion to this program. Like Bud, he was there for every snap of the Beamer era. Unlike most, he was there before that as well. I heard a rumor that he even caught a few passes back in the day. Make no mistake, Mike is emotional about the end of one era and the beginning of another, but I can easily tell that he is eager to remind of the past while leading to the future. We share that vision.

Andrew Allegretta is a bridge, albeit a younger one. He has selflessly guided me through a technical maze that we needed to traverse to bring you what turns out is Beamer’s final season. Like Bud, he has done so despite his own personal disappointment. Like Bud, he has done so because he loves Virginia Tech — and because he understands the importance of it continuing to operate with the same personality it has for decades.

Mike and Andrew are just a couple of many people who have recounted tales of Beamer and his family to me. Each person who has come up to me at any point in a way, a bridge, I encourage you all to continue to be those bridges. And don’t be flustered. As we will move further away from the Beamer era in the days to come, it will be those memories that we will need to hold on to more tightly.

With each passing game and event this season, I couldn’t help but feel a growing sense of gratitude that Beamer still was the coach during my first season. With the stories you bridges have told me, I would have had an idea, but I wouldn’t have fully understood. I couldn’t have realized how comfortable Beamer would make me feel while riding in his Cadillac to his hometown of Hillsville. There would have been no way of recreating the moment when I hesitantly wandered onto the practice field during camp, and he not only didn’t tell me to get off the field, but instead waved me closer to the huddle.

There was every week’s pregame interview and “Tech Talk Live” appearance where he dutifully showed up and graciously handled victory and defeat in the exact same manner. I’ll cherish that time, but even more so will be the brief private moments. Recently, he humbly asked if it would be all right if I sang “Happy Birthday” to his wife, Cheryl, during HIS radio show. We were a bit off key, but we got the job done. There was also a poem he wrote to her that he shared with Mike and I that night. Then there was the time he paused from breaking down game film to cut off a string on my suit jacket because he couldn’t allow my pocket to rip. Wouldn’t think of it.

There are more stories, and just four months ago, I’m pretty sure I thought I was the only one pulled up to Pinehurst for the ACC Kickoff. No. Seriously. Point being, I already have so many favorites. I’ve known the man for mere months. Imagine the wealth of stories, anecdotes, and more importantly, impact he has had on those he has been around for decades.

Beamer is fond of saying that he is fortunate and grateful. And he undoubtedly is. We are, in fact. We all got to be a part of it. We all got to actually experience it — me, for just a short time, which will fortunately allow me to be a bridge when I talk of the Beamer way. For many of you, for much longer, which will only strengthen your conviction when you speak as well.

Here is the best part. Beamer himself is the ultimate bridge. He’s retiring from coaching. He’s not retiring from Tech. He couldn’t do it if he wanted to. He couldn’t have

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Q: The NCAA doesn’t let donors/boosters/fans give money to student-athletes, but I seem to recall Virginia Tech paying for medical expenses for Rayna DuBose when she became ill years ago. Did the school receive a waiver to do this? Just curious. Thanks, Cara in Blacksburg.

TP: “Actually, no. Rayna’s insurance paid for most of her medical expenses resulting from her bout with meningococcal meningitis, and then several fundraisers were held and a trust fund was set up to help with those expenses not covered. NCAA regulations permit this under extreme circumstances and, obviously, a life-threatening illness falls into that category.

“Under NCAA Bylaw 16.21.1.7, which addresses miscellaneous benefits, a member-institution, such as Virginia Tech, may hold a fundraiser for student-athletes or their family members provided that the extreme circumstances should be extraordinary in the result of event beyond the student-athlete’s control; the proceeds must be designated for specific purposes (e.g. payment of medical bills or purchase of medical equipment); the proceeds are directly given to the beneficiaries, with receipt kept on file by the institution.”

Q: I know that we can’t provide benefits to prospective student-athletes, but what about their coaches or AAU coaches? I’m guessing that this is not permissible as well. Thanks, Evan in Vinton, Virginia.

TP: “You are correct. No institutional employee or representative of an institution — coach, former player, donor, etc. — can provide a benefit to a prospective student-athlete’s coach. Several NCAA bylaws deal with this topic. No meals or cash or anything to anyone who coaches or directs prospective student-athletes. This includes AAU or club team coaches. The only ‘freebie’ that is permitted is two complimentary admissions to Virginia Tech sporting events, provided via pass list.”

Q: What do you know about “subtweeting?” That’s a word that keeps coming up in NCAA circles, and I’m not really sure what it is. Thanks for any insight you could provide. Penny in Pearisburg, Virginia.

TP: “Probably our next headache in the recruiting realm. Subtweeting, I’m told, is simply tweeting something about someone else without mentioning his/her name. In most cases, it’s clear as to whom the person doing the tweeting is referring to.

“NCAA regulations forbid coaches from commenting publicly about a prospective student-athlete — other than to simply confirm recruitment of said student-athlete — but some coaches are starting to more frequently tweet out a comment that is a direct reference to a prospect without directly mentioning that individual’s name.

“NCAA Bylaw 13.10.2.1 deals with comments before the actual signing of a letter-of-intent, and it states that ‘the institution [a term which captures all university employees] is precluded from commenting in any manner as to the likelihood of the prospective student-athlete committing or signing with that institution.’ The NCAA staff recently came out with additional explanation on this topic, saying that ‘an institutional staff member may not publicly reference the name, nickname or other personally identifiable information of a prospective student-athlete other than to confirm recruitment of the prospective student-athlete.’

Unfortunately, as a result of the restrictions currently in place regarding the recruiting process, social media is something that we are forced to monitor carefully as its use evolves.”
Morgan Conklin, a midfielder on the Tech women's soccer team, grew up wanting to be an orthodontist, but changed her mind while at the university. Pursuing a degree in communication, she now plans on seeking a career in sports broadcasting.

Q: You started out pursuing a major in human nutrition, foods and exercise, but changed to communication. What led to the change of heart?

MC: “I liked the material, but I didn’t enjoy the sciences and what would build up to the HNFE material. I didn’t like the general classes that I had to take for it. I had to meet with an advisor and make a four-year plan, and I saw all the classes that I was going to have to take, and I just didn’t have an interest. I wanted to be an orthodontist. That’s what I had always wanted to do since middle school. But I couldn’t get past all those general classes.

“My dad was a high school football coach and then my brother played at the University of Richmond, so I kind of grew up in a sports family. I just understand sports, and I would always talk with my dad about sports. That’s how we were. Realizing that I could potentially make a living off of something like that was exciting to me."

“I interviewed Andrew Allegretta [the IMG radio voice for Tech women’s basketball and baseball] for a class project, and I really connected with him. I kind of got involved in the internship [IMG’s broadcasting internship program]. Once I got more experience with it, I fell in love with it. Now that I’m coming to the end of my soccer career, it’s been cool that I’ve found something else that kind of gives me that competitive and nervous, but exciting, feeling that I’ve only felt in soccer games.”

Q: What sort of things have you done while working as an intern in IMG’s broadcasting program?

MC: “I started by doing color commentary for the men’s soccer team [in the fall of her junior year], and then in the spring, I did color commentary for lacrosse. In the spring is when Andrew figured out a way to add sideline reporting, so I did sideline for lacrosse, softball and baseball. One of the cool things I did was sideline for ESPN for the spring football game. I got to interview Bud Foster, Kyshoen Jarrett and Kyle Fuller, which was cool. I’ve done more ESPNU games this fall. He’s given me a lot of real-world experience, opportunities. It started with color, and I worked my way to sideline and now more ESPN3 stuff.”

Q: You also worked as an intern for the Richmond Flying Squirrels with Jon Lasser earlier this summer. Have all these experiences confirmed your desires to pursue a career in broadcasting?

MC: “Yes. Everything I’ve done, I’ve wanted to do more of it. I’ve wanted to get better. I’ve wanted to do more reps, so I can improve faster. I’ve been lucky in that I’ve loved all the opportunities that have come my way. I’ve wanted to do more of them. They’ve given me that broadcasting bug and made me want to make a career out of this.”

Q: What are your future plans?

MC: “I’ve been focused on our soccer season, so I’m going to do more work on that over the winter break. I’m going to intern with WSLIS [an NBC affiliate in Roanoke] this spring. I’ve applied for an internship with the ACC, the Futures Internship, which is a postgrad internship [a paid internship for those pursuing a career in television or athletics administration]. I would like to work for a network, like the SEC Network or Raycom – something like that, just to get the experience. I’ll look at any opportunity that comes my way, but I think a network would be good to work for just to get to cover different sports and different teams. I think I’ll hear on the ACC internship at the beginning of the new year.”

Ronny Vandyke, a member of the Virginia Tech football team, graduated last May with a degree in psychology. He also received a minor in leadership and social change. He is mulling over several options in relation to his future.

