

inside

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HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

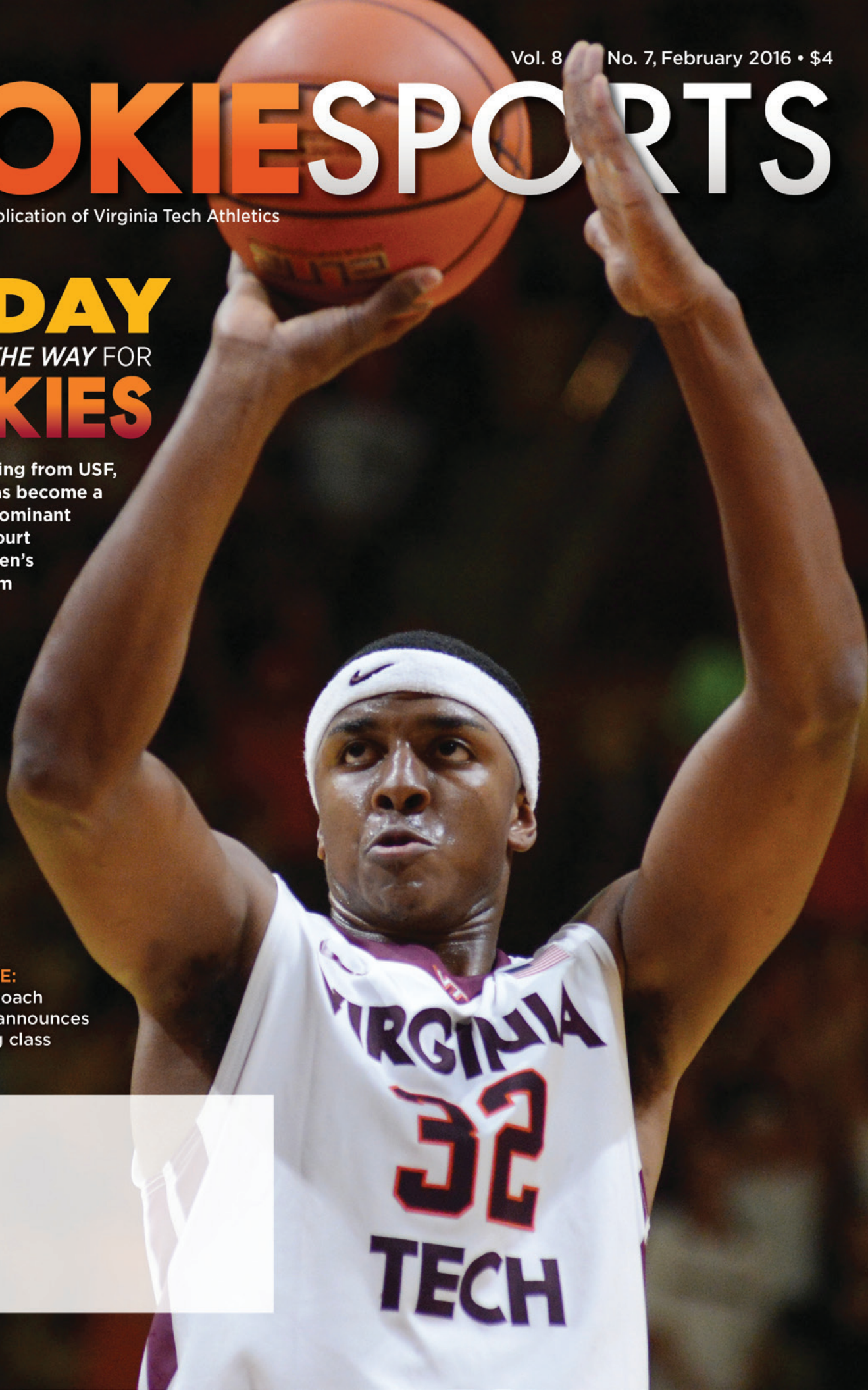
LEDAY LEADING THE WAY FOR HOKIES

After transferring from USF, Zach LeDay has become a leader and a dominant force on the court for the Tech men's basketball team



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Tech football coach
Justin Fuente announces
2016 recruiting class



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SENIORS BID FAREWELL TO CHRISTIANSBURG AQUATIC CENTER

The Virginia Tech men's and women's swimming and diving teams honored the 11 senior members of the teams at Senior Day held Jan. 26 at the Christiansburg Aquatics Center.

The seniors on the men's squad include Drake Becksted, Lucas Bureau, Logan Stevens and Michal Szuba, while those on the women's squad are Gabrielle Bishop, Lauren Buckworth, Katie Gillespie, Holly Harper, Weronika Paluszek, Mackenzie Stewart and Alyssa Bodin. The men's team defeated both No. 21 Virginia and Towson on Senior Day, while the women fell to No. 3 Virginia, but knocked off Towson.

The two squads get set to compete at the ACC Championships starting Feb. 17. The women's championships are Feb. 17-20, while the men's are Feb. 24-27. Both ACC Championships will be held in Greensboro, North Carolina.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"I am beyond grateful for the opportunities that my scholarship has given me. It has provided me the education and experience to secure a full-time job and graduate from one of the best engineering schools in the country."

Gabrielle Bishop
Senior | Suffolk, Virginia

"I am extremely grateful for the Hokie Club because the money they raise helps assist me in attending this amazing institution. In addition, the Hokie Club has helped provide the swimming and diving teams with amazing facilities and support to help our team contend on the national level."

Logan Stevens
Senior | Covington, Kentucky

The Donor File

Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: More than just an alumni of Virginia Tech. A Hokie is someone who lives out our motto, *UT Prosim* ("That I May Serve"). Serving is more than just doing something for another. It's giving. It's loving. It's being a part of a community of those who have the same mentality.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: When I moved to Southern California, I wasn't sure how I was going to keep up with my beloved Hokies. The Thursday before the opening game in 2011, I stumbled upon the OC [Orange County] Hokies Alumni Group and made plans to go to their game-watching party. I've found the Hokie Nation to be alive and strong on the West Coast and have made some lifelong friends in our alumni group.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?

A: The final drive of the Virginia Tech vs. West Virginia game in 1999. I was sitting in the WVU student section with some of my best friends from high school who were Mountaineers. The rollercoaster of emotions just from thinking we were going to lose with no timeouts and over a minute left. We were down by one. Starting on the 15-yard line, it wasn't looking good. Then Michael Vick rolled out for that amazing run followed by the game-winning field goal by Shayne Graham.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?

A: I always wanted to give back to the university, but I just never really was given more than just a mailer asking for giving, so I wasn't sure how I wanted to do it. A visit from a Hokie Club staff member Scott Hughes at an event with the Orange County Hokies led to me getting involved with the Hokie Club. Having great discussion around all our memories of Hokie sports and better information about how the contributions really help student-athletes at the end of the day was the reason I finally stepped up and gave back.



Chris Young

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL:

Orange & Maroon

CURRENTLY RESIDES:

Huntington Beach, California

GRADUATION YEAR:

2003

FAMILY:

Sophia & Stella (daughters)

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?

A: My entire life, I wanted to be an architect. I even won Block Builder of the Year Award in Kindergarten! I didn't know much about Virginia Tech in high school. I just knew it had a great architecture program and I fell in love with the campus when I visited. I ended up changing my major in my junior year, so what I think I didn't realize is that, my entire life, I wanted to be a Hokie!

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: Crisp fall day with the leaves on the trees orange and maroon. Waking up to the smell of football in the air! Tailgating throughout the day with old friends, while making some new ones leading into an afternoon Hokie football win. Heading downtown for dinner and the celebration of a victory!

Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions? If so, tell us your best.

A: Tailgating these days is just being able to get out of bed on the West Coast in time to make it to our game-watching parties at 9 a.m. Can anyone in the Hokie Club help the West Coast Hokies out and get away from the noon games?

Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?

A: Some of my favorite memories from Virginia Tech came from Tech athletics. To be able to contribute and provide those same memories for a new generation is what motivates me.

Q: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...

A: I want to give back to Virginia Tech because it gave me so much more than just an education. Hokie sports gave me so many amazing experiences and memories. I want to help the next generation of Hokies have those same experiences and memories.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...

A: Football and basketball.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...

A: I have so many that it's hard to choose just one. I've met DeAngelo Hall several times, including in Blacksburg and when I lived in Northern Virginia, and he was always willing to chat without brushing you off.

Message from the Monogram Club

CALLING PAST STUDENT-ATHLETES & LETTER WINNERS in ALL SPORTS and SUPPORT AREAS! The mission of the Virginia Tech Monogram Club is to engage former and current student-athletes through networking and fellowship events that celebrate Hokie traditions and promote the value of a lifelong Virginia Tech student-athlete experience. The focus of the Club is—Honor the Past, Celebrate the Present, and Support the Future!

The Club is a university organization directed now at expanding its membership through attracting teammates who were participants on any current, and past, sports teams supported by Virginia Tech in intercollegiate sports competitions. For past sports not currently active at Virginia Tech (e.g., field hockey, boxing et al.), we are most interested in developing their history and background as well as letter winner lists; contact the Club President in these regards (contact information found below).

With a new athletics administration in place, a Monogram Club "interest meeting" was held in April 2015 to reconnect with former letter winners and the response was strong and expansive across all sports programs. A new club logo was selected and celebrated; a ballot for new officers and sport-specific representatives was issued; and votes were cast. In September 2015, the newly-elected Monogram Club Board was announced and is actively engaged in expansion of Club activities.

In a current revitalization cycle with a new athletics administration, the Club seeks to reconnect with its recent Monogram Club membership base of more than 1,300 and identify and include all past student-athletes into its membership. Past student-athletes are encouraged to communicate with officers and/or the representative for their sport as we seek teammate input on annual Club events and events specific to individual sport teams. On a continuing and annual basis, the Club is actively seeking to provide an umbrella-structure under which all sports teams come back to campus throughout the year and have teammates reconnect, celebrate past accomplishments and support current sports activities at Virginia Tech. We look forward to input regarding activities for each sport **at our annual membership meeting on April 23rd, 2016**, in conjunction with activities around the football Spring Game. Make sure to mark your calendars!

The current Board membership is presented below. Board membership includes representatives from a 50-year span, several Virginia Tech Hall of Fame members, past and present members of coaching and support staffs, athletics administration, as well as a current student-athlete.

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Tennis - Women
Volleyball
Wrestling

Mike Saunders ('66, football): 404-985-3130; saunders@gatech.edu
Angie Edwards ('92, track): edwardsas@concord.edu
Sharon McCloskey ('79, manager - women's basketball): smcclosk@vt.edu
Quinton Nottingham ('89, men's basketball): notti@vt.edu

Jon Hand ('98); hand323@yahoo.com
Quinton Nottingham ('89); notti@vt.edu
Amy Doolan ('00); awetzel@vcom.vt.edu
Brian Walter ('89); bwalter@vt.edu
John Shipley ('66); 703-609-6100; john.shipley@srcti.com
Billy Buchanan ('66); wgba@msn.com
In inaugural season & monogram winners are yet to be identified.
Dawn Will Cliffe ('00); dawncliffe15@yahoo.com
Blair Nelson ('04); bleason19@cox.net
Rodrigo Zampieri ('18); rsz95@vt.edu
Whitney Davis ('10); whid@vt.edu
Nancy Brittle ('72); nbrittle@vt.edu
Morgan Latimer ('14); morgan11@vt.edu
Bob Burleson ('70); bburleson@ftba.com
Anne Jones ('81); 540-230-3019; cojones@vt.edu
Interested monogram-winners are being sought for Board.
Devin Carter ('14); devinc92@vt.edu

We are excited to have reconnected with so many of our past letter winners and hope to hear from many more of you as we continue to Honor the Past, Celebrate the Present, and Support the Future!

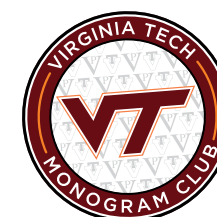
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The Virginia Tech Monogram Club Team

Not on our email list? Send an email with your Name, current mailing address, Sport(s)/Area(s) lettered, and years lettered to vtmonogramclub@vt.edu and let us know how we can stay connected with you!

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THURSDAY, OCT. 20
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NOV. 12
GEORGIA TECH*

NOV. 26
VIRGINIA*

AWAY

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vs. TENNESSEE

OCT. 8
AT NORTH CAROLINA*


OCT. 15
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THURSDAY, OCT. 27
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NOV. 5
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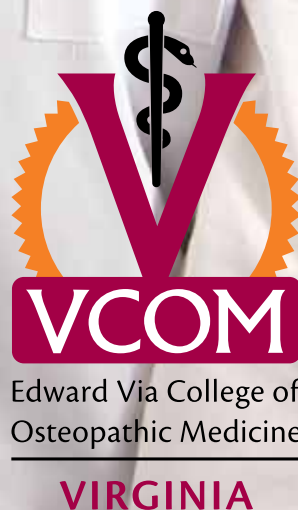
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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Motley attacking offseason to make most of final opportunity

Frank Beamer's retirement announcement in early November prompted a lot of speculation on his eventual successor and at least one player did a fair amount of analysis on Justin Fuente even before he became the Hokies' head coach.

Brenden Motley hopped on various search engines for information—as one might expect a quarterback to do—and he liked what he gleaned.

"There were names floating around, so I did some research," he said. "I was excited. Of course, you like to see the offensive numbers that he's put up wherever he's been. It was nice to see that. The fact that we kept Coach [Bud] Foster and the [coaches on] defense, I think everybody was pretty excited about that, too. We were excited about his staff and we're ready to do whatever he tells us to do."

Motley's excitement is understandable because he goes into his final season with his first realistic opportunity of being the starter. The property management major from nearby Christiansburg—who graduates in May—wants to amass large quantities of real estate in the fall, both through the air and on the ground. The process toward that goal already has begun.

Fuente and Motley have met a couple of times since Fuente's hiring. Fuente's message to Motley was simple—be the leader.

"I'm an older guy now. I'm a veteran. I'm a leader," Motley said. "I need to step up when needed. If there is something these younger guys don't know, you have to show them by example."

Arguably, Motley is currently the Hokies' most important player because he possesses the most experience at the most important position in football. He has played 15 games in his career, including six as the starter last season when Michael Brewer went out with a fractured collarbone.

Motley played reasonably well. He completed 56 percent of his passes. He threw for 1,155 yards, with 11 touchdowns and seven interceptions. He rushed for 224 yards and three touchdowns.

Tech went 3-3 in Motley's starts. In one of those losses—at East Carolina—he played well enough for the Hokies to win. He finished with 366 yards of offense in Tech's 35-28 defeat.

Most of those numbers came while playing with a torn meniscus in his knee. He underwent surgery during the winter break.

"I didn't want any excuses. I just tried to battle out," he said when asked why he waited to have surgery. "It was tough, though. I'm pretty proud of what I did last season with the way things were going."

"It was nice to get those starts under my belt and get some true experience—not just a couple of plays here and there. To come out and start five or six games ... it was nice and exciting for me. To be honest, I put up some good numbers, but there is a lot of room for improvement. I still can get a lot better. I'm excited about the future."

When Motley gathers with the receivers in the indoor practice facility, he wants the group to work on timing. More importantly, he wants to work on several aspects of his own game.

Blessed with size and speed, his footwork needs improving and he needs to refine his release point for better accuracy.

"Now that I have some time and know what I need to focus on, I can hone in a little more and get those things done, with the help of Coach and others," he said.


Given his size, speed, and skill set, he appears to be a good fit for Fuente's and coordinator Brad Cornelsen's offense. The Hokies need for him to be a *great* fit.

The rest of the quarterbacks on Tech's roster have played less than 50 snaps - 36 by Dwayne Lawson. Two of those quarterbacks enrolled for the spring semester, leaving the Hokies inexperienced other than Motley.

Motley, though, isn't assuming anything.

"You're going to have to compete, regardless of what anyone says—the media, parents, whatever," he said. "You have to be the one to compete against them. This whole spring and summer, I'll be pushing for them and they'll be pushing for me."

"Even if it's not me as the No. 1, I'm going to cheer them on. I'm going to help them out. They're going to do the same for me. The team is about the team. It's not one individual for himself. We're all trying to win games."

The work toward that goal began in mid-January and continues throughout the spring and summer. The opportunity is certainly there for Motley—and he's doing everything he can to take advantage of it. 

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behind the mic | with Jon Laaser

A picture is worth 1,200 words

I never took pictures. I didn't think I needed them. I lived the moments. The people, places and things that I should have pointed a lens at seemed vibrant, even unforgettable. The stories I would tell would be my photographs. At least that's what I told myself. In a time before phones with cameras that millennials can barely imagine, this used to be a bit more excusable. Regardless, it has become a great regret.

It was in this time period when social media hadn't yet been imagined that I set out on a journey that has ultimately led me to become the person I am now. Along the way, I encountered countless new people, places and experiences—both good and bad. I absorbed lessons in love, loss, acceptance, loneliness, ambition, and humility. Most of all, I learned how to work hard for what I wanted to achieve. Every stop on that journey went largely undocumented.

I took no “selfies” the day I packed a 1984 Chevrolet Cavalier and ventured 1,800 miles away from home for college. There is no Facebook album of my early days as a radio intern naively working my way into major level locker rooms across the Minneapolis sports scene. I didn't think to pack my Polaroid when I traveled to remote fields and gyms throughout the Midwest to call my first high school football and basketball games.

Later, there were many times at the end of a season when I would legitimately feel like I had become part of a team—sometimes it even felt like family. The 2003 St. Cloud River

Bats embraced me in that way. I considered many of the 2008 Myrtle Beach Pelicans to be my brothers. The 2011 Richmond Flying Squirrels may have been the greatest example. I vividly remember how gratifying that feeling of acceptance was.

I appreciated it even more because I also remembered how empty it felt earlier in those seasons when I hadn't gained their trust and friendships yet and oftentimes ate alone on road trips. Despite that, you won't find me in the team pictures in any of those years. Don't get me wrong. They gladly would have welcomed me, but I never wanted to be the guy to ask. Some misguided idea of objectivity that I was adhering to at the time. Missed opportunities.

Champagne clubhouse celebrations, current Major League stars who were my homesick golf buddies, interns I tried to teach, security guards who greeted me every day with a smile and a story, best friends at the time, parental figures, mentors and many more. All affected me in profound ways, and all will have to be remembered through my re-telling. I like to consider myself a decent storyteller, but sometimes when I recount something, I miss details and forget a person or two. It is an inevitable reality. Everything fades with time. Even as I write this, it makes me a bit sad.



People who have suffered through the misfortune of a house fire are often inconsolable because they lost their most prized possessions—their photo albums. Although I have never experienced that loss, I can relate. Unfortunately, I lit the match long before the pictures should have occurred.

I cite all of this because lately I have been heartened. First, by the rapid fire nature with which new experiences have occurred for me this year at Tech and my newfound affinity for snapping shots of most of them. Embracing Twitter, Instagram and the Cloud has aided this endeavor.

Second, and much more importantly, by the knowledge that no one associated with a Buzz Williams program will ever experience similar remorse. While he is laying the foundation of his program in Blacksburg, Buzz has taken a much different—and better—approach to appreciating moments of growth and fellowship.

You may have heard members of the men's basketball program talk about “hanging the picture” and wondered what it meant. Simply,

the Hokies never fail to catalog their travels. Like everything within the program, there is great attention to detail and a regimental nature to this process.

Following a pregame shoot-around, which generally takes place the day of the game, the team takes a picture on the court where they are preparing to compete. The picture hangs in their visiting team locker room before the game, and if they win that game, it makes its way back to Blacksburg. It then is posted on the team's “Culture” wall to honor the victory and the people who made it possible. Recently, the Hokies put up their first picture following an ACC road win—a dramatic triumph at Georgia Tech. It was a milestone to be sure, and it will be remembered.

There are a few important caveats to these team pictures. First, as a sign of respect, no one ever stands on the host team's logo. Second, this isn't a traditional arrange-yourself-by-height photo. Players will strike different poses, scatter in various formations, or in the case of Seth Allen in the picture from McCamish Pavilion in Atlanta, hide Waldo-style behind the scorer's table. In other words, they have a lot of fun with it. Kids will—and should—do that.

The most important aspect, however, is that, like Buzz's program itself, the picture is all-inclusive. If you are with the team in

that moment, then you are part of the team at that moment. I'm in the photo in Atlanta, and so is Mike Burnop—as is every other person who is in the gym. This includes team managers, chaplains, academic advisors, family members ... everyone! When the team snapped its photo in Brooklyn, it included a Barclays Center security guard assigned to protect the door to the gym. You better believe she was in the picture. I can say with certainty that everyone who has ever been in one of those photos is extremely grateful to be included. I am.

Buzz's fondness for photography doesn't even come close to stopping there, though. His office is littered with thousands of pictures of people he has connected with. He employs Christina Wolfe as a program photographer, and she is nearly omnipresent, snapping photos constantly. Her soon-to-be 10-year-old son Evan is there more often than not as well—as it should be.

“I try in every way possible to take pictures of our players and staff that remind us of where we are in our walk together,” Buzz explained recently.

He also talks a lot about growing character within the people in the program. Rarely does he talk about wins and losses in this way. He is resolute that doing things the right way will, in turn, lead to success in that area.

I've been around a lot of leaders and all display different styles. However, I've never witnessed the unique nature of Buzz. Prior to the team pictures on the road, there is a prayer walk across the floor. Hands clasped together from one end of the court to the other. Generally a message follows from Buzz, culminating with hands in the middle and a cry of “Family!” This occurs at home as well, minus the picture. Individually, similar events may happen in other places, but what makes these events special here are the totality, consistency, and sincerity of the actions and the message they underlie.

My own family and countless others have helped shape my character through the years and I have been exceptionally fortunate. I didn't do justice to many of those relationships by marking their significance with even a single picture.

With the men's basketball program, you've already witnessed the laying of the foundation. New floors are sure to follow and the building will only continue. It makes me smile to know that every brick placed will be remembered—and appreciated. Buzz will make sure of it and no one who has been around him will have regrets at moments fading like some of mine have.

So say “cheese,” Hokies, because you're a part of it, too!



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Keeping up *with* Compliance

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

Q: I've been meaning to ask your thoughts on Florida quarterback Will Grier. He was suspended for a year for taking an over-the-counter supplement with an illegal substance that showed up in a drug test. It seems like a rather harsh penalty for an unintentional act. Thoughts? Thanks, Bob in Blacksburg.

TP: "I'm not familiar with what he actually took, other than knowing the supplement contained a performance-enhancing drug, and NCAA penalties are severe when it comes to both performance-enhancing drugs and street drugs."

"Student-athletes lose one full year of eligibility for the first offense (25 percent of their total eligibility) and are withheld from competition for a full season. A second positive test for street drugs results in another lost year of eligibility and year withheld from competition. A second positive result for PED usage will render the student-athlete permanently ineligible."

"In this case, Grier appealed the NCAA's ruling that he be suspended for a year (he's eligible to return Oct. 15 of this year), but he lost that appeal. Suspensions stemming from failed NCAA drug tests are rarely overturned or reduced."

Q: Is there anything a university or athletics department can do to punish a donor who violates NCAA rules? The donor at Missouri got the men's basketball program in a lot of hot water,

though the NCAA went easy on the Tigers. Just wondering what could be done. Thanks, Chuck in Blacksburg.

TP: "The case in question here actually refers to two Missouri athletics donors who provided extra benefits to Missouri men's basketball players. One ran an internship program that provided housing, cash, meals, etc., in exchange for work that wasn't performed. The other offered recreational boat rides and a special rate to a local hotel."

"The answer to your question depends on your definition of the word 'punish.' The university disassociated itself permanently from the one donor, prohibiting him from receiving tickets, making donations or otherwise. The university disassociated itself from the other donor for a period of two years. That's really the only recourse a university has in a situation like this."


"Also, in regards to your remark that the NCAA went 'easy' on the Tigers, that's still an open question because the NCAA Committee on Infractions hasn't ruled on this case yet. The university self-imposed punishment, including a one-year postseason ban, vacating all wins from the 2013-14 season, paying a \$5,000 fine to the NCAA, restricting the recruiting activities of the current staff (the previous staff is no longer at the university) and taking away a scholarship this year and next year. But the Committee on Infractions will make its ruling at a later date, and Missouri will have an opportunity to appeal that ruling, if it desires."

Q: What is the process for reporting violations? Do you submit a form to the NCAA office? Thanks, Kelsey in Blacksburg.

TP: "The general process at any Division I school first involves research to gather facts and determine the exact nature of any self-reported violation. There are four levels of violations (1-4), with Level 1 being the most serious."

"Level 3 and Level 4 violations – the least serious – are reported to the NCAA office via an electronic submission system. Many of these violations carry with them standard sanctions and/or corrective actions. Regarding Virginia Tech specifically, several individuals outside the athletics department also have access to these reports, including: our university president, our faculty athletics representative, and the ACC commissioner."



"If the case involves a declaration of ineligibility for one or more student-athletes, the NCAA Reinstatement Committee plays a role in determining the conditions that must be met for competitive eligibility to be reinstated."

"Level 1 and 2 violations usually would involve lengthy, detailed investigations that would likely include the university's legal counsel, and/or Office of Internal Audit, and possibly even outside representation. These cases are then adjudicated by the NCAA Committee on Infractions. Fortunately, Virginia Tech has not had to deal with cases of this severity in more than 20 years." 

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KATEY SMITH

SOFTBALL
Falmouth, Virginia
by Jimmy Robertson

Katey Smith, a two-year starter on the Tech softball team, graduated last May with a degree in mechanical engineering and is currently in graduate school at Tech. She plans to get her master's degree in the spring of 2017 and then pursue a career in research, preferably related to the design of engines or instrumentation.

Q: Why did you decide to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering?

KS: "The story I always tell everyone is that I didn't know what I wanted to do. I jumped from idea to idea. One time, I was having a conversation with my dad, and he said, 'What do you like to do? What do you see yourself doing in your ideal job?' I was like, 'I just want to make things.' He said, 'Oh. You want to be an engineer then.' He's an engineer. My brother is an engineer. It's a family thing, and I grew up tinkering with things and making things. I always enjoyed that, so it seemed natural to go into engineering."

Q: You're doing some interesting stuff in graduate school. Please explain.

KS: "I did undergraduate research with my advisor. He works in the turbo machinery and propulsion lab, which is basically working on jet engines. I started with data acquisition and motor control of their experiments. That's how I got started with them. I started getting interested in their lab. I do a lot of instrumentation stuff and motor control of their experiments. My thesis and research is going more into instrumentation and basically data processing of turbulent data, if that makes any sense."


Q: What sort of internships have you done, and what did you learn?

KS: "I did an internship two summers ago with Texas Instruments [in Dallas]. I was basically a process engineer intern working with some of their manufacturing processes. This summer, I'll be doing an internship with Radiant [Power Corporation] and Dukane Seacom [in Sarasota, Florida]. They work with emergency systems for airplanes—the acoustic beacons for the black boxes that go off when they sink in the water. I'll be working with some instrumentation that they're doing."

"I liked the internship with TI [Texas Instruments] because it helped guide me farther into what I wanted to do. A lot of the stuff I was doing there was not so much hands on. When a problem came up, you fixed the problem and made sure the process was running smoothly. That made me want to go to grad school because, in grad school, you get your own experiment and you're doing your own science. You're really hands on. It's your project and you take control of that. That showed me that, 'Yeah, you do want to go to grad school. You're not done.'"

Q: So once you graduate with your master's, what are your long-term plans?

KS: "My dream scenario would be to go to a company that is on the leading edge of something of a new technology or looking into new things. Maybe go more into the research area than the commercial aspect of things. That's another thing that the internship at TI taught me. I'd rather go into research with something in my field. That's something I'm looking forward to."

"So I was thinking of maybe a job with Boeing. We're really close with Pratt & Whitney, which is an engine company. I know we've been getting some contracts with Rolls Royce. Maybe something that's working on the design of engines or the design of instrumentation of some sort in general. Radiant and Dukane work with those acoustic beacons, so something like that would be appealing to me." 



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ANDREW MOGG

BASEBALL
Windemere, Florida
by Jimmy Robertson

Andrew Mogg is a catcher on the Tech baseball team and will graduate in May with a degree in computer science engineering. He's already helped create 35 different apps and wants to pursue a career in mobile software development.

Q: Why did you decide to major in computer science engineering?

AM: "My senior year of high school, I needed an extra class to take. Me and my best friend were like, 'Hey this class in developing software looks kind of fun.' It was just an entry-level high school class. I took it and had a lot of fun with it. When I came here, I knew that's what I wanted to do. I like it because you're trying to solve problems and yet you have the freedom to give it your own design and a touch that is unique to your creativity."

Q: So what sort of things does one do with this degree?

AM: "It can be any number of things, from creating websites to doing IT [information technology] stuff. A lot of it is developing software that makes the every day person's life easier. So when they go to use technology, it's more user friendly and easier to access. We do that through writing code."

Q: What exactly do you mean when you say "writing code?"

AM: "It's like learning a brand new language and trying to understand how everything relates to each other. The curve of trying to learn the languages of Java and C [software languages] along with baseball, which is a lot of demanding hours, was tough. It's all about time management, and thankfully, the athletic department here has been helpful in providing aid in that. The advisors in the computer science department have been helpful in making sure I'm on track and making sure that the classes I'm taking will align with when I'm in the offseason or in season to give me the best chance to succeed."

Q: We understand that you've created a lot of apps for mobile devices while pursuing this degree. What do some of these apps do?


AM: "We've built around 35 apps. We're in the process this semester of making a pretty big one for a senior [Software Engineering] Capstone class. We don't have the direction of the project yet. We're figuring that out, but we'll see where it goes. It's like one final group project."