Q: When you were looking for majors, why did you decide on psychology?

RVD: “Ever since high school, I had an interest in doing that – majoring in psychology. But I had heard negative things about it, like, if I wanted to do well in that field, then I’d have to go to grad school. I remember it like yesterday. I was working. I had a job my senior year of high school. I was working at a sports bar, and one of the customers asked me what I would be doing when I came to Virginia Tech. The comment he made was, ‘Man, do you want to have food on your table?’

“My mom wanted me to do business. So I think I got caught up in that, and I tried the route of business. I didn’t declare a major, but I was taking an economics class my sophomore year, so that I could get into business. I couldn’t pass the class. I had to withdraw. So I was asking myself, ‘Should I retake the class or should do what I wanted to do, which was major in psychology?’ I chose to major in psychology, and I think I made the best choice. I really enjoyed the major. The classes were challenging, but they were interesting. If I had done business, I don’t think I would have enjoyed my years here academically.”

Q: So what was it about psychology that appealed to you?

RVD: “A lot of it is studying the brain and how we function as human beings. That always interested me a lot. I like studying about behaviors and why we do certain things. Things like that have always interested me.”

Q: You went to the Dominican Republic as part of a class a couple of summers ago. What did you do, and what did you learn?

RVD: “That was part of a leadership class that I had to take. It was just a lot of different things. It was experiencing some of the poverty there and working with the kids. We met with those kids for a couple of days and did a lot of activities and had a lesson for them because most of those kids are coming from neighborhoods with sexually transmitted diseases. So we taught them how to avoid getting caught up in that type of stuff and we used sports activities as a way to teach. That was really neat. It was a great learning experience just to be a part of that.”

Q: You graduated in four years. How were you able to balance the rigors of football and your academic coursework?

RVD: “It was tough. There were times when I thought about dropping classes because I didn’t think I could get through them. I had to really have a lot of trust in the Lord and know that He was going to be there with me to help me get through those classes that were really tough. My goal was to graduate, so I stuck to that, and it was tough, but I did it. Having people to support me and trusting in the Lord really helped me to graduate.”

Q: What are your future plans?

RVD: “After the season, I’m going to train either for the Combine or the Pro Day that we have here this spring. I don’t have a backup plan – it’s going to work out. I’m not sure what I’ll do when football is over. Maybe working with adults, or just making an impact in people’s lives in some type of way. I really don’t know right now. I just want to follow God’s will, and He hasn’t given me a clear path yet. So I’m just trying to be patient and take it day by day.”
For the first time in nearly three decades Virginia Tech held a news conference to announce the hiring of a new football coach. At this news conference, held in the football players' lounge, Justin Fuente addressed an array of topics—everything from the appeal of the school to staffing to philosophy to recruiting and much, much more.

The former quarterback, first at Oklahoma and then at Murray State, even offered some insight as to what he is looking for in a quarterback. “When we talk about it in the staff room, I tell them that I don’t want guys like me,” Fuente said. “I want somebody that can move.”

With that bit of levity, Fuente showed all aspects of his personality, combining a funny side with seriousness about his task, humility at replacing a legend and thankfulness for the opportunity, as he gets set to replace retiring coach Frank Beamer. Fuente assumes full duties at the helm once the Hokies and Beamer play in their bowl game.

The 39-year-old Fuente, whose wife and three daughters were also in attendance, agreed to a six-year contract that pays him $8.2 million in the first year and subsequently increases thereafter—a more than $20 million commitment in all. He comes to Tech after spending four seasons at Memphis, where he turned around a program that had won just five games combined the three seasons before he arrived. In the past two seasons, he led Memphis to a 19-6 mark, including a 9-3 record this season.

His turnaround job at Memphis, his coaching pedigree having worked with Gary Patterson at TCU and his ability to build offenses that put points on the board more than sold Tech AD Whit Babcock.

“Justin was absolutely our top choice and the only one we offered the job to,” Babcock said. “I know that every AD will say that, but I sincerely want to assure you that it’s true. And also to sit up here in front of you today and say, my saddle is latched to him and vice versa, as well as our 22 other coaches, but he and I are in it together, and I’m proud to tell you he was the top choice and the one we wanted, and I’m thrilled that he said yes.”

Babcock became familiar with Fuente from Babcock’s days as the AD at Cincinnati. During that time, the American Athletic Conference invited Memphis into the league, and Cincinnati and Memphis became league opponents. Babcock first met Fuente at a league meeting, and he knew the football situation at Memphis was bleak.

But Fuente gradually built the Tigers into winners. They went 4-8 and 3-9 during his first two seasons there, but went 10-3 last season and won the Miami Beach Bowl. They finished ranked in the top 25 of both the Associated Press poll and the Amway coaches’ poll for the first time in school history.

“Very rarely in coaching hires do you get this: A four-year window snapshot where you can directly attribute it to that coach and that staff, meaning a lot of places you come to, they’re inheriting players and quarterbacks,” Babcock said. “They’re [Fuente and his staff] doing this, all of that, and I know Justin would defer the credit, but to take Memphis—and you guys know the static, they won, I believe, five games total in the three years before they got there. They started with 32 scholarship players in the first team meeting, and you can have 85. They won the first conference title at Memphis in 40-plus years while stepping up from Conference USA, [had its] first 10-win season since 1998, and in 2014, Coach Fuente was [conference] Coach of the Year. Most wins in a two-year period. They had a first-time-ever national ranking at the end of the year by The AP and USA Today [Amway] in 2014, and then this year as high as 12th or 13th and on to beating Ole Miss.

“Coach Fuente got this job in large part for much more than beating Ole Miss, but I remember what I thought of when I saw the Memphis stats and the data, and to watch what they’ve built in four years, and to do that, that’s when I started to think of Justin as the right guy.”

Fuente was widely sought after during what has been termed by those most knowledgeable about college football as one of the craziest offseasons in recent memories. Numerous high-profile “Power 5” schools are making coaching changes, including Southern Cal, Georgia, South Carolina, Missouri, Miami, Georgia and Virginia and others.

Fuente said a dozen schools approached him or his representatives. He was only interested in one job — Virginia Tech.

“I’ve admired this program from afar for many years, on television, the way the players have played, the way the fans have cheered, their traditions, the wins, the losses, the facilities, the support, the league changes, and I’ve always wanted to be a part of something like that,” Fuente said. “The thing about this job is it comes with all of those things wrapped up in a community that I cannot wait to raise my three girls in, and that was a huge contributing factor to me. I don’t say that disparagingly about any place that I’ve ever lived. I’m just very thankful for the opportunities I’ve had beforehand and thankful for this opportunity.

“This is absolutely the job that I was interested in. I had really no interest in anything else, just this, because of what it has been and what it can be and the community that comes along with it.”

Fuente, though, will be transitioning into a totally different situation. Unlike the program at Memphis in nearly every respect, the Hokies will be going to their 23rd straight bowl game and haven’t incurred a losing season since 1992. Beamer, his staff and his players over the years have established a culture of winning.

He inherits a good situation at Tech. The Hokies return many key components from this season’s squad, including players like Isaiah Ford, Bucky Hodges and Chuck Clark.

“It’s certainly a different dynamic,” Fuente admitted. “That’s part of the reason why the next couple of weeks are so valuable. You get a little bit of a pulse by observing about the mindset of the team. You get a feel for the squad, but it’s not the same situation. You’d be foolish to say...

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that you’re going to take exactly the way you approached problem A and plug it into the next one that comes along. I think it is different.”

Fuente met with the team and the man he would be replacing the Sunday following Tech’s win over Virginia. He said it was intimidating walking into Beamer’s office and seeing all the conference and national Coach of the Year Awards, but Beamer made him feel welcome.

The two even talked about Murray State, where Beamer once coached and Fuente graduated.

“I just felt so great sitting in there and getting a chance to visit with him, and obviously, we all know you don’t replace a legend in coaching,” Fuente said. “You hope to build on what he’s already done. You hope to continue to operate in the same manner with the same principles and the same integrity that he’s done for so very many years here.”

Fuente brings to Tech a philosophy on offense that has been productive during his time as a coach. This season, Memphis ranks seventh nationally in scoring offense (42.7 ppg), 12th in total offense (510.4 ypg) and 14th in passing offense (324.4 ypg).

Prior to taking over at Memphis, he worked for five seasons at TCU. He spent his first two years as the running backs coach before moving into the co-offensive coordinator role. He coached current Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Andy Dalton for two seasons.

“Absolutely, I will stay out of the way,” Fuente said of the Hokies’ bowl preparations. “I think it’s an awesome benefit to get to be around and see and watch the kids interact and get a chance to not be—that honestly, not be in charge of it, but just be able to sit back and observe and watch. I think it’s a huge advantage.”