"A lot of these, we were just doing to learn basic functionality, things like spacing and formatting and all that stuff. We made an NFL app. You can click on the team and it takes you to their website. If you went to a game, you could write notes on what happened. You can look at the schedules and search teams. We haven't published this—there's a \$100 fee to do that—so these apps are mostly for us to learn."

"Those were all part of a class. For our final project, we had to do one ourselves and I built a recruiting app for coaches to store information. You can call, email, text or write notes on a recruit. You can search and filter by position—things like that."

Q: What are your future plans?

AM: "I'd love to get into somewhere where I could build mobile apps for iPhones and all devices. That's what I'm passionate about and would love to do. That's why I got into this. I'm an avid Apple user and they seem like they're always the cream of the crop, developing things that they're passionate about."

"I've got applications on the table. I'll go to the Career Fair here in a few weeks [Feb. 23]. I'm trying to explore all my options and weigh what will be the best decision. I'm pretty flexible." 



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ZACH LEDAY may lead the Virginia Tech men's basketball team in scoring and rebounding, but during a recent interview about his success, he spent most of the time handing out assists.

Averaging 15.8 points, 8.1 boards, and 1.4 blocks per game (as of Feb. 3) in his debut season as a Hokie, LeDay has seemingly out of nowhere established himself as one of the most consistent players in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Most people in similar situations might become a little too proud of themselves — not the levelheaded power forward. Instead, he dished some love to his family, dealt some credit to his coaches, doled some kudos to his mentor and even tossed an alley-oop to God.

It might appear, to Tech fans and opponents alike, that LeDay's gains happened overnight. To LeDay and his close-knit inner circle, his arrival to prominence has been anything but an overnight process.

Born and raised in Mesquite, Texas, a small city on the outskirts of Dallas, LeDay grew up with his brother, Seth, in a single-parent household. His mother, Christy, worked in the corporate offices of J.C. Penneys, a Texas-based department store.

"It was me, my mom and my brother," LeDay said. "My parents split up when I was younger. It was hard, but it helped me a lot. My mom made me really strong and instilled a work ethic inside of me that I still have to this day."

Seth is just two years younger than Zach, but the two did not get to share the court in high school. Seth's growth spurt didn't happen until Zach had already left for college. Now, Seth is a 6-foot-8 slasher at Northwest Mississippi Community College, a junior college. Zach hopes his brother will join him in Blacksburg next season.

LeDay said he hasn't seen his mother much since leaving for college, but now that her youngest son is away from home, Christy has more freedom to travel and has watched Zach play in person twice this season. That's fitting, as Christy's persistence helped Zach to embrace the game.

"I was in like, fourth or fifth grade, and my mom was looking for an AAU team for me to play for," LeDay explained. "I was trying to get out of my neighborhood because, in Mesquite, it was kind of political. Certain guys were treated better. My mom wanted more for me, so we tried to look for different teams."

The program that the LeDay family settled on had a trainer named Jason Mayo, whose father was a big-time high school coach in Dallas. LeDay stumbled through the next few years, both literally and figuratively.

"I wasn't good at basketball at all," he said. "I was going through my growing stages and I was very lanky and goofy. I couldn't really handle the ball and I didn't really have hand-eye coordination."

**A NEW
LEDAY**

Transfer Zach LeDay has taken advantage of his new opportunity through the power of positivity and hard work

by Matt Kovatch
Special to Inside Hokie Sports

I also wasn't really focused because I was playing football, too."

Mayo slowly became like family to LeDay, which led to a very pivotal summer when LeDay was entering the eighth grade.

"He asked me 'Do you really want to be good at basketball? How good do you want to be?'" LeDay remembered. "I said something like, 'I want to play in the NBA and make as much money as I can playing basketball.' He said 'OK, we're about to take it to another level.'"

With the blessing of his mom, LeDay spent the entire summer living with Mayo and transformed his mentality. The two trained every day. Mayo trained other kids, too, but every time he finished with the others, he returned to LeDay. They routinely spent 12 hours a day at the gym, and when they weren't there, they went to all the toughest parks in Dallas, playing until dark. Still developing physically, LeDay said the older guys knocked him down but that it only made him tougher.

"I just developed [that summer] and realized how good I could be," he said. "I decided I wanted to take it seriously and it just took off from there. I just kept on working and praying and it led me to here, so I'm thankful for that. I just thank God I met him [Mayo]. I still see him every time I go home."

Though constantly improving throughout high school, LeDay didn't exactly have offers streaming in from major college programs. He did, however, realize that, if he was playing a highly ranked opponent, he could show off his skills to recruiters in the gym recruiting other players.

*Continued on
page 18*

"When I got here, I had a lot of time to think and I didn't have many distractions. It dawned on me that this is a blessing. I get to have fun and play basketball. I'm on a scholarship. People are paying for school and I don't have to. People are hungry and I can eat whatever I want to. I'm thankful for everything I've got and I just want to keep on working."

Zach LeDay
on being at Virginia Tech

So the better his opponent, the more LeDay stepped up. He eventually caught the eye of current Virginia Tech assistant coach Steve Roccaforte, who was an assistant at the University of South Florida.

“Coach Roc started recruiting me during my junior year and during the AAU circuit,” LeDay said. “We built a really good relationship over the phone and in person when we saw each other. It just felt right. Coach Roc saw the potential in me from the beginning, so when other offers started coming in for me, I realized that I already had someone in whom I could trust.”

LeDay joined Roccaforte at USF, but — for whatever reason — he never really got a chance to shine during his two years there. He mostly toiled on the bench and averaged just 4.1 points over 63 games.

Following back-to-back 3-15 finishes in conference play, USF fired its head coach and Roccaforte was suddenly looking for a job. Rather than sticking around to see what would happen next, LeDay said the decision was easy.

“I talked to my mom about it the day it happened,” he recalled. “I was going to go wherever Coach Roc went. We had built what became a father-son relationship. I’m always going to be loyal to him. He’s always been loyal to me and he’s always checking in with my family.

“When he called us to say he was going to Virginia Tech and asked if I wanted to go there, I said ‘Yeah, that’s cool with me.’ He told me that Buzz [Williams] was just like him and was all about hard work and winning games. That’s all he had to tell me. I was sold.

Getting to know ZACH LEDAY

Favorite NBA player: LeBron James and Blake Griffin

Favorite sports team: Dallas Cowboys

Favorite movie: He Got Game with Denzel Washington and Ray Allen

Favorite music artist: Rapper J. Cole

What kind of car do you drive?: Mini Cooper

Favorite food/restaurant: Shrimp. I go to Hwy 55 [in Blacksburg] two or three times a week.

What are you studying?: Psychology and Public Relations

Why do you wear No. 32?: I always wanted No. 23 growing up, but everyone loved LeBron, so I could never get it. Then Blake Griffin came along and he’s 32 – plus it’s 23 backward.

Not many players still wear a headband. Why do you?: My sophomore year at USF, I wore it to practice one day. My teammates liked it, so we all wore one at Temple and I’ve worn it ever since.

What do you want to do when your playing career is over?: I want to be a coach. I would be an energetic coach and I want to give back. I am a basketball junkie and I watch any game I can find.



I didn’t have to take a visit or do all of that recruiting stuff. I just wanted to go put in the work and change my mindset.”

NCAA transfer rules forced LeDay to sit out the entire 2014-15 season. It would have been easy to get down upon himself having to spend another year not showcasing his skills, but the ever-optimistic LeDay harkened back to that eighth-grade summer and made the most of it.

“I looked at it [the redshirt year] as a blessing because it gave me a chance to disappear into the gym for a whole year,” LeDay said. “I was in the gym turning late nights into early mornings, just sweating and working and wanting this all to happen. I used the time to let my body get stronger and to help my mind get right.”

LeDay also wanted to prove himself to Roccaforte and Williams. Tech’s new coach took a big leap leaving Marquette to rebuild the Hokie program. LeDay knew that Williams’ opinion of him was almost entirely based off of what Roccaforte said, so he didn’t want to let him down.

“Coach Roc didn’t have to bring me up here—I averaged like four points,” LeDay admitted. “I didn’t get an opportunity to show what I could do at USF, but he knew my work ethic and he knew my heart. I’m just

thankful to God that he saw that in me and that he could sell that to Buzz.”

LeDay’s effort during his year off did not go unnoticed by the man in charge.

“Zach’s got the heart of a lion,” Williams said. “He’s similar to some other people in our program who, for whatever reason, have never received the acclaim that they feel they are deserving of, so they compete with an edge. You can feel that. It’s hard for us to take him out of a game.

“He’s just always around the ball. He doesn’t always make the right decisions. He sometimes tries to do too much. But there is something about when you work the way that he works. His peers are never disappointed, even when he tries to do too much because they know how much he cares and how much he works.”


As a result of his hard work, LeDay has been handed unlimited playing time and the green light to do whatever he needs to do on the court. He’s playing more than 30 minutes per game and, even as the primary big man on the floor, he’s added a 3-point shot to his arsenal. It’s a far cry from where he was at USF and not a day goes by when he doesn’t appreciate his opportunity.

“I think about my situation every day and I’m really humbled by it,” LeDay said. “I

have friends in programs all over the country who were ranked higher than me and they’re barely playing. I’m just really blessed that Coach Buzz respects me and my work ethic and lets me play the minutes. I know what it’s like not to play, so I’m respectful that Coach Buzz believes in me and has given me the opportunity. I thank God every day.”

There are endless motivational quotes and sayings about the hope and fresh start that comes with each new day. Virginia Tech has been the metaphorical new day for LeDay.

“When I got here, I had a lot of time to think and I didn’t have many distractions,” he said. “It dawned on me that this is a blessing. I get to have fun and play basketball. I’m on a scholarship. People are paying for school and I don’t have to. People are hungry and I can eat whatever I want to. I’m thankful for everything I’ve got and I just want to keep on working.

“I’ve been through a lot of trials and tribulations in my life and God got me through it, so I’m thankful. I just try to keep a positive head and it’s helped me since I got here. Being negative won’t help you in anything. If you just believe and keep faith in everything that you’re working for, you can get it. I’m seeing that it’s paying off, so now it’s just helping me even more.” 

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DEPARTMENT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS **MERRYMAN CENTER** **GETTING FACELIFT**

The turn of the calendar brought forth a new construction project within the athletics department at Virginia Tech, as workers began demolition of the Legends Hall area in the Merryman Center in preparation of an overhaul of the area.

This is the first phase of a two-phase project that calls for updating the entrance to the Merryman Center and for the renovation of the Legends Hall area. Also, the sprucing up of the ramp that leads to the football offices and the hallways surrounding those offices will be a part of this phase.

In addition, the hallway on the bottom floor of the Jamerson Athletics Center that surrounds the sports medicine area will get a facelift. Tech's Olympic sports will be the focal point of this particular area.

The Legends Hall area, though, will get most of the attention. The plans for this area call for the installation of new exhibits that commemorate Tech's greatest players, including guys like Bruce Smith and Michael Vick, and the school's greatest football accomplishments, along with new graphics and video displays on the walls. The specifications of the area also call for an open floor plan that allows a person to view the new indoor practice facility once he or she walks into the space.

Snyder & Associates, a local company, started the demolition for the project on Jan. 4, while Cannon Design, with regional offices across the nation, already has designs in place for the spaces. 1220 Exhibits, Inc., out of Nashville, Tennessee, will build the exhibits and displays. 1220 built the displays at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, along with displays in the athletics departments at Notre Dame, Tennessee, North Carolina, NC State, Navy, Kansas and others.


Phase I of the project will cost \$1.7 million and be paid for with private contributions to the Hokie Club.

Phase II involves overhauling McConnell Auditorium, which is the football team's meeting room inside the Merryman Center, and also the football team position meeting rooms — spaces adjacent to Legends Hall. Plans call for replacing the seating, the lighting and the ceiling, along with adding new graphics on the walls.

The timetable for that part of the project has not been established yet.

In addition, plans are in the works to overhaul the Bowman Room, which resides on the fourth floor of the Jamerson Center. The room sees heavy use — from meetings to luncheons and dinners before and after football and basketball games to providing team meals for all sports on occasion. The athletics department wants to expand the room, adding seating and a full-service kitchen. This area would provide a central place for team meals.

The athletics department needs to get approval from the Board of Visitors to start the project in earnest. Officials hoped to pick an architect within a month and complete the project within a year. The cost of the project hasn't been determined yet.

For those wishing to contribute to these projects, please contact the Hokie Club office at 540-231-6618. 



FUENTE TARGETS QUARTERBACKS AND OFFENSIVE LINEMEN IN FIRST RECRUITING CLASS

The class features nine in-state prospects and six offensive linemen

by Jimmy Robertson



Virginia Tech football coach Justin Fuente's first task when he landed the job as the head coach was to assemble a staff. His second task centered on keeping the recruiting class amassed by the previous regime intact.

He obviously put together a quality staff, and for the most part, he achieved the latter goal. Fuente and his staff put together a 21-member recruiting class, keeping nearly all of the prospects who had committed to Frank Beamer and his staff. In fact, only two of those backed out.

The 2016 class included nine prospects from the state of Virginia (including Zachariah Hoyt, a Salem, Virginia offensive linemen who signed with the Hokies last year but enrolled for the spring semester and is included in this class). That was Beamer's strategy, as he and his staff targeted in-state kids first and supplemented with prospects from other areas. Also, it follows in line with what Fuente stated when he received the Tech job.

"We've got to bring good young people to this community and that all starts in the state of Virginia," he said at the news conference announcing his hiring. "We have to do a great job in this state in order to continue this program along—and we will."

Four of the Hokies' prospects hail from the Tidewater region of the state and three hail from Northern Virginia. In the past five recruiting classes, the staff has signed 20 prospects from the 757 area code.

That group includes players who made prestigious all-area teams in those areas. Linebacker Tavante Beckett, offensive lineman Jarrett Hopple, and receiver Phil Patterson were first-team All-Tidewater choices by The Virginian Pilot. Eric Kumah earned first-team All-Met honors by The Washington Post.

For the second straight year, the staff did not sign a prospect from the Richmond area, but Tech's continues to make inroads in other areas. In fact, the staff brought in prospects from eight other states.

That includes three prospects from Georgia, two each from Florida and North Carolina, and one each from Michigan, Texas, Ohio, New Jersey, and South Carolina.

The impetus to get in Florida and Georgia makes a lot of sense, given the talent in those states. In looking at Tech's current roster, receiver Isaiah Ford (last season's team MVP) is from Jacksonville, Florida, while Brandon Facyson hails from Newnan, Georgia. Two

of the Hokies' best defensive linemen the past few years—Dadi Nicolas and Luther Maddy—came from Florida.

The Hokies' roster next season will feature seven Floridians on the roster, including two out of this recruiting class—Eron Carter, a linebacker from Palatka, and defensive lineman Jarrod Hewitt from Venice. The roster also will feature six Georgians, including the three in this year's recruiting class—linebacker Emmanuel Belmar (Suwanee), offensive lineman Patrick Kearns (Adairsville) and cornerback Khalil Ladler (Stone Mountain).