The job brings Fuente to the East Coast for the first time in his career. All of his experience is from the Midwest and Southwest. A native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, he played two seasons at Oklahoma before transferring to Murray State. He then coached at Illinois State, TCU and Memphis before landing in Blacksburg — the place he wanted to be.

“I’m incredibly humbled by this opportunity,” he said. “I cannot wait to get started. I have a deep respect for Virginia Tech and for this community. Thank you, Whit, thank you, President [Timothy] Sands, for letting me be the next football coach here.”
Bobby Ross (center) put together a great staff when he took the head coaching job at The Citadel in 1973—a staff that included Frank Beamer (to Ross’ right) and Ralph Friedgen.

To understand how much Frank Beamer means to Bobby Ross and his family, just consider the following: Ross’ granddaughter, a member of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, delayed her Thanksgiving break by a day just so she could be in attendance for Beamer’s final home game.

There’s more. Ross used to send his middle son to Beamer’s football camps when the outgoing Hokies’ head coach worked at Murray State.

“Was in the pros [with Kansas City], and I put him on a Greyhound bus,” Ross said.

“It would be about a 10-hour drive. He’d get there and watch as Beamer went on to make the most of it.”

Ross later wound up at Georgia Tech, and he and Beamer coached against each other one time— in 1990. The Yellow Jackets got a field goal in the waning moments to win 6-3 and ended up winning a share of the national championship that season.

“Coach Claiborne also brought in Frank as a graduate assistant,” Ross said. “Obviously, the main reason was that Frankie had been a great player for him, but he also knew what type of person Frankie was and that he would make a great football coach. That’s where we first met, and I knew from the very beginning that I was working with the defense and coaching linebackers, and Frank and Ralph Friedgen were our graduate assistants with the defense. You could see from day 1 that Frankie was going to be a very special guy as a coach.

Ross worked at Maryland for one season before landing the head coaching job at The Citadel—his first head coaching job. He wasted no time in hiring Beamer as an assistant coach.

“The two of them actually left for the Charleston, South Carolina-based military school on the same day around Christmas 43 years ago. In fact, Ross has a photo of his Richmond home of the two of them before they boarded the plane to go to Charleston.

Ross also hired Friedgen to join him, and he hired Jimmy Laycock, currently the head coach at William & Mary; too.

“I knew they were all going to be good,” Ross said. “I knew Frank was going to be a special coach. His work ethic was special. He had a great way with people—I’m talking all people in the athletic department. He was highly respected by everyone. He got along quite well with his players, but also took a real strong interest in them.

“He did an outstanding job. My first year, I didn’t name any coordinators. I had to get a feel for things and for people. After that first year, I named Frank our defensive coordinator and began to see how special he was. He coordinated our defense. He knew it quite well. I knew then and there that I had something very special.”

Ross and his group of young assistants got along very well, even during trying circumstances. The school lacked the resources to be competitive, and attending a military school wasn’t a popular option in the early 80s, specifically with the Vietnam War going on at the time.

“It made recruiting very tough, but Frank and those guys were very hard workers and brought in some excellent players,” Ross said. “Those guys got on the road. They didn’t fuss about anything. We didn’t have a high budget. Their wives chipped in—I think they did a lot of tutoring. They all lived in pretty much an apartment complex and had players over to eat. They just jumped in fort first, and Frank was always looking to find solutions for our problems in the program.”

Well there, Beamer learned how to be more than a coach to his players. He learned that being a coach also required being a mentor, a counselor and a father to certain young men who needed those things at certain times.

Beamer made an impact on his players, and one young man comes to mind, according to Ross. This young man struggled early on at The Citadel, but Beamer took him under his wing, playing racquetball with him and spending time with him. The result was positive.

“The youngster became a very good football player, but he was also a good student and accomplished a lot in the time he was at The Citadel,” Ross said. “He got his degree. He was very special, and that epitomized Frank. He could be firm. He knew how to be firm. He wasn’t just a good, of folksy guy all the time. But because he was that, the players loved him and respected him. He had a real strong interest in his players. He cared—and the players knew that.”

Ross coached at The Citadel for five seasons before Ross left off to the NFL in 1978. That year, he received an offer from Marvin Lerry to be the special teams coach of the Kansas City Chiefs.

Bobby Ross, who won a share of the national championship while at Georgia Tech and also coached in the NFL, gave Frank Beamer his first full-time coaching job—and watched as Beamer went on to make the most of it.

Ross also hired Friedgen to join him, and he recommended Beamer for the job. Baughman hired Beamer, and the rest is history.

Ross gave him that first opportunity. Given what Beamer’s accomplished in his 40-plus years in the coaching profession, he’ll forever be grateful.
He heard the news on Nov. 1 that Virginia Tech head football coach Frank Beamer planned on retiring at the end of this season. But what transpired the following morning caught him off guard.

Dale “Dutch” Baughman heard the phone ring and expected nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps it was a colleague in the profession, or maybe a dreaded telemarketer.

Instead, it was Beamer, calling the man who hired him as the football coach at Virginia Tech two days before Christmas in 1986. Beamer thanked Baughman, and he explained his reasoning for retiring.

Beamer’s call came as no surprise to those who knew him—the man who never forgot his roots, his manners and those who afforded him with opportunities.

“We had the nicest conversation about our friendship and how well he’s done and what occurred 29 years ago,” Baughman said via phone from his home in Southlake, Texas. “He is a first-rate person, and that was the convincing element during our initial interview. It’s certainly been the consistent character trait for all the years I’ve known him. It was a great moment for us to share and kind of him to reach out.”

The tenure of Dutch Baughman as the athletics director at Virginia Tech lasted six months, but his decision to hire Beamer changed not only a football program and an athletics department, but also the university.

Baughman himself got the AD job at Tech on Dec. 11, 1986, replacing outgoing AD and football coach Bill Dooley, who weeks later led the Hokies to a Peach Bowl win. Dooley resigned in what many remember as a tumultuous time that involved NCAA violations. Baughman, who had been working for the Southwest Conference, knew he was going to be getting the job at Tech and knew he needed to hire a football coach. So he began the process even before he arrived on campus.

Baughman went after Bobby Ross, who had resigned as the head coach at Maryland following that season. Baughman met Ross in Richmond to discuss the Tech job, but Ross thought it was too soon to jump back into coaching.

Baughman also had Beamer, the coach at Murray State at the time, on his radar. Yet the conversation with Ross immediately pointed Baughman toward Beamer’s direction.

“I remember asking Bobby the question, ‘If you were to be the candidate for the new head coach, tell me about your stuff,’” Baughman said. “The first thing he said he’d do was hire an assistant head coach. Back then, that was not really a known or popular position, but he was so sure of it. I asked him, ‘Well, do you have someone in mind?’ and he said, ‘Yeah, it would be Frank Beamer.’

“In having heard Frank’s name in several other places, I knew that he was capable, meeting all the elements of the profile [for the position]. But when I heard his name mentioned by Bobby Ross, that validated a lot of the research I had done and so forth.”

Baughman contacted Beamer and later met Beamer and his wife, Cheryl, at a hotel in Nashville, Tennessee. The three of them chatted for a while, and then Cheryl excused herself to allow the two gentlemen to talk about the position.

What technically was supposed to be an interview turned into a conversation—one that sold Baughman. The two briefly talked about football, but mostly talked about values and handling certain scenarios, and Baughman left impressed with Beamer’s responses.

Baughman certainly put an emphasis on toughness, discipline and football knowledge, having once served as a graduate assistant football coach under legendary Woody Hayes at Ohio State—a man known for such traits. But Baughman, a former Marine, felt values, such as integrity and character, were more important.

“What I had learned at that point in my career was that it’s not just hiring on personal character,” Baughman said. “Every time, you hire on personal character. One of the main reasons is that you’re in a position to hire a person that’s going to have incredible influence over the lives of student-athletes first and foremost, and then there’s coaching staff and parents and faculty and staff and so on.

“The personal character criteria was the most important, and that was the decision maker. That made the difference. After the meeting in Nashville, there was no doubt in my mind that this was the man that we wanted.”

Unfortunately, Baughman never witnessed Beamer coach a game as the AD at Virginia Tech. He resigned six months later following Beamer’s Christmas hiring after a rift with university officials involving an NCAA investigation into the Hokies’ men’s basketball program.

But Baughman kept in close contact with Beamer over the years, and he made several trips to Blacksburg to take in games. He never announced his arrival and always stayed in the background, preferring to be respectful of the current ADs at the time—Dave Braine, Jim Weaver and now Whit Babcock.

Baughman later served as the AD at Oregon State and then became the executive director of the Division I-A Athletics Directors Association, a post he held for nearly 20 years before retiring this past January. Each year, he re-lived the story of hiring Beamer, as both future ADs and current ADs wanted advice on how to an eventual legend.