Quarterbacks to define class

Fair or not, a recruiting class ultimately gets graded on how well the quarterback, or quarterbacks, perform. Fuente and his staff signed two, with both of them enrolling for the spring semester, which enables both to participate in spring practice.

The two are 6-foot-4, 230-pound junior college transfer J  rod Evans from Dallas and Josh Jackson, a 6-1, 205-pounder from Ann Arbor, Michigan who originally committed to the previous staff.

Evans came to Tech ranked as the top junior-college quarterback prospect nationally by 247Sports. He threw for more than 3,000 yards, with 38 touchdowns and three interceptions in eight games this past season for Trinity Valley Community College in Athens, Texas.

Fuente recruited Evans when he coached at Memphis.

"We actually brought him in on a visit," Fuente said. "We didn't have room at the time, so he went to Air Force Prep [U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School] and then ended up in junior college. We stayed in touch with him because we thought he could be a special player. His recruiting got pretty heavy in terms of his opportunities. He got outside the Memphis realm pretty quickly. Then when this opportunity came up and we landed here, we touched base with him to see if this was something he was interested in—and he was. It all worked out."

Former Tech offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Scot Loeffler recruited Jackson. After visiting with Fuente in December, Jackson decided to stick with his commitment and enroll for the spring semester.

He was rated the No. 12 quarterback prospect nationally by 247Sports and the No. 13 overall prospect in Michigan. He threw for 1,778 yards and 21 touchdowns his senior season at Saline High in Saline, Michigan. He also rushed for 460 yards and eight scores.

"I'm just as excited about him," Fuente said of Jackson. "He's not an overly tall kid. I love his background ... coach's son ... I got a chance to meet with him [before he enrolled] and we hit it off. I really like him."

"He's not a tall guy, but the cool thing about college football now, with the shotgun, is that you can play at a little bit shorter height. It's let some shorter guys play. I don't mind the shorter guys as long as they're decent athletes and can throw the ball."

The Hokies needed quarterbacks considering only three returned for next season—Brenden Motley, Dwayne Lawson and Chris Durkin, who worked some at tight end this past fall. The two quarterbacks certainly shore up Tech's depth at the position and will get the chance to compete for the starting job in 2016.

"You can never have too many good quarterbacks," Tech offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen said. "Those guys are going to have to understand ... that they're being evaluated every single day—lifting, running, when they come in, turn on the film and ask questions."

"It's an ever-going process because there aren't enough reps to go around to give every single one of those guys as many reps as

INSIDE HOKIE SPORTS'

J  rod Evans

Big and strong, Evans threw for 3,000 yards this past season at his junior college in Texas. He displayed a strong arm and an ability to throw the ball accurately through a tight window. He also showed good running skills in the open field for a young man his size.

Joshua Jackson

Jackson isn't quite as big as Evans, but possesses similar skills. He can stand in the pocket, take a shot and deliver a strike and he also is a quarterback who threw accurately on the run. He finished with more than 2,000 total yards this past season.

Eric Kumah

Tall and rangy, Kumah catches the ball easily and glides in the open field once he gets it. He caught a lot of short passes that he turned into long gains because of his ability to separate from defenders out in space and he caught his share of jump balls, too. That's why he finished with nearly 1,500 yards receiving his senior season.

Phil Patterson

Patterson showed a lot of potential as both a receiver and a safety, though he fits into Tech's players as a receiver (and possibly a kick or punt returner). He's a fluid athlete with height and speed and his ball skills are tremendous. He also played against great competition in high school and could play early at Tech.

Jarrod Hewitt

Hewitt, a two-time all-state (Class 7A) performer, was a nice prospect to get late in the process. His quickness stands out, as he often appears unblocked but his quickness simply allows him to beat the block. He chases the ball, too, refusing to give up on a play. He should be a great fit in the Hokies' scheme.

TO WATCH

you'd want. So it's going to be an evolving depth chart. Ideally, a guy clearly emerges early and you can get him going and get him the most reps. It's going to be a fun spring. I anticipate a lot of guys being in the mix for a long time."

Addressing need at receiver positions

This past season, Ford and Cam Phillips received the majority of the reps at the receiver positions. In fact, during the regular season, Ford played 789 snaps from scrimmage, according to the staff. Phillips played 766. No other receiver on Tech's roster played more than 58 snaps the entire season.

Ford and Phillips combined to catch 124 passes last season. The rest of the receivers caught exactly two.

Fuente and his staff like to spread defenses out with multiple receiver sets, so that meant there was a need to bring in receivers—and the previous staff did not sign a receiver in last year's recruiting class. The current staff signed four as receivers.

"Obviously, we needed to sign some wide receivers," Fuente said. "We actually have room for more to reach our goal number, but I was a little hesitant to get too many of those guys in one class. If you're not careful, three or four years from now, you're going to be in the same situation. You've got no class dispersion. We wanted to make sure we spread those guys out."

The incoming receivers include one of the state's best in Kumah, a 6-2, 180-pounder from Forest Park High School in Woodbridge, Virginia. He finished his senior season with 1,387 receiving yards and 14 touchdowns. In one game, he caught 261 yards worth of passes.

The other prospects at receiver were Patterson, Divine Deablo and Samuel Denmark. Patterson, who made the All-Tidewater team as a defensive back, played receiver at Bayside High School and the 6-2, 185-pounder caught 40 passes for 801 yards and 11 touchdowns. He arguably rivaled Kumah as the best receiver prospect in the state.

Continued on page 24

2016 VIRGINIA TECH RECRUITING CLASS

NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	HOMETOWN	HIGH SCHOOL/JUNIOR COLLEGE	ALSO CONSIDERED	NOTABLE
Tavante Beckett	LB	6-0	215	Chesapeake, VA	Indian River	Wisconsin, Maryland, Rutgers	A first-team All-Tidewater choice as an LB by The Virginian Pilot
Emmanuel Belmar	LB	6-2	230	Suwanee, GA	Collins Hill	Syracuse, Virginia	An honorable mention choice to the Georgia all-state Class AAAAAA team
Eron Carter	LB	6-2	230	Palatka, FL	Palatka	Air Force, Army, UCF	Named to the all-county team and was the county's MVP
Divine Deablo	WR	6-3	210	Winston-Salem, NC	Mount Tabor	North Carolina, NC State	The No. 9 prospect in North Carolina and the No. 22 receiver in the nation by ESPN
Samuel Denmark	WR	6-0	185	Hanahan, SC	Hanahan	Wake Forest, South Carolina	The No. 6 overall prospect in South Carolina by ESPN
Silas Dzansi	OL	6-5	270	Woodbridge, VA	C.D. Hylton	Delaware State, Temple, Rhode Island	The No. 25 overall prospect in Virginia by 247Sports
Jérod Evans	QB	6-4	230	Dallas, TX	Mansfield/Trinity Valley C.C.	Missouri, UCF, California, UAB	The top junior college quarterback prospect by nationally by 247Sports
Reggie Floyd	DB	6-0	200	Manassas, VA	Stonewall Jackson	West Virginia, Old Dominion, Wake Forest, North Carolina	The No. 5 overall prospect in Virginia by 247Sports
Jarrold Hewitt	DL	6-1	290	Venice, FL	Venice	Rutgers, Pittsburgh	A two-time first-team all-state selection (Class 7A) and the Herald Tribune Defensive Player of the Year
Jarrett Hopple	OL	6-6	280	Suffolk, VA	Nansemond River	Pittsburgh, Virginia, West Virginia, Wake Forest	A first-team All-Tidewater choice as an OL by The Virginian Pilot
Zachariah Hoyt	OL	6-5	275	Salem, VA	Salem	BYU, Pittsburgh, Virginia	The No. 22 center prospect nationally by 247Sports (in 2014)
Joshua Jackson	QB	6-2	205	Ann Arbor, MI	Saline	Penn State, Northwestern, Minnesota, West Virginia	The No. 9 dual-threat quarterback prospect nationally by ESPN
TJ Jackson	OL	6-8	330	Cumberland, VA	Cumberland County	NC State, Norfolk State, VMI	The No. 30 overall prospect in Virginia by Rivals
Patrick Kearns	OL	6-5	280	Adairsville, GA	Darlington School	Georgia Tech, Florida, NC State, Kentucky	A top-60 overall prospect in Georgia by Rivals
Eric Kumah	WR	6-2	180	Manassas, VA	Forest Park	Maryland, NC State, Miami, Kentucky	A first-team All-Met choice as a WR by The Washington Post
Khalil Ladler	DB	5-11	175	Stone Mountain, GA	IMG Academy	Miami, LSU, Georgia, Florida State, Tennessee	The No. 26 cornerback prospect in the nation by ESPN
Demetri Moore	OL	6-5	300	Fairborn, OH	Huffman/Mississippi Delta C.C.	Auburn, Georgia, Cincinnati	The No. 8 junior college offensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports
Phil Patterson	WR	6-2	185	Virginia Beach, VA	Bayside	Duke, Wake Forest, North Carolina, Penn State, Tennessee	A first-team All-Tidewater choice as a defensive back by The Virginian Pilot
Jovonn Quillen, Jr.	DB	6-2	195	Hampton, VA	Hampton	Old Dominion, NC State	Daily Press Offensive Player of the Year; Rated the No. 15 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports
Tyree Rodgers	DB	6-1	180	Camden, NJ	Camden Catholic	Old Dominion, Temple, Rutgers	The No. 21 overall prospect in New Jersey by Rivals
Jimmie Taylor IV	DE	6-3	230	Jacksonville, NC	Southwest Onslow	North Carolina, NC State, Duke, Michigan, Tennessee	The No. 24 prospect in North Carolina by Rivals and 247Sports

FIRST RECRUITING CLASS

Continued from page 23

At 6-3, 210 pounds, Deablo brings the size. The Winston-Salem, North Carolina product received interest from several ACC and SEC schools.

Denmark brings the speed. The 6-0, 185-pounder from Hanahan, South Carolina

won the state championship in the 100- and 200-meter dashes during track season, helping lift Hanahan to the team title.

“We’re going to shoot for 10-12 receivers [in the program],” Cornelsen said. “Those guys get taxed the most when you are up-tempo. Those guys do the most running. Those guys can help you on special teams. You need guys who can return kicks and punts for you and cover kicks and punts. We have numbers set

at each position, but it’s not exact. It’s rarely right on the mark. A lot of it is determined by what you have and how close you really want to get to that number.”

Stocking up on OL

The Hokies return 12 scholarship offensive linemen for the 2016 season, but molding a prospect into an effective offensive lineman takes time. Few possess the strength and display the technique to come in and help right away, though the previous coaching staff played Jonathan McLaughlin, Eric Gallo, and Yosuah Nijman as true freshmen.

One could argue that those three needed to take a redshirt season, but Tech’s staff lacked the depth along the offensive front and needed to play them. To establish depth, the current staff signed six offensive line prospects. The group features a nice combination of length and size.

“We needed to add some depth on the offensive line,” Fuente admitted. “That’s pretty heavy [signing six offensive linemen]. In general terms, it’s usually around four, sometimes as low as three. Our target number is around 18 [in the program]. You’d like to

not be so heavy in one spot from year to year. You’d like for it to look a little more like the defensive side of the ball was this year, where you sign an offense and you sign a defense moving forward.”

All six linemen are listed at 6-5 or taller and all weigh 270 pounds or more. TJ Jackson, from Cumberland, Virginia, stands 6-8 and weighs 330, though he only possesses three years of playing experience and needs a

lot of tutelage. So, too, does Silas Dzansi, a 6-5, 270-pounder from C.D. Hylton High in Woodbridge, Virginia who began playing football his sophomore year and only played offensive tackle the past two seasons.

Jarrett Hopple, from Suffolk, Virginia, checks in at 6-6, 280; while Patrick Kearns from Adairsville, Georgia is listed at 6-5, 280. Last, but not least, Demetri Moore is a junior-college transfer from Mississippi Delta

2016 recruiting roundup

Community College and stands 6-5, 300; and Hoyt is 6-5, 275.

Moore, from Fairborn, Ohio, turned down offers from Auburn, Georgia, and Cincinnati and enrolled at Tech for the spring semester. Given his two years of junior-college experience and that he will participate in the Hokies’ spring practice starting in March, he may be the lineman in this class with the ability to get on the field first this fall for the Hokies.

Finding linebackers

Tech’s staff didn’t load up at any particular position on defense. Instead, the coaches added pieces at each spot.

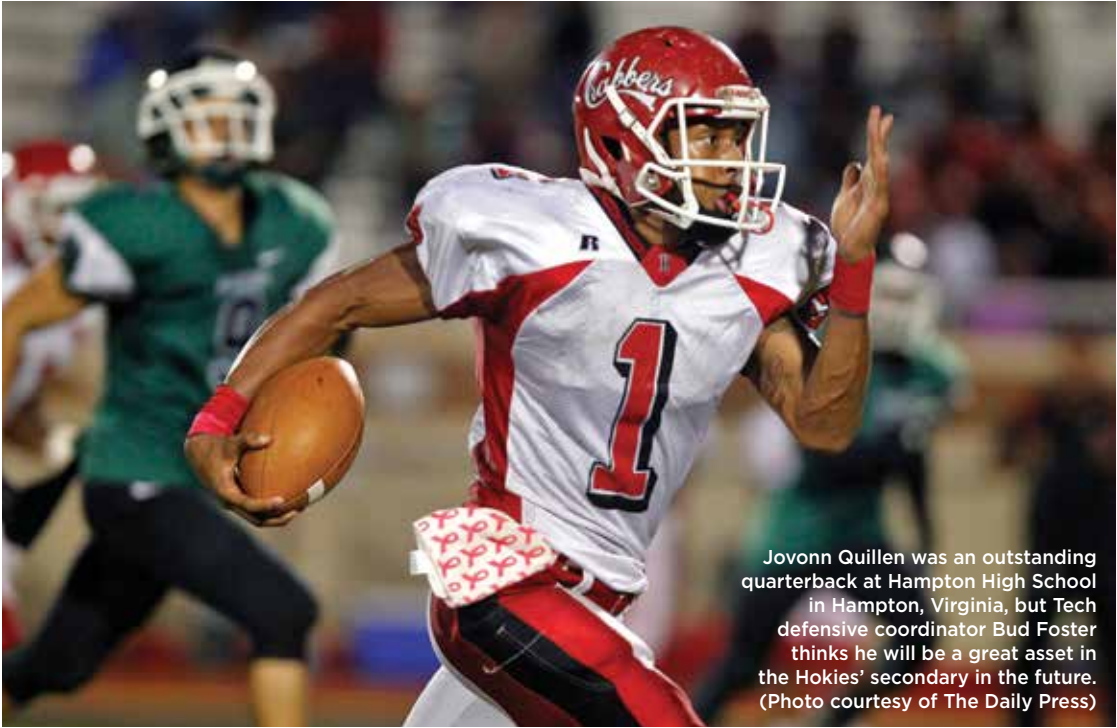
Most notably, they added three prospects at Bud Foster’s two linebacker positions, arguably the biggest need on defense.