“It seemed that every year, as the team would have success and go to a bowl game, I don’t know how many years went by where someone would call me and say, ‘Tell me the story about when you hired Frank,’” Baughman said. “Well, the story had been told so many times, but it was very nice not to be with Frank on a daily basis and yet still be connected and share in that excitement and joy. Every time I would re-live that experience, it was not only a tribute to Frank and the Hokies, but it also made me feel real good, too.”

Baughman was unable to attend Beamer’s final home game at Lane Stadium, but hopes to make it back to town for any future tributes to the legendary coach. As the years clicked along, he knew Beamer’s retirement to be imminent.

But Beamer’s decision left Baughman feeling the way many in Hokie Nation feel—disappointed and sad, yet thankful that the coach gets to leave on his terms.

“I feel sadness to step away from something I’ve been dedicated to for 45 years or whatever it is, and now to see Frank retire at the same time, that’s part of the empathy I have with the decision that he and Cheryl made and the announcement and the thoughts he has going forward,” Baughman said. “There is a happiness. There is an enormous congratulations for being able to sustain 29 years, but there is also a sadness because there is a dire need for people in that position, not only at Virginia Tech, but all over the country, that will continue to influence the lives of student-athletes the way Frank did.”
Michael Brewer never grew up aspiring to be a writer. Like most Texas natives, he dreamed big, thinking of oil wells, and land management, and swinging a J.R. Ewing-style dash. But should he pursue it, Virginia Tech’s cowboy boot-wearing, pickup-driving quarterback may have found an option as a wordsmith after his 1,300-word essay on retiring head coach Frank Beamer that appeared in Sports Illustrated’s online “Campus Rush”—a digital complement to the magazine that is dedicated to focusing on the stories that make college football so special.

Brewer, who wrapped up his final regular season as a collegian by throwing two touchdown passes in Tech’s win over Virginia in Charlottesville, penned a heartfelt missive about the Hokies’ beloved head coach that appeared on Nov. 19—and resonated with Hokie Nation. It may have secured Brewer’s status on many fans’ list of favorite players.

Not that Brewer wrote the piece with a popularity contest in mind. He wrote it with humble intentions, as a personal and genuine tribute to his coach.

“I did an interview with SI about Coach Beamer, and the transfer process, and how I ended up here,” Brewer said. “I had a lot of good things to say about Coach Beamer because that’s pretty easy to do. A day or two later, they called back and had the idea of me writing a piece about Coach Beamer. They wanted, from the player’s eyes, what Coach Beamer is like and from what we think about him from the locker room rather than just what you hear from the media.

“I was willing to do that. People always say it’s easy to write about a subject in school when you know a lot about it. To write good things about a guy like Coach Beamer was easy. I could have made it a heckuva lot longer than that. I had to condense it down a little bit. He gave me an opportunity. Obviously, he’s done so much for this university, and the athletic program, and the state of Virginia. It was something I wanted to do after they approached me about it. Brewer felt—and still feels—that he owes Beamer a debt that can’t be repaid, even through a well-written letter in one of the nation’s premier sports publications. It’s a debt that may never be repaid.

Two years ago, Brewer wasn’t happy, stuck in a program with a head coach who did not recruit him. He made the decision to transfer from Texas Tech after his coach there, Tommy Tuberville, left to go to Cincinnati. The hard part came after that decision. He needed to find a home.

“I committed on my visit because the more I thought about it, the more I realized an opportunity to play for someone like Coach Beamer doesn’t come around very often. When I told him, he shot right out of his chair—I didn’t know he could move like that!—came around his desk and gave me a big hug. It was like we had known each other for years. That’s when I knew I made the right decision.

(Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Brewer, Nov. 19, excerpt from Campus Rush, SI.com)
Michael Brewer will leave Virginia Tech ranked in the top 10 in school history in touchdown passes, but more importantly, with two wins over Virginia as the starting quarterback.

“Second, the defense. Having a defense like that means you don’t have to be perfect on offense. Coming from a system in the Big 12, you have to score a lot of points, and a lot of times, it [the game] turns into a track meet. Here, it’s not like that. It takes a lot of pressure off the offense. I always thought that if Virginia Tech could take that next step offensively, they could be a heckuva team with the defense and special teams.”

“Those were some of the reasons I thought it would be a good idea to come here,” Brewer said. “I know he’s going to get back up. When he went down against Ohio State, I was like, ‘Ah, he’s going to be fine. It’s Michael. He’ll be fine.’ Once he gets hit, it sucks. But I know he’s going to get back up. He’s the toughest guy I’ve been around.”

That toughness also has won him the respect of the man whom he respects so much — Frank Beamer.

“He’s a tough guy,” Beamer said. “He’s my kind of quarterback. The guy is made out of the 195-pounder.”

“None of Tech’s staff had heard of Brewer. Pursuing him meant trusting Morris. No one questioned Brewer’s credentials as a person, but he needed to be able to play — and there was little film available.

“At the time, Chad’s name was being mentioned for the Louisville job, and he said, ‘If I had gotten the Louisville job, I was going to take him [Brewer] with me to Louisville,’” Beamer said. “He said, ‘If I had gotten a head coaching job, I would try to take him with me.’ The more and more we researched Michael, knowing the family and the background, he was certainly a guy we wanted to pursue.”

Brewer and his family made the long journey from Texas to Blacksburg for an official visit. Conversations with Loeffler and Frank Beamer went well. So, too, did those with the players.

But those were just a couple of the things that enticed Brewer to travel halfway across the country and go to school.

“A lot of things go into it,” Brewer said. “Two of the big things that stood out to me were, No. 1, Coach Beamer. Getting the chance to play for a legendary coach like Coach Beamer and then after sitting down with these teammates, this place means a lot to me because of the response I’ve gotten here in Blacksburg and the rest of Hokie Nation have accepted me and taken me in as one of their own. I’m truly grateful for that and appreciative of that.”

— Tech quarterback Michael Brewer

None of Tech’s staff had heard of Brewer. Pursuing him meant trusting Morris. No one questioned Brewer’s credentials as a person, but he needed to be able to play — and there was little film available.

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The weather was perfect for tailgating, and Hokie Nation made the season's final pilgrimage to Blacksburg to see their beloved team close out the campaign. The year was 1990, the team's record was 5-5, and a win over letter rival Virginia would produce a winning season, a source of warmth for the coming winter's cold. Tech's players knew their future lot. This game marked the end of their year for them, and the Hokies viewed themselves as a rest area for the Cavaliers, who were on a date to New Orleans for the Sugar Bowl, gaudy national ranking in tow. In those days, bowl invitations went out well before season's end. So the Hokies were going all out for this one. They convinced their coach to let them wear all-maroon uniforms. Then they took matters into their own hands, as the seniors, an outfit led by the likes of Archie Hopkins, Nick Cullen, Al Chamblie and Jimmy Whitten, hatched a shrewdly devised scheme to wear coveted black jerseys. That marked the start of what turned out to be one of the most magical evenings in the history of Virginia Tech football. On Nov. 24, 1990, with the nation watching and the largest crowd ever assembled for an event in the Commonwealth, the Hokies won what was considered the largest crowd ever assembled for an event in the Commonwealth. The Hokies went out for early pre-game warm-ups for the Virginia game. He and his crew set up the locker room, made sure the appropriate items for the sideline sat in their proper places and handed out gameday attire to players. "You need to see this," he said. "They're out there spray painting their shoes." The trees, for the most part, stood naked, having shed their leaves and disappeared. The locker room, save for a few, was eerily quiet. One of Karlin's minions came up to him and told him he needed to go outside. "Lester was getting all crazy on me," Beamer said. "I remember telling him something like, 'If it helps us win, let's go with it.'" Beamer's reaction wasn't quite what Karlin expected. "If my offensive line and running backs and my career, I was smart enough to know that something like this. "Regardless, Furrer hopped on board, which comforted the group. After all, the quarterback had led this squad. But they had two weeks to get ready for UVA, with an off week before the game—and prepared accordingly. Virginia came into the game ranked No. 17 in the nation, with an 8-2 mark and the aforementioned Sugar Bowl bid in hand. It reached the pinnacle of its season on Oct. 14 when Associated Press poll voters ranked the Cavaliers No. 1 nationally after their 7-0 start. But the Cavaliers entered the Tech game struggling. They had lost two of their previous three games, seeing their dreams of an undefeated season end with a 41-38 loss to Georgia Tech and then receiving a double whammy from Maryland, which beat the Cavaliers 35-30 and dedicated UVA quarterback Shawn Moore's performance in the process. That left their offensive in the hands of junior Matt Blundin. The Hokies won the toss, and as Beamer's traditional custom, elected to defend the south goal. Kevin Kiley handled the sideline color commentary. Gottfried knew Beamer expected a fast start. "As a unit, both offense and defense, we had a strong belief in that we could win that game. "We were tired of being everyone's Homecoming game. "Tech's players, led by those seniors, had owned Tech for the past 10 seasons, snapping their 11-game winning streak. "They had a strong belief going in that we could win this thing." Beamer's reaction wasn't quite what Karlin expected. "We convinced him to do it, we knew it was the right thing to do. After seeing the mass, Karlin knew nothing could be done. So he sought out Beamer to deliver the news. "Lester Karlin went in No. 12 of what ended up being a 36-year career as Tech's equipment manager for him, this pending game with Virginia resembled any other game he and his crew set up to their locker room, made sure the appropriate items for the offense sat in their proper places and handed out gameday attire to players. The Hokies went out for early pre-game warm-ups for the Virginia game and stepped back to the taking room before handing out our own pranks. They had their white pants in favor of the maroon ones—approximately 20, who didn't own maroon outfits since 1984. Then a multitude of players showed up at the covered seat to exhibit the entire plan. "You need to see this," he said. "They've got these guys spray painting their shoes." Karlin and his minions led what he termed a Tech with a simple reaction. "It was pretty well-planned," he said. "They got black spray paint all over the benches and on their socks and shoes." The Hokies had lost the toss, and as Beamer's traditional custom, elected to defend the south goal. The second half, Virginia decided to receive, and Tech elected to defend the south goal, taking the wind in the first quarter. That turned out to be a pivotal decision. Few remember this, but the wind played a major role in this game, with gusts reaching 15-20 miles per hour. Playing with the wind in the first quarter allowed Tech offensive coordinator Steve Smith to be aggressive from the start. In contrast, UVA seemed to struggle going into the wind, Derek Dooley, former Tennessee head coach and current Dallas Cowboys receivers coach, dropped passes on the Cavaliers' first two possessions, perhaps serving as a microcosm of things to come. On their second possession, the Hokies went for the big play—and got it. Furrer carried out a beautiful play-action fake to Paul USA safety Keith McManus to a knee, then threw a strike to Bo Campbell for a 49-yard gain to the Virginia 15. Then Tony Kennedy ran 17. The Hokies elected to run the ball from the 3, and Mark Poidexter scored his first career touchdown on a 3-yard run to give Tech a 7-0 lead. "As a unit, both offense and defense, we had a strong belief in that we could win that game. "We had put in the work with Coach [Mike] Gentry, and the coaches, Coach [Butt] Foster's [outside linebackers coach] and Coach [Rich] Bate. "Bo Campbell [Tech's quarterbacks coach] believed in our potential—and I'm not sure we had lived up to it yet. "We recognized Coach Beamer's passion and belief that we could bring the capital of Virginia sports from Charlottesville to Blacksburg. We were tired of being close, and we were tired of being everyone's Homecoming game. Our defense came out and hit them in the mouth, and our offense was a force. It all came together." Continued on page 30
Beamer and His Mentor

Few remember this, too, but Jerry Claiborne was in the house for this one. Claiborne got his first head coaching job when hired by Frank Moseley to take over the reins at Tech, and he coached from 1961-70. He coached Beamer, who played at Tech from 1966-68.

Beamer surprised his mentor, who had gotten out of coaching the previous year, with a rather bold call on the Hokies’ next drive following their touchdown.

Furrer had gotten Tech to the Virginia 23, but back-to-back plays lost six yards, leaving the Hokies with a fourth-and-11 from the UVA 29.

Rather than have kicker Mickey Thomas attempt a career-long 46-yard field goal — with the wind at his back — Beamer elected to go for it. Following a timeout, Furrer saw man coverage on Cullen in the slot, so he changed the play. He found Cullen on a post route, and Cullen, who beat McMeans on the play, made a sliding grab in the end zone for a 29-yard touchdown.

"He was in the slot to the right," Furrer said of Cullen. "It was a double move. Nick was hell on cornerbacks, but he really caused free safeties trouble. It was a little scary because I almost skipped it off the ground. He made a great catch." The play, which gave the Hokies a 14-0 lead with a little more than three minutes left in the quarter, still sticks with Beamer mostly because of Claiborne’s reaction afterward.

"Coach Claiborne was a conservative guy," Beamer said. "I remember him telling me, ‘If you really surprised you went for that first down. That was kind of a gamble.’ I told him, ‘Well, I just had the feeling that it was the time to do it.’

"Then you go a lot on your gut feeling. Sometimes, it’s worked out, and sometimes, it hasn’t. I’ve done that quite a few times since that night. It worked out well that night."

Coming out of the timeout, Furrer threw a ball toward tight end Greg Daniels that appeared to be too long. But Daniels made a diving grab in the end zone for a 33-yard touchdown and a 24-0 Tech lead with 3:20 left in the half.

The play probably sealed the game for the Hokies.

"I remember calling the timeout because something didn’t feel quite right," Furrer said. "Coach Bustle asked me, ‘What do you want to do?’ I told him the play, and he said, ‘Good, that’s what I was hoping you’d say.’ So I made that throw, and Greg made an amazing catch.

"The groin nagged me all year long," Hebron said. "So it was a big question mark whether I would play, and not only if I would play, but how effective would I be.

"For me personally, I was just happy to be a part of it, being on the field and being a part of something like that. I didn’t know what I’d be able to provide on the field. I went out there, and I felt great. Coach [Billy] Hite [Tech’s running backs coach] put me in there the first time and I did well, and he rode me from here on out."

The first half, we were just really in sync," Furrer said. "We just came out and executed, and it wasn’t just me throwing the ball. It was Bo and Vaughn and Greg and the offensive line. We had the previous week off, and we put in a lot of film study. Those extra three or four days made a world of difference."

UVA tried to get back into the second half, but each time, the Hokies’ defense stood tall.

On the Cavaliers’ first possession, Blundin threw a deep pass toward Terrence Tomlin, but Tech’s Tyronne Drakeford made a fantastic interception to kill that threat. Then, after the Cavaliers cut the lead to 24-13 on a 66-yard pass from Blundin to Herman Moore—a pass that had been intercepted by Drakeford, who took a poor angle on the play—UVA threatened again, driving to the Tech 14.

But the Cavaliers’ Gary Steele fumbled, and Pendleton recovered at the 17. That play probably was the biggest play of the game, as UVA didn’t come that close to scoring the rest of the night.

Starting with that fumble, Virginia turned the ball over on four straight possessions, with Drakeford—a freshman—adding another interception, along with an interception by Jerome Preston and a fumble recovery by Basham.

"It worked out well," Drakeford said of his night. "I was playing with some good defensive backs, with Damien Russell back there—and he was one of the best safeties to come through Tech as far as I’m concerned. Those guys made me feel good, made me feel comfortable as a freshman. They told me just to go play and enjoy myself."

Tech put this one away with two fourth-quarter touchdowns. On one drive, Hebron—who missed the previous two games with a groin injury—carried the ball eight straight times. The final carry was a 9-yard touchdown run that gave Tech a 31-13 lead with 9:21 left.

With a little more than three minutes to go, Furrer threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Poindexter following Basham’s recovery of a muffed punt. That accounted for the final margin.

Virginia went into the game averaging 42 points and 542 yards per game. It finished with 13 and 374 against Tech’s defense—not to mention five turnovers.

Offensively for Tech, Furrer threw for 254 yards and three touchdowns, while Hebron, getting the bulk of the work after Kennedy injured his shoulder in the first half, rushed for 117 of his 142 yards in the second half. He finished with 31 carries.

"The groin nagged me all year long," Hebron said. "So it was a big question mark whether I would play, and not only if I would play, but how effective would I be."

"For me personally, I was just happy to be a part of it, being on the field and being a part of something like that. I didn’t know what I’d be able to provide on the field. I went out there, and I felt great. Coach [Billy] Hite [Tech’s running backs coach] put me in there the first time and I did well, and he rode me from here on out."

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Plays of the Game

Tech’s defense certainly got into the act, too. A group led by Hopkins, Chamblee, Randy Pendleton and Damien Russell forced a Blundin fumble late in the first quarter that led to another Tech touchdown. The Hokies drove 59 yards in 12 plays and settled for a 21-yard field goal by Thomas with 10:17 left in the first half.

Virginia finally got on the board with a touchdown late in the first half on a shovel pass from Blundin to tailback Terry Kirby, but Tech’s Tyronne Drakeford made a diving grab in the end zone for a 33-yard touchdown and a 24-0 Tech lead with 3:20 left in the half.

That was a bonus, since he was kicking into the wind, as the Hokies took a 17-0 lead. But one of the big plays in the game was forthcoming.