Beckett comes to Blacksburg after a senior season at Indian River High School in which the 6-0, 215-pounder recorded 131 tackles, including 24 for a loss, to go with 12 sacks and seven forced fumbles. Carter, a 6-2, 230-pounder, racked up 163 tackles (93 solo) and forced three fumbles in making the Class 5A all-state team in Florida this past season. Belmar had 87 tackles and 10 sacks as a senior.

“We targeted Tavante from day one,” Foster said. “He’s a really good football player. He’s explosive. He can play in space and tight spaces. He’s very physical and has great ball skills. He’s just a complete football player. I like what he’s about.

“Emmanuel reminds me of [former defensive end] Nekos Brown. He’s maybe a little taller. He’s a long kid. He’s played with his hand on the ground coming off the edge

Continued on page 26



Jovonn Quillen was an outstanding quarterback at Hampton High School in Hampton, Virginia, but Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster thinks he will be a great asset in the Hokies’ secondary in the future. (Photo courtesy of The Daily Press)



Tavante Beckett played at Oscar Smith High as a junior before transferring to Indian River for his senior season and the linebacker finished with 131 tackles this past fall. (Photo courtesy of David B. Hollingsworth, The Virginian Pilot)

FIRST RECRUITING CLASS

Continued from page 25

and he’s explosive and dynamic. He could play a couple of positions. He’s athletic and can bend his body. He can be a big-time playmaker.

“Eron is a great student and approached heavily by the academies. He’s more of a mike [middle] linebacker, a thumper type guy. He’s good in tight spaces and a good finisher.

“I really like the group of kids. I like their diversity and intelligence as far as their football IQ. I think we’ve got a good group there.”

The Hokies added just two defensive linemen in this class—end Jimmie Taylor from Jacksonville, North Carolina, who enrolled for the spring semester and Hewitt, a late signee from Venice, Florida, who recorded 105 tackles and 10 sacks this past season.

Foster wasn’t too worried about adding more ends. Seth Dooley’s injury leaves the Hokies with one experienced end—Ken Ekanem—heading into spring practice. But three others, including Houshun Gaines, Darius Fullwood, and Trevon Hill all took redshirt seasons this past fall and figure to get plenty of reps this spring.

“That position is critical for us this spring,” Foster said. “We’ll have four young guys

Reggie Floyd

Floyd played on both sides of the ball, but he figures into the Hokies’ plans as a defensive back. He resembles current whip linebacker Anthony Shegog. He’s a big, smooth athlete with good ball skills and an ability to close on the ball quickly.

Eron Carter

Carter sports a fantastic grade-point average, earned all-state honors in football (Class 5A), was his local newspaper’s Wrestler of the Year and won the state title in the shot put and discuss last year. The Florida native had 163 tackles last season and appears to have a nice future as a linebacker for Tech.

Tavante Beckett

Beckett played some on offense in high school, but he fits the mold of a Tech linebacker – a little short, but fast and not afraid to deliver a blow. Beckett’s speed really stood out on his highlight videos, making him a nice fit in Tech’s scheme.

INSIDE HOKIE SPORTS’

TJ Jackson

Tech’s coaches loved Jackson’s athleticism for a 6-8, 330-pounder, citing his numerous dunks at a basketball game they attended. He may take some time to develop, but he’s big, can move and possesses a lot of long-term potential.

SLEEPERS TO WATCH

Khalil Ladler

Ladler was receiving a lot of big-time interest before tearing his ACL in the offseason and missing this past season. But his junior film showed an athlete who breaks on the ball quickly and showed a willingness to come up in run support. He could be a steal for the Hokies.

playing for the first time, but I’m excited about Jimmie and what the other guys are going to bring to the table. We’ll have to grow up in a hurry.”

In the secondary, the staff added four prospects—cornerback Khalil Ladler, defensive backs Jovonn Quillen, Jr., Tyree Rodgers, and Reggie Floyd. Quillen played mostly quarterback at Hampton High School and amassed 2,370 yards of offense, while Rodgers, from Camden, New Jersey, also played quarterback. He amassed nearly 2,000 yards of offense and 17 touchdowns.

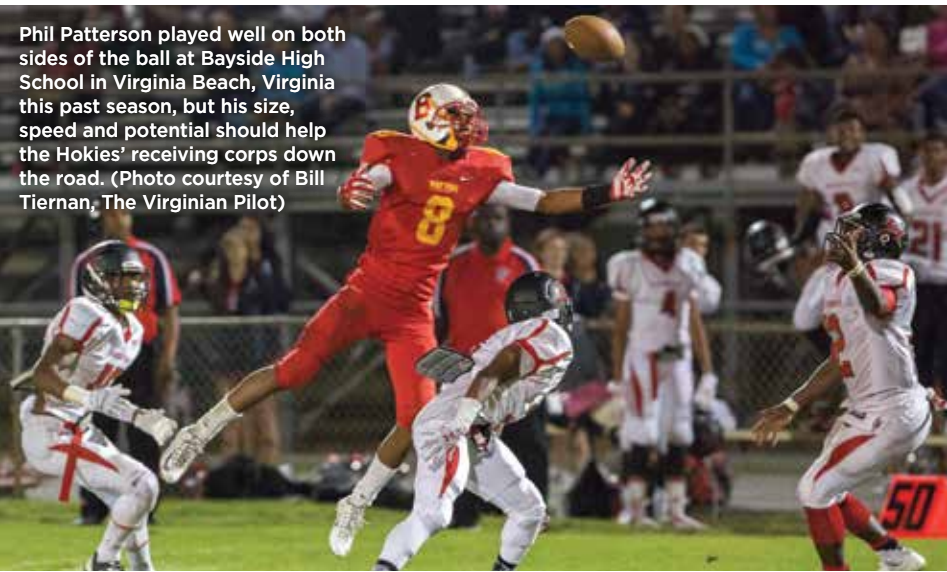
“I feel good about the young men we’re bringing in who will be a part of this thing,” Foster said. “I’m looking forward to the future.”

Looking ahead

Given the needs at both quarterback and on the offensive line, Fuente and his staff brought in two junior-college prospects in Evans and Moore. That marked the first time that a Tech recruiting class had featured two junior-college prospects since 2000 when Kevin McCadam and Channing Reed signed with the Hokies.

Fuente’s roster at Memphis featured a lot of junior college transfers, but that doesn’t figure to be part of the trend here at Tech going forward.

“I don’t anticipate it being a big part of what we do,” he said. “These were special scenarios. They were strong academic kids who could




Phil Patterson played well on both sides of the ball at Bayside High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia this past season, but his size, speed and potential should help the Hokies’ receiving corps down the road. (Photo courtesy of Bill Tiernan, The Virginian Pilot)

handle Virginia Tech. I’m not saying we’ll never do it [signing junior college prospect], but I don’t anticipate it being a large part of our philosophy. We’d like to build this thing through the high school ranks.”

That means continuing to build relationships, particularly with the high school coaches in Virginia. Fuente and his staff already have started recruiting for 2017, though they may find themselves with little to do—Tech’s 2016 roster features just 10 seniors. That leaves little room for adding prospects, however attrition could increase that number.

Expect the Fuente staff to focus on getting the best prospect possible at every position.

“We’ll sign a little bit of everything,” Fuente said. “We’ll probably be back in the running back and tight end business, for sure, on the offensive side of the ball. We don’t have a particularly large class. It won’t be an incredibly large class unless we have some attrition, which I’m sure we will. Every program does.

“Hopefully, our numbers will be more balanced and we’ll have more even distribution throughout the class.” 

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New offensive coordinator with track record of putting up big numbers

by Jimmy Robertson



Today's era of college football features fast-paced offenses, with scoring that resides at an all-time high and yardage that gets racked up in record-breaking quantities.

Justin Fuente and his staff run this exact style of offense, but the man tasked with coordinating this offense gave a rather interesting answer when asked recently to give a general overview of his philosophy.

His first words?

"We're going to run the ball," new coordinator Brad Cornelsen said.

Cornelsen served as the co-coordinator at Memphis this past season, during which the Tigers rushed for nearly 180 yards per game. They also threw for 307.5 yards per game and averaged 487 yards of offense. Memphis scored more than 40 points per game. All those numbers ranked in the top 60 nationally.

In contrast, the Hokies ranked 53rd in scoring offense at 31 points per game, but weren't in the top 60 in any of the other main categories. In fairness, the level of competition was different, but they hope to change their output under Cornelsen's coordination going forward.

"We're going to run the ball and try to set up play action," he said. "We want to try to move fast. You can either line up, be simple, hand off the ball, and mow people down, if you've got the people to do that. If you don't, you have to find a way to get yardage on the ground to give your quarterback a chance to play well.

"The last few years at Memphis, we were creative with how we tried to do that. It was fun and exciting. We had some good players who had bought into what we're doing and been unselfish in that system."

Of course, a lot of those great numbers at Memphis came about because of the exceptional play of quarterback Paxton Lynch, who completed nearly 63 percent of his passes for 3,776 yards, with 28 touchdowns and just four interceptions this past season. The gifted

Lynch certainly possesses the attributes to be a fine professional, but Cornelsen deserves some of the credit as well. He served as the quarterbacks coach for all three of Lynch's seasons at Memphis and all four of his seasons under Fuente.

"He's a guy we took a chance on," Cornelsen said of Lynch. "We didn't know much about him. It was late in recruiting, but there was some upside, some big-time potential that was easy to see on film. Credit to him. He did what he needed to do to develop from a physical standpoint and to learn how to play the game and the position.

"I'm still a little puzzled why he didn't have more going on [in recruiting]. We certainly did not teach him how to throw the ball once he got to Memphis. There is some natural talent and skill that we were hoping he'd have. That's what we saw on film."

Cornelsen has parlayed a smaller school background into a big-time position. He grew up in Texhoma, Oklahoma—a panhandle town of less than 1,000 that straddles the Oklahoma-Texas state line—and his father coached high school football. That set the stage for a future in coaching.

"I knew from a young age that I wanted to coach," he said. "I've had a lot of good mentors along the way, the guys who coached me in high school and college. There are so many who have done so much for me along the way. It's a winding path. Every stop along the way, you learn something good and something bad and just keep on going."

Before coaching, though, he enjoyed a rather nice playing career at Missouri Southern State in Joplin, Missouri, where he became the first Division II quarterback in history to throw for more than 4,000 yards and rush for more than 2,000. He graduated in 2000.

He got his start in college coaching in 2001, working as a graduate assistant at Northwest Missouri State under Mel Tjeerdsma, who

guided the Bearcats to three Division II national titles over a 16-year career before retiring in 2010.

Working with Tjeerdsma really enforced the value of work ethic for Cornelsen.

"He took an 0-11 team [in 1994], and two or three years later [in 1998], was a 14-0 national champion," Cornelsen said. "He really established the most dominant Division II program in the past 15-20 years. He did it the right way. He recruited guys and developed them. He recruited kids with character. He went into a small community and threw himself into it. He was always consistent. You knew what to expect. The players knew what to expect. He was consistent in everything he did. Nothing replaces hard work, and that's what that staff did for many years."

In 2002-03, Cornelsen worked as a graduate assistant for then-head coach Les Miles at Oklahoma State. Miles went on to coach at LSU, where he won the 2007 national title.

In 2003, Cornelsen landed his first full-time coaching gig, which came under Denver Johnson at Illinois State, an FCS program in Normal, Illinois. While there, he became acquainted with Fuente, who served as quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator, while Cornelsen was the receivers coach.

Together, they formulated the plan for a fast-paced attack.

"We were together for four seasons at Illinois State, both young coaches at the time, creating our own philosophies and styles," Cornelsen said. "I had a chance to develop a relationship with some of the other guys on the staff, too. It was a neat time. It was a great place for us and a great starting point.

"Justin is really sharp when it comes to offense and quarterbacks. He played at a high level and has always seen the game through those eyes. I've learned a ton from him. I learned some things before I got to Illinois State that we've adopted and kept this whole time. Coaching evolves. You steal ideas from people. You go see someone every year. You continue to develop and tweak. I think we've both stayed in line over the years from a philosophy standpoint. We feel the same way about some things."

Johnson's resignation following the 2007 regular-season finale ultimately forced Cornelsen to find a different job. He spent the 2008 season working for Mike Gundy at Oklahoma State.

From there, he went to Northeastern State, a Division II school in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. He served as the coordinator for three seasons before reuniting with Fuente after Fuente got the Memphis job.

"I always hoped we'd get a chance to hook back up," he said. "It's funny how things work out some times."

The Memphis staff turned around a downtrodden program. The Tigers had lost 21 of 24 games prior to Fuente's arrival. They lost 10 of the first 17 games in Fuente's tenure. But,

Continued on page 33

Scott a good fit among the Tech coaches on defense

by Jimmy Robertson



Justin Fuente probably felt obligated to offer a position on his coaching staff to Galen Scott.

After all, the two were roommates while working on the staff at Illinois State. While there, Scott introduced Fuente to the woman who ultimately became Fuente's wife. The two know each other well, which can work in either's favor.

"I know some good stuff," Scott joked. "I told him that if he didn't hire me, it was all going out there. I had to make sure I had a job."

Kidding aside, Fuente probably never thought twice about bringing Scott aboard his staff in Blacksburg. He named Scott the defensive tackles coach on Jan. 4 and Scott represented the final piece to the staff—and

certainly one of the most important.

He also represents the only new face among Tech's coaches on defense. Fuente retained coordinator Bud Foster, secondary coach Torrian Gray, and defensive ends coach Charley Wiles. He obviously thought the high-energy style of Scott would mesh with the intense Foster.

"I hadn't met him [Foster] before, but I knew his guys, just watching them on film," Scott said. "A guy whom I played for, Coach Randall McCray [now the defensive coordinator at Gardner-Webb], met with him all the time. We ran the same defense at Illinois State—or tried to.

"I knew from watching them on film that

they were aggressive. They were going to get after you pretty good, and they always played hard. That's what intrigued me. Then, watching them even these past few years, there isn't anything that has fallen off. So, that's what I was excited and intrigued about."

Scott spent the past six seasons at Memphis, serving the first two of those seasons under Larry Porter, who was fired following a 2-10 campaign in 2011. Fuente retained Scott after getting the Memphis job, and Scott served as the linebackers coach for three seasons before assuming the defensive coordinator job this past season.

Scott had no problem giving up coordinator duties to be a part of the Tech staff.

"Whatever he needs me to do, I'll do," Scott said of Foster. "Whatever we need to do, I'll make it work."

Scott, a Florida native, was a three-time All-American during his days at Illinois State from 1997-2000. Following his senior season, he decided to get into coaching and McCray hired him as a graduate assistant.

Scott later took what was then known as a restricted earnings position at Illinois State. That was when he came into contact with Fuente for the first time. Fuente later served as the quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator for the Redbirds.

The two of them roomed together for three years. Perhaps no one on Tech's staff knows Fuente better than Scott.

"He coaches offense like a defensive coordinator," Scott said. "If you just walked out on the field and didn't know which side of the

Continued on page 33

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MARTIN TRAVEL



Wiggins' winding road brings him to Tech

by Jimmy Robertson



Holmon Wiggins' career continues to take him in an eastern direction.

The Los Angeles native played his college ball at the University of New Mexico. He then got his first full-time coaching position at Illinois State and later ended up at Tulsa and Memphis.

Now, he finds himself in Blacksburg. There aren't many places farther east to coach, at least not in this country.

Wiggins knew little about this small-town utopia before arriving, but quickly received an education, both from the locals and those in the coaching profession. He liked what he found out.

"I've heard nothing but great things about Blacksburg," he said. "What I've known is the consecutive bowl games, Coach [Frank] Beamer, the players they've had—Michael Vick, Tyrod Taylor—the defense that has been played here and been lights out for the last 20 years. That was the extent of my knowledge of Virginia Tech."

Wiggins, along with James Shibest, were the first two to come with Fuente from Memphis. In fact, they arrived on the same day as the news conference announcing Fuente's hiring, eager to get a jumpstart on continuing the legacy that Beamer established.

The Hokies' tradition and the opportunity to continue working with and for Fuente made for an easy decision for Wiggins, who will be the team's receivers coach.

"It's awesome to work for a guy and have an idea of what you're getting into—his offensive philosophy, what he stands for, and those things," Wiggins said. "That led me to take the job at Memphis."

"Also, seeing the tradition here and getting the opportunity to build on what Coach Beamer has built here is an awesome task and an awesome opportunity."

Wiggins certainly has paid his dues within the coaching profession. Following his career at New Mexico (1998-2001), he worked as a student assistant coach there for a season and

then a graduate assistant for two more.

In 2006, he landed a job coaching the running backs at Illinois State. Fuente served as the offensive coordinator, leaving after that season for a job coaching running backs at TCU.

Wiggins would go on to work five seasons at Illinois State before moving on to Tulsa, where he coached running backs under a guy named Bill Blankenship—who was Fuente's high school coach at Tulsa's Union High School.

In 2012, Fuente got the Memphis job and brought Wiggins aboard.

"I told myself that, given the opportunity to work with him again, I'd jump at it," Wiggins said. "I was fortunate enough that he called me when he got the job at Memphis."


"I know that he can coach his tail off. I know he's in football for the right reasons. I know that he's grown tremendously since he left Illinois State. Me, being a young coach and learning under those guys ... as with anybody in life, you want to surround yourself with people that are smarter than you. I feel like he is."

Wiggins coached receivers at Memphis and will do so at Tech. His receivers caught more than 200 passes combined each of the past two seasons in Fuente's and coordinator Brad Cornelsen's attack.

The key to their success at Memphis?

"We try to tailor our system toward the kids we have, realizing what those guys can and can't do and put them in the best position possible," Wiggins said. "We were able to run the ball and build off of that, whether it was play-action pass or getting the quarterback out of the pocket and trying to get the ball out on the edge."

The Hokies return eight starters on offense from the Independence Bowl, including two guys whom Wiggins will be coaching—record-setting Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips. That makes for some exciting possibilities.

It also may be enough to allow a well-traveled coach to establish some roots on the East Coast. 



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Shibest excited about Tech's returning tight ends and special teams standouts

by Jimmy Robertson



In some respects, James Shibest has the toughest position on the Virginia Tech football coaching staff.

He coaches the tight ends and certainly has a fine group of talent to work with—including Bucky Hodges, Calvin Cline, and Xavier Burke. He also doubles as the special teams coordinator, which means he assumes those duties previously handled by Frank Beamer, the now retired head coach whose work in this area led to recognition in the College Football Hall of Fame.

"Y'all put the pressure on me," Shibest said, with a laugh.

The truth is that Shibest might just be the perfect person to take over those special teams responsibilities. He coached those units at Memphis with head coach Justin Fuente the past four seasons and he also coached special teams in previous stops at Ole Miss and Arkansas.

He did so successfully, too. He coached the American Athletic Conference Special Teams Player of the Year for three straight seasons while at Memphis. He tutored four All-SEC honorees while at Ole Miss, including Mike Wallace, who currently plays for the NFL's Minnesota Vikings.

But Shibest said that quality special teams starts at the top.

"It all starts with our head coach and how much time he's going to put into it," Shibest said. "I know Coach Beamer was involved and it starts with that guy [the head coach]. The way we've done it is that all of our coaches are involved, even the defensive coordinator and offensive coordinator, just to let our players know that it's extremely important to winning or losing games."

"Just growing up, you've been seeing it for so long—the great things they've done here [at Tech]. To me, it's an honor to be the special teams coach here. It's going to be a challenge, too."

Shibest, who played at Arkansas and graduated in 1988, started his coaching career as a graduate assistant at Oklahoma State in 1990. After two seasons at Oklahoma State, he coached in the junior college ranks for eight seasons, including four as the head coach at Butler Community College in El Dorado, Kansas—just northeast of Wichita.

Shibest guided Butler to back-to-back National Junior College Athletic Association national titles in 1998 and 1999. While there, he coached a name familiar to Virginia Tech fans—Ricky Hall, who played for the Hokies during the 1998 and 1999 seasons. Hall spent two seasons at Butler before arriving at Tech.

Shibest coached a few players from Virginia during his time in the junior college ranks.

"We'd come to Virginia because there were no junior college programs in Virginia and it was always good football," he said. "So I've

Continued on page 33

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Vice ready to mold an offensive line with four starters returning

by Jimmy Robertson



The offensive line has been a troublesome area for the Virginia Tech football program over the years, and perhaps unfairly, a sore spot among Hokie Nation.

But the Hokies started the same five for every game in 2015 with the exception of one, and the group played fairly well—as Travon McMillian's 1,000-yard season attests. On an even better note, four of the starting five linemen return for the 2016 season for new line coach Vance Vice.

"I've certainly inherited worse situations," Vice said. "When I got to Memphis, they had six total bodies."

Vice—who graduated from Oklahoma State in 1990 and once played with Thurman Thomas and Barry Sanders—becomes the fourth offensive line coach in the past five seasons for the Hokies. He brings a wealth of experience, having coached the past 20 seasons at various stops. In fact, he coached

for three seasons at Clemson in the mid-1990s, including a 1998 game against Tech at Death Valley. The Hokies bested the Tigers 37-0 that day.

The following season, Vice wound up at Murray State, where he coached the offensive line. His group blocked for a quarterback with a familiar name—current Tech head coach Justin Fuente. He knew Fuente was going to be a great future head coach after his initial meeting with Fuente.

"When I got there, it was during spring ball, and the head coach pulled the offensive coordinator and the quarterback coach out of the meeting room just to introduce me to them," Vice said. "I talked to them for five minutes. I noticed that the meeting never stopped. I looked back in there, and Justin, a player, was running the meeting and the projector."

"I knew he was something special. He's a tremendous leader and has a great work ethic."

There was no question he'd be a coach."

Following his one-year stint at Murray State, he ended up at Illinois State, where he coached the offensive line for five seasons. While there, he coached with Fuente.

Vice spent five seasons at Illinois State, four at Utah State and three at Louisiana-Monroe before joining Fuente at Memphis. He didn't hesitate when Fuente asked him to join the staff here in Blacksburg.


"I had a great, great appreciation for what they'd done here," Vice said.

Vice seems to get the best out of his linemen, no matter where he coaches. In his five seasons at Illinois State, three linemen earned All-America honors and eight earned all-league honors. At Utah State, four earned all-league recognition. While at Memphis, his offensive lines paved the way for an attack that rushed for more than 185 yards per game each of the past two seasons.

When trying to find a quality offensive lineman, he looks for three attributes.

"Smart, mean, and can move," he said. "Just find the toughest guy I can find. With what we want to do on offense, mobility is definitely an asset. You need to be able to play multiple positions and help me create depth. Guys that can play more than one position have great value. Guys that are hungry and have a great work ethic ... that's the biggest thing."

Tech returns six offensive linemen who lettered this past season and several younger linemen who either did not letter (Braxton Pfaff, Billy Ray Mitchell and Colt Pettit) or took redshirt seasons (Tyrell Smith, Austin Clark and D'Andre Plantin). So Vice has a fairly good nucleus to help improve a rushing attack that ranked 81st nationally (159.2 ypg).

"I'm very, very excited," Vice said. "They seem eager. There are definitely some guys with promising futures. Buy in and let's go." 

CORNELSEN *Continued from page 28*

as Cornelsen put it, "You chop wood and keep going."

Cornelsen said he never hesitated when Fuente approached him about being the offensive coordinator here in Blacksburg.


"If you're in coaching, you know what kind of place this is," he said. "Even if you've never been here, you know what the tradition is. That's something that is intriguing to any coach. I was certainly excited when he said those words [Virginia Tech]."

He takes over an offense that returns eight starters from the bowl game, but he'll need to find a quarterback. Michael Brewer departed, leaving the position open for Brenden Motley, Dwayne Lawson, or two prospects who enrolled for the spring semester—Jérod Evans and Josh Jackson.

Cornelsen and the staff spent much of January focused on recruiting. After that, they wanted to get a plan in place for spring practice. He has already watched film of the Hokies' 2015 games to get a feel for the situation at hand.

"I'm certainly excited about what I've seen so far," he said.

The talent for a good offense appears to be in place. In roughly a month, Cornelsen begins the task of molding it into just that.

His track record should leave Hokie Nation feeling optimistic about his chances. 

SCOTT *Continued from page 29*

ball was which and saw coaches just coaching, most people think it's the defensive coordinator just yelling and chasing people down the field and that type of stuff, but it's really across the board. We coach offense the same way a lot of people coach defense. We get after people."

Scott coached at Illinois State from 2001-07, serving as the defensive coordinator his final two seasons. From there, he went to Tulsa, where he coached defensive backs for two seasons. In 2010, he joined Porter's staff at Memphis and was later reunited with Fuente.

Scott couldn't wait to get started recruiting for the Hokies. Less than a week after arriving, he hit the road with most of the rest of the

SHIBEST *Continued from page 31*


recruited here a little bit, but not enough to have the deep down relationships that you need to have. That's what we have to develop and it takes a little time."

Shibest shouldn't need too long to mesh with the talent returning at his position. Hodges thought about making himself eligible for the NFL Draft, but decided to come back for his redshirt junior season. He's caught 85 passes the past two seasons, including 13 for touchdowns.

Shibest also expects to work some with fullback Sam Rogers.

staff to secure future stars. It wouldn't surprise anyone to see him recruiting a lot on his home turf in Florida, where he grew up.


"It's always a challenge," Scott said of recruiting for a new school. "You're going some place new. But it was the same at Memphis. I've been at Tulsa, Memphis, Illinois State, and I'm from Florida. There is always a different deal wherever you go."

"If you can relate to kids and let them know you care about them and you can get that across in your message ... and then you've got a good product to sell—I think we should be fine. We'll go into areas and get to know good people. Hopefully, they get to know us the same way and we'll sell a good product." 

"It's really the tight end/fullback position," he said. "It's one in the same. I hear we've got some good ones here and that makes it easier on me. We do a lot with both of them in the game."

"It's been fun for me. Before I met Justin, I just had the tight ends. I never had the fullbacks, so that's kind of cool. I like that. You like for them to be able to do both. That makes us better offensively."

The Hokies return a lot of good players at Shibest's position, including special teams.

For that, he is grateful. As a new coach, he knows he certainly could find himself in a worse situation. 

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IN STEPPE WITH TECH

Former Hokies point guard Reggie Steppe works at UVA these days, but he cherishes the fond memories of his playing days, including his role in Tech's stunning upset of then-No. 1 Memphis State in 1983

by Jimmy Robertson



Many of the fine people who live in the quaint areas surrounding Charlottesville, Virginia are among the upper echelon of society and received their degrees from nearby University of Virginia. They work at the school and proudly display their Cavalier colors throughout their homes and offices.

One such resident of this area is employed by Thomas Jefferson's university, but chooses to display items of orange and maroon in his yard, office, home and anywhere else he deems appropriate.

Obviously, Reggie Steppe hasn't forgotten his roots.

"I'm a Hokie through and through," he said.

Tech fans will be happy to hear that, as many elder statesmen of Hokie Nation fondly remember one of their favorite basketball players from the early 1980s. Steppe served as a point guard under then-head coach Charlie Moir and played a role in some of the finest moments in program history. Old video

footage reveals the crowd often chanting "Reggie, Reggie" whenever he made a big play.

Today, Steppe, 55, works as a customer relations manager within the Work Management department at the University of Virginia—a position he's held for the past 15 years. He is responsible for a list of Virginia's classroom and administrative buildings. He coordinates projects, serving as a middleman to make sure needs are met, whether they be small construction needs, maintenance improvement, information systems, risk management and others.

Perhaps his days as a point guard prepared him for such a role. He came to Tech as a lightly recruited player out of Crozet, Virginia near Charlottesville. He played his high school basketball for Frankie Allen at Albemarle High. When Allen got an assistant's job at Tech under Moir, he recruited Steppe, who took a prep school year at Fork Union before coming to Blacksburg in the fall of 1979.

Steppe played in 28 games as a freshman

and averaged four points per game. His most memorable game during that 1980 season came when he witnessed the "Henson Heave" at Tully Gymnasium in Tallahassee, Florida. Henson's fullcourt, 89-foot shot at the buzzer went in, lifting the Hokies to a 79-77 victory over Florida State.

"He was so close to being out of bounds," Steppe recalled. "He just threw it. I'm on the baseline following the ball and I'm thinking, 'There's no way.' When it went in, it was the best feeling I've ever had.

"Les said he knew it was going in, but that was Les. I just couldn't believe it."

Steppe averaged 8.6 points per game as a sophomore during the 1980-81 season with a team-best 63 assists. He averaged 7.2 points per game as a junior and finished second on the team with 106 assists (and just 61 turnovers).

Steppe averaged 8.8 points per game and had a team-best 138 assists as a senior, though in a different role. He started a bunch of games his sophomore and junior seasons, but Moir wanted to bring him off the bench his senior year and instead start Al Young.

"One of the hardest things Charlie Moir had to do was tell me, 'Hey, I'm going to bring you off the bench and not start you,'" Steppe said. "Al Young and I were close and we competed. Coming off the bench took the pressure off of me. I bought into it wholeheartedly—and I thought I was good at it. Throughout the years, I started some, and when Al came, he [Moir] saw an opportunity for me to show Al the way and come off the bench. A lot of the time, I was the igniter to get the guys going."

The Hokies went 23-11 during Steppe's senior year—a season in which the squad recorded one of greatest victories in program history. On Jan. 10, 1983, Tech stunned then-No. 1 Memphis State 69-56 in front of 10,000 fans at Cassell Coliseum.