Tech’s defense forced UVA to a three-and-out on the ensuing series, as Furrer and the offense went back to work. The Hokies drove to the UVA 33 and faced a third-and-10 situation that led to another timeout.

"The play probably sealed the game for the Hokies.

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After the play, UVA coach George Welsh immediately grabbed his hat and slammed it to the turf.

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Continued on page 32
then on out. It really worked out for me and obviously for the team.”

With two minutes left, students started jumping over the wall in the north end zone and lining up at the back of the end zone, ready to storm the field. Rodd Wooten, the Hokies’ backup quarterback, lined the team up in the victory formation with 58 seconds to go, taking the final two snaps.

As the horn sounded, the fans rushed onto the field.

And the goal posts came tumbling down.

The Aftermath

Virginia got Moore back for the Sugar Bowl matchup against Tennessee, and the Cavaliers suffered an excruciating 23-22 setback to the Volunteers. They finished the 1990 campaign with an 8-4 record.

Tech finished at 6-5, and some argue that the Hokies were the best 6-5 team in the nation. Perhaps more importantly, the win showed Hokie Nation that its football program could beat its rivals to the northeast. It marked Beamer’s first win over the Cavaliers in his four seasons — and the previous three losses came by a touchdown or less.

In addition, the win gave Beamer and the program some much-needed name recognition. The entire nation saw a quality, well-disciplined team destroy another such team in front of a boisterous fan base.

The country, especially recruits (of whom there were 50 in attendance), was no longer asking, “Virginia who?”

“When I mention Virginia Tech now, everyone knows Virginia Tech,” said Hebron, who owns and runs a gym north of Philadelphia. “They don’t get it confused with UVA. To me, that’s not a small thing. Not one time when I used to say ‘Virginia Tech’ did people not get confused with something else. Now, you mention ‘Hokies’ or ‘Virginia Tech,’ everybody knows. That was definitely one of the first games in which that started to happen. It was the first of many that created Virginia Tech as a household name.”

Furrer, now a senior vice president for Q2 Holdings in Austin, Texas, agreed.

“I think that game was bigger than a bowl game,” he said. “I think we established our position in the state, and it put Coach Beamer and Virginia Tech in a place where it should be.”

The win, and the direction the program was trending, led to the Hokies’ entrance into the Big East Football Conference. After years of playing as an independent, Tech received that invitation in 1991, along with Miami, Rutgers and West Virginia.

The invitation came during a time of uncertainty and probably saved the school’s football program. It, and Beamer’s leadership, led to an unprecedented run of success spanning more than two decades.

“There is no question that, at the time, we needed something like that,” Beamer said, referring to the win. “That was a gigantic boost. Just to beat Virginia, with the success they had had and they were going to the Sugar Bowl, and to beat them the way we beat them ... there’s no question that was a big, big win for Virginia Tech.”

That night occurred 25 years ago on Nov. 24, just four days before the Hokies closed the 2015 regular season in Charlottesville. Those who played in it remember it well — and they’ll never forget.

“It feels just like yesterday,” said Drakeford, who works in Gainesville, Virginia, as a regional director for The Boys and Girls Club of greater Washington. “I remember a lot about that game. It doesn’t seem like it’s been that long. Whenever you’ve done something special, you have a tendency to remember a lot more than what you probably originally thought.”

By the time the players had gotten back to the locker room and the coaches their offices on that memorable night, students were carrying the goal posts toward downtown, with plans on parading them through Main Street. A perfect moon illuminated their path and provided light for a long night of revelry. It marked the end of a perfect late-fall day, and all knew the sun’s early-dawn light would bring forth a new day — and a changed football program at Virginia Tech.
The cold reality of sports is that, sometimes, the best team doesn’t win. And unfortunately, the Virginia Tech women’s soccer team became an example of that.

The Hokies dominated the action against Ohio State in the second round of the NCAA Tournament, but the Buckeyes got a goal in the 78th minute and held on for a 1-0 victory over Tech in State College, Pennsylvania on Nov. 20.

The loss marked the end of the season for the Hokies, who went into the tournament ranked No. 14 nationally and as a No. 4 seed. Tech finished its season with a 15-4-2 record.

“It’s sometimes a cruel game,” Tech coach Chigger Adair said. “That’s how it goes. I thought we were dictating the tempo and the possession and the flow of the game. They [Ohio State] played smartly to their credit. They defended well as a team and limited a majority of the match, and the Hokies out-shot the Buckeyes a staggering 20-5. They also held a 4-2 advantage in shots on goal.

But they couldn’t put the ball in the net. Tech had multiple shots drift wide of the post in the second half. Madi Conyers settled and started every match in which she played this season and started every match in which she played this season. Coburn earned All-ACC honors three times and started every match in which she played in her career (87).

“They’ve been the most established and successful in their times here at Virginia Tech,” Adair said of the seniors. “They’ve been to the Final Four, the Sweet 16 and the NCAA Tournament all four years. It’s going to be difficult to replace them, for sure.”

Tech figures to finish in the top 20 nationally in scoring offense (2.24 gpg) and total goals (47) and in the top 30 nationally in points per game (6.10) and total points (128) — the season had not concluded at press time.

But the Hokies do return their top three goal scorers and eight of their 11 starters in the Ohio State match, led by first-team All-ACC choice Tiernan, who scored 14 goals this past season — a number that ranks in the top 20 nationally. Alani Johnson and Laila Gray scored nine and seven goals, respectively.

Tech also returns goalkeeper Kaylyn Smith, who allowed 21 goals in 21 matches and recorded 72 saves.

“We’ve got a good nucleus coming back,” Adair said. “The freshmen and sophomores that contributed this year are only going to get better as we grow and try to work this offseason. We’ve already met about preparing for next season and putting the work in to get back to the NCAA Tournament and try to put a run together. With that returning group, Tech should have high expectations yet again. Hopefully, a ninth straight NCAA appearance will be in the works.”
Wolff and staff **sign two** during fall signing period

**Kaela Kinder and Genesis Parker provide future quickness and depth to the Hokies’ backcourt**

*From Tech's Strategic Communications office*

Virginia Tech women’s basketball coach Dennis Wolff and his staff signed two backcourt players during the fall signing period, adding future speed, quickness and depth at the guard positions.

The class consists of Kaela Kinder, a 5-foot-10 guard shooting guard from Inwood, New York; and Genesis Parker, a 5-9 combination guard from Bristow, Virginia.

Kinder, who plays at Stonewall Jackson High School, averaged 20 points per game and shot 81 percent from the free-throw line as a junior. The left-handed guard picked the Hokies over offers from Georgia, George Mason, George Washington, VCU and St. Joseph’s.

ESPN HoopGurlz ranked Parker as the No. 62 prospect nationally and the No. 18 guard prospect in the 2016 recruiting class. She earned first-team All-Met honors from The Washington Post and first-team All Group 6A honors following a junior season in which she led Stonewall Jackson to the state championship game in Group 6A—Virginia’s highest classification. Stonewall Jackson lost to Cosby High, but Parker scored 11 points and dished out four assists in the game.

“Genesis is a talented combo guard,” Wolff said in a statement released by Tech’s Strategic Communications office. “Her quickness is very good, and she has great athletic ability. One of the things that has stood out to me is her terrific ability to get past her man.”

Kinder plays at Christ the King Regional High School—the same high school that produced former Tennessee standout and former WNBA great Chamique Holdsclaw—and led her team to its second straight CHSAA Brooklyn, Queens Division I crown as a junior last season. In the CHSAA championship game against Archbishop Molloy, Kinder scored 19 points and grabbed 16 rebounds.

Kinder also led her team to the state title game in which Christ the King lost 66-52 to Long Island Lutheran.

Kinder chose the Hokies over Providence, while also securing offers from the likes of St. John’s and Seton Hall. She averaged 13.8 points and nine rebounds per game as a junior last year, earning first-team honors in the New York Daily News All Queens girls’ basketball squad. ESPN HoopGurlz rated her as a three-star recruit and the No. 25 guard prospect in the nation.

“Kaela is a versatile two-guard,” Wolff said. “She plays on a very good high school team and has shown what an excellent defender she is. Throughout her career, Kaela has continued to improve as an offensive player.”

Wolff and his staff still have scholarships available to sign prospects in the spring.

Williams and staff **add size** during fall signing period

**Oak Hill Academy product Khadem Sy signed with Tech and will give the Hokies a physical presence in the post next year**

*From Tech’s Strategic Communications office*

Virginia Tech men’s basketball coach Buzz Williams added size with the lone scholarship at his disposal by signing Khadem Sy (pronounced ka-deem see), a 6-foot-10, 245-pound post player from Dakar, Senegal during the fall signing period.