The game marked the first time a No. 1-ranked team had played at Cassell. The Hokies' squad featured freshmen named Dell Curry, Bobby Beecher and Keith Colbert and sophomores named Perry Young and Al Young.

But Steppe's 21 points carried the Hokies on that night.

"We didn't have a chance, they said," Steppe said, referring to the naysayers. "As I tell everyone, there is nothing like having that sixth man, which is the fans, and they really pumped us up. They were just as big a part of it as us on the floor playing. I think about it often. I talk to my wife about it. She got to see it and was impressed.

"I was confident. There was no pressure on me. I had played those guys many times. I knew the rivalry and it was a good one. All of our guys had the confidence that we could win that game. I remember Coach Moir saying, 'It's just another game. Don't pay attention to the ranking. The hoops are the same and the ball is the same. Just go out and play and play mistake-free basketball'—which we did.

"People still ask me about it. I get a chance to say it was a team effort. A lot of people had doubts. They [the Tigers] had Keith Lee and Andre Turner and Baskerville Holmes. At the end, seeing the crowd storm the court and being a part of that ... that's something a lot of people don't get a chance to feel. That woke a lot of people up to Virginia Tech."

Steppe helped lead the Hokies to an NCAA Tournament bid and two NIT appearances in his four-year career. In his final game at Cassell—an NIT home game against William & Mary—he scored 18 points to propel the Hokies to an 85-79 victory. Tech lost to South Carolina in the second round to end its season.

Following his final season, Steppe worked in Northern Virginia for a few years before landing his current position at the University of Virginia. His co-workers, seeing the Virginia Tech stuff on his office walls and on his desk, often question whether he actually played, and the good-natured Steppe often refers them to Google.

He usually takes his lumps from his co-workers during basketball season—he gets them back in football season—as the Cavaliers had won nine of 10 hoops games versus the Hokies heading into this season. On Jan. 4, though, Tech knocked off the then-No. 4 Cavaliers 70-68 at Cassell.

"When Tech is down, they find my office and get their shots in, but it's OK," he laughed. "The thing about it is that I always tell them, 'What

goes around, comes around.' A few weeks ago, I got my chance to visit some offices."


Steppe, who is married and has an 18-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter, hasn't been back to Blacksburg since he left in 1983—though he plans to return for the Hokies' March 5 game against Miami. Despite his long absence, he loves the school and certainly cherishes the memories of his days at Tech.

There are certainly many. In addition to being there for the "Henson Heave," Steppe also remembers the Hokies playing in the Rainbow Classic in Hawaii and losing by two points in overtime to a Wayman Tisdale-led Oklahoma team. He also went head to head against Doc Rivers, the current coach of the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers who played at Marquette. The Memphis State game probably ranks at the top of the list.

Plus, Steppe played in arguably the greatest era of Tech basketball—which included players like Wayne Robinson, Dale Solomon, Jeff Schneider, Gordy Bryan, Perry Young, Al Young, and of course, Beecher and Curry.

He played with all those greats. Has any other Tech player played with such a collection of talent? Maybe not.

The thought of it leaves him feeling blessed.

"I tell my wife that I've met a lot of people, and I know a lot of people," Steppe said. "That experience there, being able to play for a great coach and with great teammates ... it was all great. I'll never forget Virginia Tech." 



Reggie Steppe played in some of the greatest games and with some of the greatest players in Tech history during his career in the early 1980s.



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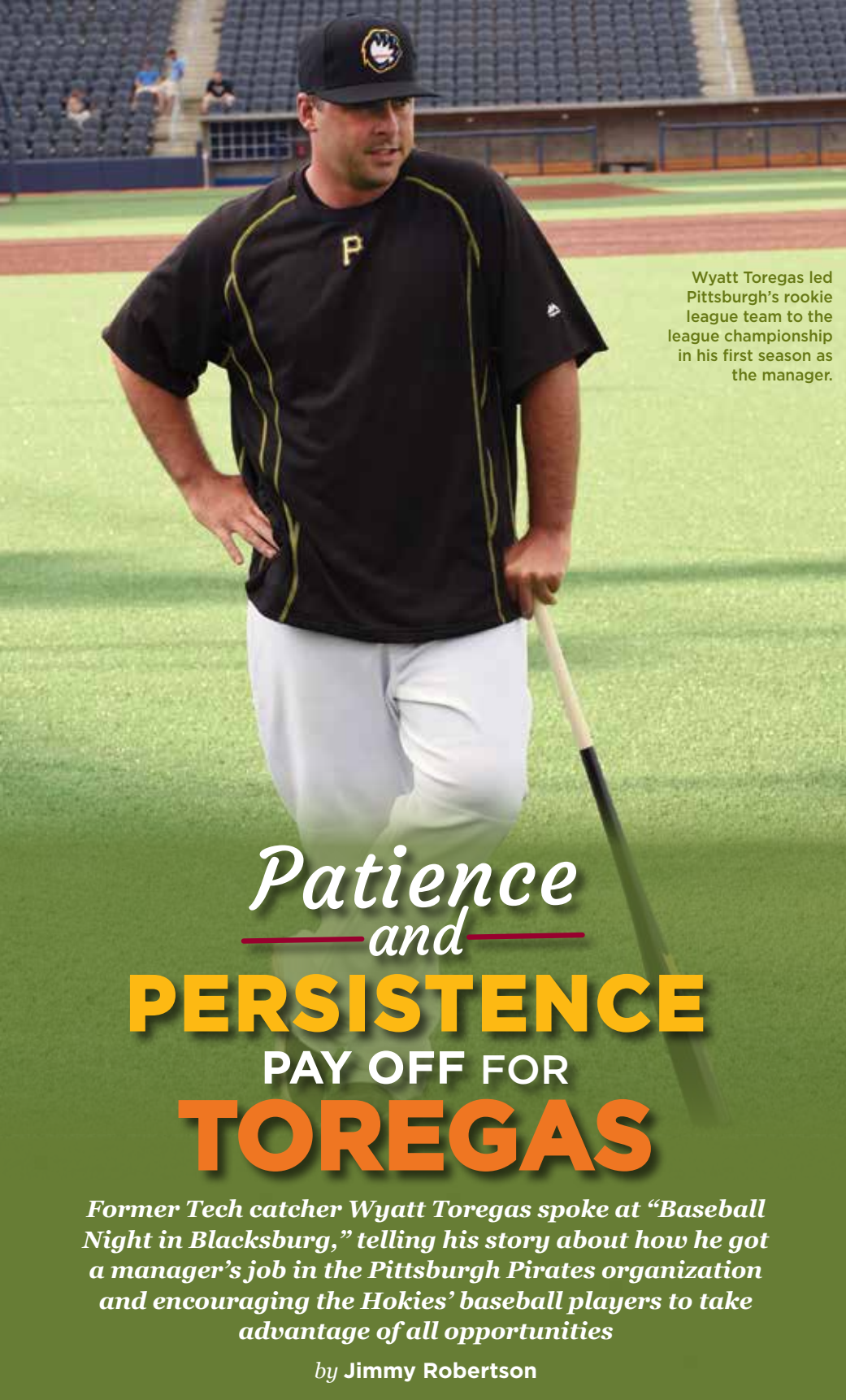
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Wyatt Toregas led Pittsburgh's rookie league team to the league championship in his first season as the manager.

Patience and PERSISTENCE PAY OFF FOR TOREGAS

Former Tech catcher Wyatt Toregas spoke at “Baseball Night in Blacksburg,” telling his story about how he got a manager’s job in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization and encouraging the Hokies’ baseball players to take advantage of all opportunities

by Jimmy Robertson

Most former Major League Baseball players keep the ball from milestone accomplishments, and Wyatt Toregas is no different.

He still possesses the ball from the night when he got his first Major League hit, though he keeps it in a rather odd place.

“I’ve got it in a sock in my drawer,” Toregas said.

Further investigation, however, revealed that Toregas, his wife and two children recently moved into a new home in Hartville, Ohio and hadn’t quite unpacked all the boxes or decorated all the rooms. But those who know him best wouldn’t necessarily be surprised if he kept the ball in a drawer. He always put more stock in team wins than in personal achievements anyway.

Toregas, a former Virginia Tech catcher, still does that these days, though as a minor league manager in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization. He came back to campus on Feb. 6, serving as the guest speaker for the Tech baseball program’s “Baseball Night in Blacksburg,” a preseason dinner and auction that serves to raise money for the Tech program.

His message to the players was simple, but poignant—take advantage of the opportunities that Virginia Tech provides.

“Get everything you can from it,” he said. “It’s so much more than baseball, and sometimes in college, it’s hard to realize that. The opportunities that the university offers are unbelievable. So many of my friends who didn’t get drafted are all having successful lives with Virginia Tech degrees. Just work hard at everything you do. You never know where it’s going to take you.”

Toregas’ hard work got him drafted and ultimately took him to the majors. He played at Tech from 2002-04, working his way immediately into the lineup. He hit .347 as a freshman, with eight homers and 51 RBIs. He earned All-BIG EAST honors as a sophomore, hitting .319, with a team-best 60 RBIs, and he hit .280 as a junior, with 39 RBIs.

His work at Tech led to him being drafted by the Cleveland Indians in the summer of 2004—something he never really expected.

“When I went to Virginia Tech, I didn’t have aspirations of playing professional baseball,” he said. “I wanted to play baseball, and don’t get me wrong, everyone wants to play professionally, but I didn’t know how good I was. I wanted to go to Virginia Tech because I liked Virginia Tech football and the school offered a great education. Baseball was an avenue to cut costs. My family didn’t have a whole lot of money.

“I think my sophomore year was when I started thinking, ‘Man, I’ve got a shot at doing this professionally.’ It’s not that I didn’t think I was good enough, but you know the odds going into college. I just wanted to play and have fun, and I ended up being a lot better than I thought I was. And I worked hard. Once I got drafted, I wanted to go to the big leagues because playing baseball was awesome. I was thinking, ‘I’ve got a chance to do this. You only live once, so let’s give it all we’ve got and see where it ends up.’”

It took Toregas more than five years to reach the majors. He played for five minor league teams before getting called up by the Indians in August of 2009. In his first at-bat with Cleveland, he delivered a single off then-Detroit pitcher Rick Porcello.

Toregas played in 19 games and recorded nine hits in 51 at-bats that season. The Indians released him following the 2010 season and he

signed a minor-league deal with Pittsburgh in January of 2011. In June, the Pirates called him up and played him in three games before designating him for assignment.

His time in those clubhouses and on the field provided him with many memorable moments. He played with Jim Thome, a five-time All-Star, while in Cleveland and he played against the likes of Ken Griffey, Jr., one of his childhood favorites.

But once all that ended, he needed to find something else to do.

Following the 2011 season, he decided to pursue a career in managing. The Pirates started him on that path by signing him as a player-coach.

“I wanted to stay in it once I stopped playing,” Toregas said. “And I was fortunate enough that the Pirates thought the same and asked me to come on in different roles at first.

“In 2012, I coached the catchers at the Triple-A level and I was also the first base coach. In 2013-14, I was on the major league staff as the advance scout. I was watching the team we were going to play before we played them and would report back to the Major League field staff about what they’re doing and what I think we should do—things like that. I did that for two years, and that was cool, too. Coming into the 2013 season, we had 20 consecutive losing seasons, and in 2013, we broke that streak. It was cool because I was a part of that team.”

Toregas kept working and kept learning. Just like it took him more than five years to

reach the majors as a player, it took him five years to receive his first managerial job. That occurred last season when the Pirates named him the manager of the West Virginia Black Bears, their rookie league team based in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Toregas’ first season was a grand slam. Coaching the team’s draft picks and rookie free agents, he guided the Black Bears to the New York-Penn League championship, sweeping a best-of-three series from the Staten Island Yankees, a New York Yankees affiliate.

“Like with anything, you go into it thinking what you’re going to do and it turns out that there are changes as you go, and you learn,” Toregas said of the job. “The cool part about it was that you learn how to utilize your staff and they learn what you do as well. The cool part for me was that I learned the areas where I could trust guys to get it done on their own. I learned the areas where I needed to be proactive to help them. I had a really good staff. They knew my blind spots where I needed watching every single day and they knew the watch areas that I wasn’t paying attention to.

“I think, early on, I tried to micromanage it too much. Once I got the hang of it and learned what my staff was good at and how to utilize their strengths ... that’s when we took off as a team. And the players were good at the same time. We had really good talent and that made it easy to coach them. It started a little rough, but once everything got in swing, we started running smooth.”



Wyatt Toregas will be the manager of Pittsburgh's rookie league team again this season, but his long-term goal is to be the manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates some day.

Photos courtesy of West Virginia Black Bears

Nicolette Donovan played well this fall and is one of the reasons that the Hokies are optimistic heading into their spring season.

GOING FOR IT

In its inaugural season, the Tech women's golf team played well enough this fall to think big about its goals for the upcoming spring season

by Jimmy Robertson



The Virginia Tech women's golf program may be in its first year of competition, but the Hokies aren't "laying up" when it comes to setting their goals.

On the contrary, they are going for it.

Buoyed by a fall in which they were competitive in nearly every tournament, the women's golfers and their coaches now set their sights on the spring season — during which they plan to take dead aim at an NCAA regional berth.

"It's definitely attainable for us," Tech coach Carol Robertson said.

That might seem ambitious for the newcomers on the Division I scene. After all, Tech held its first practice as a program in August of 2014, and the current roster consists of three true freshmen (Elizabeth Bose, Nicolette Donovan and Anne Taylor Hough), two redshirt freshmen (Amanda Hollandsworth and Allison Woodward) and a junior-college transfer (Whitney Stevenson). None had played in a Division I event until the program's inaugural tournament in Greenville, South Carolina (Lady Paladin Invitational) this past September.

But they finished seventh in that event and fifth in another tournament against rather good fields. That got them to thinking big. A 17th-place finish out of 20 teams, however, in the fall finale at Turtle Point Golf Club in Kiawah Island, South Carolina tempered those thoughts somewhat.

"Before our last tournament in the fall, we were right there," Robertson said. "They [the NCAA golf selection committee] usually take around 60 teams — anywhere from 55-65 is the bubble depending on where conference champions fall and who gets exemptions.

"We bounced around from 58 to 62 [in the rankings] until we went to Kiawah. We struggled there, which, in turn, dropped our ranking, but the great news is that our spring schedule is a fantastic platform to get an NCAA regional back in our grasp."

That excites Robertson, a former college and professional golfer who loves to compete. She certainly appreciates competition now after waiting nearly two years to be a part of it.

The Tech athletics department hired Robertson in July of 2013 to run the

women's golf program after adding it as the 22nd varsity sport in May of that same year. She served as a one-person program her first year in Blacksburg.

"So much excitement surrounded this job for me," Robertson said. "The first year was non-stop recruiting. I was struck hard with the things I missed. I missed having a team and an assistant coach.