Tech’s current roster features just one senior—Shane Henry—which forced Williams and his staff to be very selective during the recruiting process. He elected to sign Sy to fill what will be Henry’s vacancy in the post.

Sy is the fourth player on Tech’s roster who is 6-10 or bigger. He averaged 6.5 points and six rebounds per game last season for national power Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Virginia.

We are excited to add an Oak Hill alum to the Hokie family for the first time in more than 30 years,” Williams said in a statement released by Tech’s Strategic Communications office. “Khadim has been coached at an elite level since he arrived in the States and fills a need we had in our second class.

“Throughout the two years we have recruited him, he has continued to improve at a consistent rate as a player, and I believe his ceiling is very high. More importantly, he has the character and work ethic that we want those in our program to be about on and off the floor.”

Sy, who moved into the starting lineup this season for Oak Hill, picked the Hokies over Purdue, Georgia Tech and Kansas State. ESPN.com, Scout.com, and Yahoo.com listed him as a three-star recruit. ESPN.com ranked him as the No. 10 prospect in Virginia. He played last summer for Upward Stars AAU team.

“T’m so happy to be a Hokie today,” Sy said in a statement released by Tech’s Strategic Communications office. “Oak Hill has been my home for three years, and now Blacksburg will be my home for the next four. I can’t wait to play for Coach Williams and his staff and compete in the ACC—the best basketball conference in America.”

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Logan Stevens, who started his diving career as a kid, won a silver medal at the ACC Championships last year and has high expectations for the remainder of this season

by Jimmy Robertson

H e scaled the steps gradually, wondering when, or if, he would reach the top. Once he got there, he quickly came to the stark terms of the elevation. Then he walked slowly to the edge and peered over it, and the reality hit him. There he stood, 10 meters above the water, or roughly 33 feet, and his coach wanted him to jump off, twist, turn, somersault and ultimately land in the water head first with arms out.

“I lettered for seven years, so that was kind of cool,” Stevens said. “It was intimidating diving with the high school kids and competing against them. It was more intimidating than awkward. My teammates, though, were great. They didn’t treat me any differently. They tried to encourage me to learn more difficult dives to compete with the high school kids.”

Stevens got real serious about his diving as a seventh grader when he attended a camp at Miami. While there, he met a coach named Mike Grapner, who ran the camp and invited Stevens to join his club team. He received an enthusiastic yes.

In the summer following his seventh grade year, Stevens competed in his first USA competition. The results weren’t great, but the top 12 got a medal, and since only 12 competed in the ages 13-14 division, Stevens received a medal.

“That was all that mattered to me,” he said, laughing.

Undeterred, he went on to become a terrific high school diver, and he started attracting attention from college recruiters. The University of Kentucky coaches contacted him, which, of course, pleased his family.

Amused to do anything different, though, he broached with his parents the possibility of going to a different school besides Kentucky. He dropped subtle hints at first before cautiously broaching with his parents the possibility of going to Virginia Tech. They didn’t treat me any differently. They acknowledged the idea, and the idea turned a little more serious conversation.

“On my parents’ side, all their siblings and parents went to UK,” he said. “I was the only one in my family who didn’t go. But they were absolutely supportive of me. They told me, ‘Go where you want.’ They still made me look at Kentucky for diving, but Virginia Tech had a much better program.”

Before he found his way to Blacksburg, he took recruiting visits to West Virginia, where Grapner had landed a job, and Florida State.

He really enjoyed his visit to West Virginia, but his recruitment turned a little weird.

While there, one of Florida State’s assistants inexplicably told Stevens to check out Virginia Tech.

“Florida State was my No. 1 before I came here, and I went on a trip there and the assistant coach there said, ‘Before you finish recruiting, I want you to go to Virginia Tech and check out the campus. Just drive through on your own and check it out,’” Stevens said.

“It’s a weird story. I went to his diving camp, too, so we knew each other. I think he knew that he wasn’t going to be there when I got there—he left after my freshman year. I’m not sure why he told me that, but I thank him for that.”

Stevens made the trek to Blacksburg, and in a story that is not uncommon, he fell in love with Virginia Tech’s beautiful campus, high-quality academics and friendly people. The stunning Christiansburg Aquatic Center, home of the school’s swimming and diving programs, also impressed him.

Under Piemonte, Stevens has gotten better each year. His sophomore season, he earned 46 points at the ACC Championships, helping the men’s team to its first ACC title. He finished 10th on the platform, 12th in the 1-meter and 13th in the 3-meter events.

Last season was his best yet. Stevens won a silver medal in the 3-meter event at the ACC Championships and nearly won a bronze in the platform event, coming in fourth. He qualified for his first NCAA Championships.

Now the question is: Can he improve upon last season? Tech divers were the difference in the race for the 2014 ACC team championship won by the Hokies, and Stevens hopes to lead a young men’s squad—with just four seniors—to a similar outcome this season. Hopefully, personal acclaim comes with that.

“My expectations are high,” he said. “I want to repeat last year. That would be the ultimate goal, or maybe do better. Maybe break my personal record again. I want to be consistent, not many make any dumb mistakes, and really savor my last year of diving.”

Stevens graduates next May with a degree in geography and minors in both meteorology and communication. He wants to go to graduate school at Tech before embarking on a career in medical geography, which studies the effect of locale and climate on health.

Whatever he ends up doing probably won’t beat the rush of climbing the steps to the top of a 10-meter platform—and then attempting to defy gravity.

“I enjoy platform because you get that thrill of falling 30 or 40 miles per hour from 10 meters,” Stevens admitted. “The three-meter has proven to be my best event. I enjoy the three-meter, but I think I enjoy the platform the most. It’s a constant adrenaline rush.”

It’s a rush he knows how to love. But winning a gold medal at the ACC Championships … that would provide a rush never to be equalled in his world.

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Logan Stevens was part of a diving contingent that earned 267 points at last year’s ACC Championships and helped the Tech men’s swimming and diving team to a third-place finish.
“It’s more about staying relaxed. I don’t want to get too pumped up because I’ll over-do or under-do the dive. I just want to stay focused and visualize the dives I’m doing. That’s the only thing I think about at meets. I’ll listen to Apple radio at times, and that calms me down, but visualizing is a very important part of getting into meet mode.”

Q: If you could trade places with someone for a day, who would it be?
LS: “Ron [Piemonte, Tech’s diving coach]. He lives on a beautiful lake [Claytor Lake] with a bunch of water toys.”

Q: Why do you have an interest in medical geography?
LS: “I had a medical geography class my sophomore year, and it was one of the best classes I’ve taken here. We learned a lot about disease transmission and why there are certain diseases in certain areas of the world.

“I’m doing undergrad research with one of my medical geography professors now, and I’m using a lot of GIS [Geographic Information Systems] to look at Lyme disease in this area. I’m figuring out why it’s so prevalent and growing in this area. I want to do something in the future with GIS and remote sensing and diseases. I wouldn’t mind working for the CDC [Center for Disease Control].”

Q: In 10 years, where do you see yourself?
LS: “Working at maybe the CDC and being a GIS [Geographic Information Systems] analyst or a remote sensing analyst for disease control.”

“Getting To Know Logan Stevens”

Q: It’s Friday night after the season, what are you doing?
LS: “Does homework count? Just kidding. I like to hang out with my teammates. When I don’t have homework, I like watching TV or doing anything with friends.”

Q: What’s your favorite TV show or movie?
LS: “Lost, by far. I like the mystery of the whole season. They don’t tell you anything that is going on until later in each season. They don’t tell you any big thing until the end of the last season. You’re always, ‘What’s happening?’

“My favorite movie is Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby. Will Ferrell is just hilarious.”

Q: What’s your favorite food?
LS: “London broil at West End. You can’t really go wrong at West End.”

Q: What is your pre-dive routine?
LS: “When I’m in a meet and about to do a dive, I’ll have my headphones in and replay the dive in slow motion in my head. I really focus on when to do what when I’m in the middle of the air. It took a while to learn how to do that. But that’s what I do.”

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Once his diving career ends, Logan Stevens plans on pursuing a career in medical geography and studying the effect of locale and climate on the health of people in a specific region.
Thomas signs three in latest softball class

Tech softball coach Carol Raffety said Wednesday that Thomas inked three prospects to letters-of-intent during the fall signing period—a class that adds versatility and talent. The group includes Taylor Barnes from Scottsboro, Kentucky; Taylor Clark from Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; and Carrie Eberle from Charlotte, North Carolina.

“I think this is a really good class,” Thomas said. “Sometimes, classes—they kind of complement other classes. They’re not what you would call ‘big impact classes,’ where you would have five or six. In this case, we’re bringing in three quality players. They’ll impact in their own way because they’ll bind the classes together and fill in the gaps. I’ll be nice because we have a couple players who could be pitchers or do some other things.