"Last year certainly was fun having two redshirts, but we all still missed competing. All the time and effort we put into this game becomes worth it during the thrill of competition. It's certainly a rollercoaster ride that's tough on your stomach, but you just can't help coming back for more. That's why we love what we do. To have that back was really special."

Robertson went into this past fall knowing little about her lineup. After all, she had coached Bose, Donovan, Hough, and Stevenson for all of about six weeks before Tech played in the fall opener. But leaders started to emerge rather quickly.

The Hokies' most consistent player was Bose, a Norfolk, Virginia product.

She finished in the top 15 of three events, including a team-best ninth-place finish at the Cardinal Cup played at the University of Louisville Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky. She shot rounds of 75, 70, and 76 to come in at 5-over-par.

She shot 70 on two other occasions in the fall — her best score. She shot higher than 75 in just two of her 12 fall rounds.

"Elizabeth knows her game," Robertson said. "She's solid and consistent off the tee,

which sets her up for great approaches to the green. On top of that, she's an awesome putter. If on the occasion she hits it into a little trouble, she always makes smart recovery decisions.

"She made a comment one time that I love. She said, 'Even the best golfers in the world make bogeys. If I make a bogey ... big deal. The best player in the world makes them, too.' She has a very impressive mental game that helps her stay level throughout

her round."

Donovan also played well. The Ponte Vedra, Florida product opened her career with a 73 at the Lady Paladin Invitational and followed that with a 72 in the second round to get into contention for medalist honors. She struggled in the final round, finishing tied for 43rd overall, but the performance jumpstarted a good fall for her.

Continued on page 40



Though only a freshman, Elizabeth Bose was the Hokies' most consistent player this fall, finishing in the top 15 in three events and looking forward to similar results this spring.

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GOING FOR IT Continued from page 39

Donovan would go on to record three top-50 finishes. Her second-round 70 at Kiawah Island marked the team's best score in that tournament.

"She's got one of the best short games I've ever seen," Robertson said. "Her bunker play is amazing. Add that to her imagination around the greens in chipping and putting and it sets her up for a solid score every time she tees it up."

"That's a really good asset to have. You can hit three bad shots and one good putt and that's a par. She's never out of it with her short game. Even on the days when her driving and irons aren't up to her standard, she's never out of contention because of her short game."

Robertson expects improvement from the rest of the roster, especially from Hollandsworth and Woodward—the program's first two recruits. Both took redshirt seasons during the 2014-15 academic year.

Although a little inconsistent this fall, they both showed flashes of greatness.

Hollandsworth finished tied for 10th at the Lady Paladin Invitational after shooting rounds of 75, 73, and 73, and she fired two good rounds at the Windy City Classic in Wilmette, Illinois, shooting 72 in the first round and 71 in the final round.

Woodward finished tied for 14th at the Cardinal Cup, shooting rounds of 73, 76, and 73.

"There is more from both of them," Robertson said. "Both have a ton of talent and I know they aren't satisfied in how their fall went."

"Even though Amanda and Allison were here for an entire year, it was a year of practice. They both put themselves in good competition this summer after not having any during the school year. Coming in this fall, they had high expectations for themselves and the team. Although golf is an individual sport, it's a different atmosphere when you know the team is counting on you as well. Bad scores sting a little more when you're playing for the Hokies and not just yourself."


The Hokies started testing their mettle in earnest on Feb. 10 when they flew to Tallahassee, Florida for the Florida State Match-up, which was played Feb. 12-14. They play several other tournaments with loaded

fields, including the ACC Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina on April 15-17.

Seven ACC teams came out of the fall ranked in the top 31 of Golfweek's team rankings—Duke (No. 2), Virginia (No. 21), Notre Dame (No. 25), Louisville (No. 26), Clemson (No. 29), Miami (No. 30), and NC State (No. 31). Florida State, Wake Forest, and North Carolina were in the top 50.

Tech's tournament schedule should prepare it for the ACC Championships—and hopefully beyond.

"If you want to be with the best, you've got to play with the best," Robertson said. "I didn't want to hide them from tough competition. There were several moments this fall when we all saw what potential this young team really has. They hung tough with many veteran teams and came out on top a few times."

"We are in the ACC, and like a lot of other Olympic sports, it's arguably the strongest women's golf conference in the country. I see this program reaching great heights. We currently have loads of talented players who look to get better every year with experience. This coupled with strong recruiting classes in future years makes me thrilled to be a part of our history in the making." 

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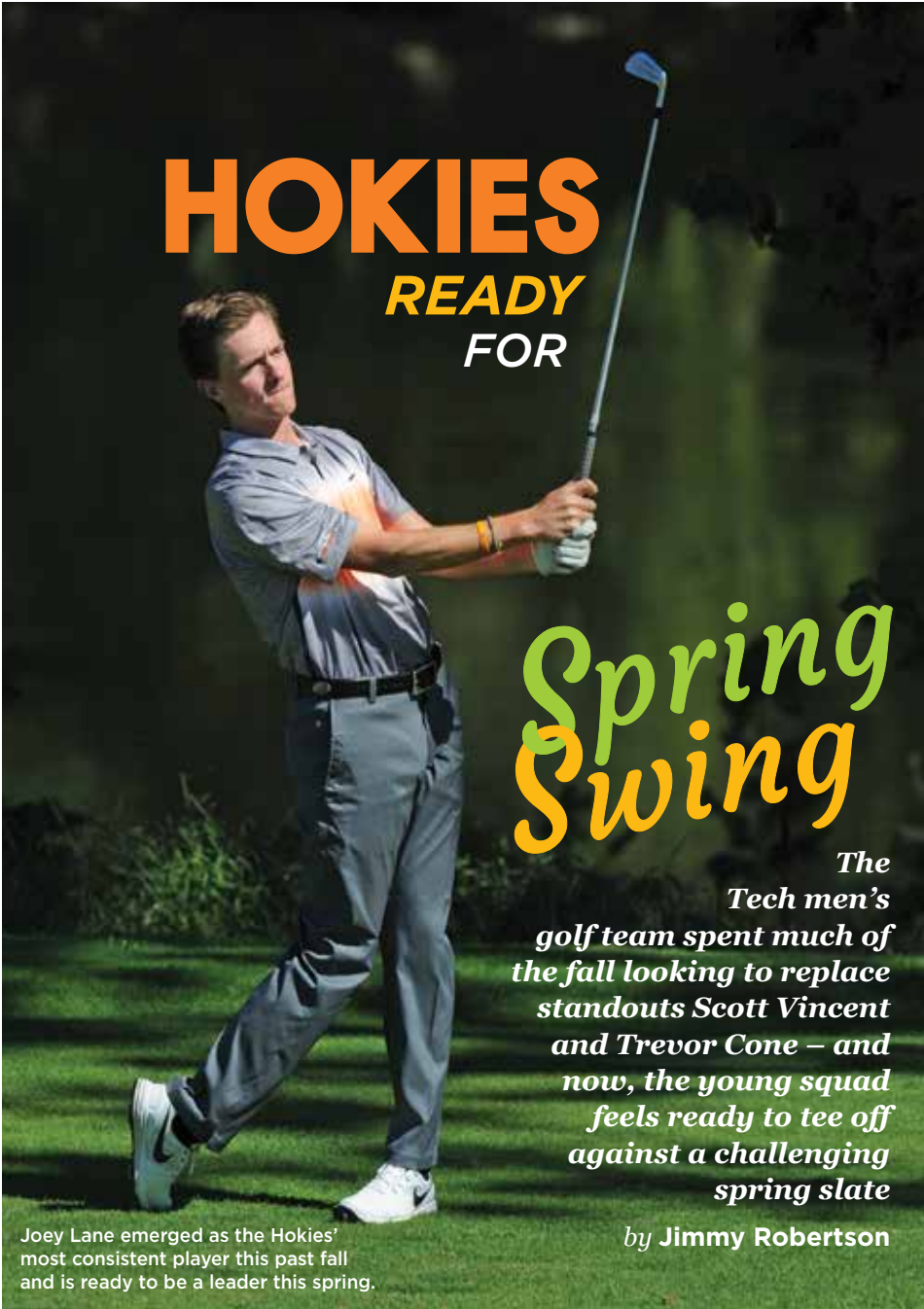
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HOKIES

READY FOR

Spring Swing

The Tech men's golf team spent much of the fall looking to replace standouts Scott Vincent and Trevor Cone – and now, the young squad feels ready to tee off against a challenging spring slate

by Jimmy Robertson

Joey Lane emerged as the Hokies' most consistent player this past fall and is ready to be a leader this spring.

In mid-September, the Virginia Tech men's golf team traveled to Richmond to open the fall season at the VCU Shootout—a tournament that the Hokies won the past three years.

But for the first time in four years, a Virginia Tech lineup did not feature the names Scott Vincent and Trevor Cone. The Hokies subsequently came in ninth out of 13 teams.

That was the challenge facing longtime coach Jay Hardwick this fall, as he attempted to replace not just the two All-Americans, but two *two-time* All-Americans. Vincent and Cone are two of the greatest players in Tech history. They rank No. 1 and No. 2 on the school's career scoring list.

Hardwick, who has seen a little of everything in his 33 seasons as the Hokies' coach, wasn't about to panic. He knew his talent level and his players' work ethic. Sure enough, by the end of fall, this young squad—with only one senior and three freshmen—gradually improved.

"We knew it was going to be a challenge," Hardwick said. "Scott and Trevor are two of the best players we've ever had. It was rough early on, but the one thing we did was to get better every tournament. The scores got better. The finishes were comparable, but we really started playing some good rounds and shooting some good scores, and other things that were more like what Virginia Tech has done."

The Hokies played in five tournaments this past fall, during which all nine players on the roster played at least six rounds. Six of them played at least nine rounds. That allowed Hardwick and longtime assistant Brian Sharp to get an evaluation on who could emerge as leaders for the upcoming spring season.

Joey Lane, a junior from Great Falls, Virginia, turned out to be one of those leaders.

Lane recorded three top-10 finishes, including two top-five results. After the VCU Shootout, in which he came in 46th, Lane's worst finish was 23rd, and he finished the fall with a scoring average of 71.9.

In his final three tournaments of the fall, Lane came in fourth, eighth, and fourth. He only shot one round worse than a 74 and shot four rounds of 69.

"Joey was a real bright spot for us this fall," Hardwick said. "He would always play 15 or 16 really good holes and then he'd hit a couple of shots that were so bad that it would turn into a big hole—and he might do it twice.

"He's now learned to put the ball in play and hit whatever he's got to hit off the tee to get the ball in play. His short game and putting have improved tremendously. He changed his putter and has become much better there. Another thing is maturity. He's one of our captains this year. Maturity in life led to maturity on the golf course. He believes in himself."

The Hokies also got some solid performances from guys Ryan Mondy and Drew Johnson. Mondy, a junior who has played little in the Hokies' lineup so far in his career, recorded a top-20 finish this fall, coming in 16th at the Bridgestone Golf Collegiate. He shot rounds of 69, 73, and 74. His stroke average of 74.5 ranked third on the team.

Johnson's stroke average of 74.59 was right behind Mondy. He concluded the fall ranked in the top 10 nationally in driving accuracy.

"Ryan's stroke average has improved five shots per round from last year," Hardwick said. "He's been under par a couple of times. He's more consistent. He's been more patient. He's a good driver of the ball. He hits it straight. He doesn't put himself in jeopardy much. The biggest difference is that his short game has improved. Now he's taking advantage of some opportunities.

"Drew continues to play solidly. He's a guy who is never going to shoot many big numbers. He doesn't take it deep. He doesn't have the length that some of the other guys do, but he keeps the ball in play. That's his strength."

Hardwick's top priority heading into the spring season was getting talented Maclain



Ryan Mondy had a top-20 finish this fall and is looking to be a regular in Tech's lineup this spring.

Huge back on track. Huge stunned the state golfing establishment this summer when he won the VSGA State Amateur, surviving two rounds of stroke play and five rounds of match play. In the 36-hole match play final, he knocked off Mark Lawrence, Jr., 4 and 3 to become the first Hokie to win the event since 1951.

The Hokies' lone senior was a little inconsistent this fall, though he recorded a seventh-place finish at the Primland

Collegiate Invitational held at the Primland Resort in Meadows of Dan, Virginia. His second-round 68 marked Tech's best round of the fall.

In his final eight fall rounds, however, he failed to break par, as he struggled off the tee.

"He certainly has all the talent," Hardwick said. "There's no question he'll rebound. He's a guy we need to play well. The guy has played every tournament since he's been here and he's a guy who can take it lower than anybody.

I think he'll be ready this spring. All of our guys have put a lot of time into playing and practicing because we've had good weather to do it."

Tech began its spring pursuit of a 10th consecutive NCAA regional appearance on Jan. 21 when it started practice and the Hokies need to make up some ground. Fortunately, they will have the schedule to do just that.

Most of Tech's six spring events include

Continued on page 44



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loaded fields. The ACC features three of the top six teams in the nation (according to Golfweek) heading into the spring season—Wake Forest (No. 3), Florida State (No. 4), and North Carolina (No. 6). Clemson, Duke, and Virginia are also in the top 25.

“I’ve always been of the mindset that you don’t get better playing people you can beat,” Hardwick said. “We’ve always played a strong schedule. There were a lot of teams that were above .500 last year, but their schedules were so weak that they weren’t ranked high enough to go [to an NCAA regional].

“But we’re not looking too far ahead. We knew this was going to be a rebuilding year. If we get our players playing to their capabilities, we can get back in the hunt.”

The Hokies may not be far off. As a team, they ranked 13th nationally in driving accuracy heading into the spring season. They also ranked fourth nationally in short game success.

Getting the ball in the fairway and getting it in the hole are the best attributes for a golf team. Those lead to success.

“We’re doing some good things,” Hardwick said. “I’m pleased with our progression. We just have to fine tune some things.”



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For the first time in the 103-year history of the tournament, the VSGA State Amateur will be held on a public golf course — the Pete Dye River Course of Virginia Tech.


The tournament, which features 132 players, will take place this summer on June 28-July 2, with a practice round scheduled for June 27. The practice round and the competition rounds, which include two rounds of stroke play before heading into match play, are open to the public and there is no admission.

Virginia Tech’s Maclain Huge is the defending champion of the event.

In addition to seeing their squad play better on the course toward the end of the fall, Hardwick and Sharp capped the fall in a fine way, signing a three-member recruiting class that may be the program’s best ever. The class consists of Tom Crow, the 2014 winner of the VSGA Junior Stroke Play Championship; Tanner Owens, the top-ranked player in Tennessee and the 2014 winner of the Future Masters; and Sirit Suwannarut, a Thailand

native who is the No. 1-ranked amateur in Southeast Asia.

Plus, the Pete Dye River Course is one of the top college courses in the U.S., with Golfweek ranking it No. 8. The Hokies’ practice facility at the course stands as one of the best in the nation.

So, the trend appears to be heading in the right direction for this program — both now and in the future. 



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