“Overall, it’s a talented class. It’s a group that can compete and make an impact right away given the other classes surrounding them.”

Barnes plays at Halifax High School and earned second-team all-region honors last season. She also earned all-conference and all-region honors. She serves as a utility player and a pitcher, earning all-state honors as a pitcher.

“Taylor Barnes is the lone one out of Virginia right now,” Thomas said. “She’s a utility player, and we’re not sure where she’s going to fit in, but I think she’ll have a big impact. She’s done really well from a pitching standpoint at the 18-and-under level, and we know, athletically, she’s going to get it done.”

Clark plays shortstop for Mechanicsburg Area Senior High School and hit .468 as a junior, leading her team to a second-place finish in its division. She earned first-team all-conference honors for the third consecutive season.

“Taylor Clark is an athletic softball player who can hit the ball, and we’ll see where she fits in defensively, whether that’s middle infield or wherever fits best in our lineup,” Thomas said. “I’m excited about her because I think she has a big upside as an athlete.”

Eberle—who’s parents are Virginia Tech graduates—is a pitcher and a first baseman at Charleston Catholic High. Over the past two years, the twosome has earned all-state honors as a junior. As a senior, she won 12 games, striking out 147 in 141 innings. She also hit .543, with four homers and 21 RBI that season.

“Carrie Eberle is someone we’re looking at as a pitcher,” Thomas said. “We think probably the exciting part of her because she has a nice frame. She’s also able to hit the ball really well, so we’ll see where her bat impacts the lineup. She’ll be a nice piece to put into our lineup and pitching rotation.”

Dresser signs latest crop of talent

Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser announced the signing of five prospects to letters-of-intent during the fall signing period—a group that includes two from the state of Virginia.

The class consists of T.J. Allen from Mechanicsville, Virginia; Joey Prata from Richmond, Virginia; Jarrett Degen from Belgrade, Montana; Brent Moore from St. Paris, Ohio; and Kyle Northrom from Brandon, Florida.

Allen wrestles as a member of the Hanover High School team and helped lead Hanover to the 2014 state championships and a runner-up finish in 2015. He finished second at 182 pounds in 2014 before winning the state championship at 195 pounds this spring. He will wrestle at 174 or 184 pounds for the Hokies.

Prata wrestles at St. Christopher’s School and is a two-time National Prep Champion. He also took first place at the 2013 Greco Nationals in Fargo, North Dakota. He finished fourth at the 2013 Freestyle Nationals, second at the Beast of the East and seventh at the Ironman. He will wrestle at 133 pounds.

Degen wrestles at Belgrade High School and is a three-time Montana high school state champion. He also brings two NHSCA championships to Tech, where he will wrestle at 141 and 149 pounds.

Northrom wrestles at Graham High School, where he won the Ohio state championship as a junior. Finishing in the 2014 Flo National Champ, he added a runner-up finish at the Super 32 in 2015. A two-time top-five finisher at the Ironman, Moore will wrestle at 141 pounds.

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Women’s golf program adds three more

The Tech women’s golf program added three more to the fold, as head coach Carol Robertson announced the signings of three prospects to letters-of-intent on Nov. 11. The class includes Kristin Heur from Roanoke, Virginia; and Jessica and Sarah Spicer, twins from Durham, North Carolina.

“The 2016 signees have really excited us about what they can bring to this budding program,” Robertson said. “We continue to work hard on setting both a solid foundation and culture. Jessica, Kristin and Sarah certainly have the characteristics to raise this team to a higher level on and off the golf course.”

Tech fans are familiar with Heur, who will become a third-term Hokie. She played on the Pointdexter team for Virginia against Maryland for four years and spent three years on the Virginia/Maryland vs. North Carolina/ South Carolina team. In 2013, Heur set the course and tournament record at Ole Miss Golf Club, shooting a 62 on the first day of the Metro Invitational. She went on to win the Metro Invite in back-to-back years. She was the VNGA Junior girls champion in 2014 and Player of the Year in 2014. She claimed runner-up honors in 2015.

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Heur was a two-time captain at Hidden Valley High School, and in 2014, led her team to its first ever state championship. A four-time member of the Roanoke All-Metro golf team, Heur was named the Timesland Player of the Year in 2015. She has multiple tournament wins as part of her impressive resume, including the Junior Valiente and Roanoke Valley Women’s Hall of Fame tournaments.

Jessica Spicer, a three-time, first-team member of the North Carolina all-state squad, qualified for the U.S. Girls Junior in both 2013 and 2015. The 2014 Carolina Junior champion also was named the Carolinaan Player of the Year in the same year. She received all-conference honors while competing for her high school earlier this fall.

Sarah Spicer, also a member of the 2015 all-conference team, won the 2015 Durham Men’s High School Invitational Championship and the North Carolina Women’s Amateur in the same year. A three-time, first-team member of the North Carolina all-state squad, she qualified for the 2015 U.S. Girls Junior and advanced to the match play rounds.

Men’s golf program signs three

The Tech men’s golf program, under head coach Jay Hardwick, sign three prospects to letters-of-intent, including the program’s first recruit from Thailand.

The 2015 recruiting class consists of Tom Crow from Virginia Beach, Virginia; Tanner Owens from Milton, Tennessee; and Sarit Suwannarat from Bangkok, Thailand.

Suwannarat is a member of the Thailand National Team and was the No. 1-ranked amateur in Thailand and Southeast Asia at the end of the 2014 season. In the past two years, he has won 13 times and had eight runner-up finishes. He won the Thailand Amateur Open with scores of 69, 66, 69 and 72. This past summer, he traveled to the United States in an attempt to qualify for the U.S. Junior Amateur.

He not only made it through the sectional qualifier, but shot 5-under-par in the stroke play portion of the championship to advance to match play.

“Sarit is one of the most talented players I have ever seen at this young age,” Hardwick said. “He has good size, is very athletic, and has prodigious length—all of which bode well for his future as a top collegiate player.”

Crow is a member of the National Honor Society at Cape Henry Collegiate School and was captain of his high school team the past two seasons. The 2014 Virginia State Junior champion was also the medalist in the 2014 Virginia State Junior Match Play.
PAYTON BEACH

Tech lacrosse coach Megan Burker went all over the Mid-Atlantic region to find players, signing six prospects to letters-of-intent — with five coming from different states and one coming from Washington, D.C.

“I’m excited to welcome this 2016 class to the Hokie family,” Burker said. “This is a strong group of girls who bring a high level of athleticism and drive to their play and will make an immediate impact next fall.”

Maiyynn Steppe

Steppe is the only prospect from Virginia. The Gordonsville native plays as a defender for St. Anne’s-Belfield. She also played club lacrosse for the Storm Elite 2016 under coach Christina D’Angelo.

In addition, Steppe was a standout basketball player at St. Anne’s under Phil Stinnie, earning first-team all-state honors. Prior to St. Anne’s, she lettered in lacrosse and basketball as a freshman at Godwin High School.

Sydney Gagnon

Gagnon plays for The Episcopal Academy in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. A team captain, the goalie is a three-time letter winner for coach Josie Ferri.

Gagnon was named the 2015 EA Defensive Player of the Year. Also for her efforts, she was named to the 2015 All-Mid-Atlantic and the All-INTER-AC second team, and helped lead her team to a runner-up performance at the 2015 PAISAA Pennsylvania Championship. She played club lacrosse for the Brandywine Majors under coach ChristyAnn Morella, and the team won the 2015 TLCLA Champions Cup and the 2015 lax Inception.

Jenna Martiellini

A defender, she began playing from an early age and quickly adapted to her role on the field. She played club lacrosse for South Jersey Select Lacrosse under coach KK Knaubach. Martiellini’s brother, Alex, plays lacrosse at the University of Delaware, and her sister, Katrina, played lacrosse at Rutgers University.

Sarah Vanadia

A native of Medina, Ohio, where she plays at Medina Senior High School for coach Nikki Boliba. She scored more than 50 goals as a junior last season and earned first-team all-state Division I honors for the second straight season.

A three-time letter winner, Vanadia has been named a U.S. Lacrosse All-American. She has helped lead her team to two OLSA Division I state semifinal finishes and a OSLA Division I state runner-up finish.

Payton Beach

Beach joins the Hokies from Grasswood, Maryland, and plays at Kent Island High School, where she is a four-year letter winner for coach Bev Allig. She has been named All-Bayside Conference every season, and in her freshman season, helped the team to a district championship. She played club lacrosse for Maryland United Lacrosse Club under Elizabeth Kohlman.

Mary Clare McCarthy

McCarthy signs with Tech out of Washington, D.C., where she plays at the Connelly School of the Holy Child under coach Sarah Aichbuch. She is a four-year letter winner as a midfielder. She played club lacrosse for Capital Lacrosse Club for coach Christine Rogers.
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