

inside

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# HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

## REACHING FOR IT ALL

A veritable Renaissance man, Brandon Fiala is a great swimmer and student, works in the community, and will be the university's first ACC student-athlete representative to the NCAA Convention next January



**WHAT'S INSIDE:**  
Defensive coordinator Bud Foster answers questions about his players as the Hokies head into spring practice



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## inside HOKIESPORTS

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## HOKIES CLOSE

## REGULAR SEASON WITH A BANG

The Virginia Tech men's basketball team sat at 13-13 overall and 5-8 in the ACC following a 65-49 loss at Miami on Feb. 17. A little more than two weeks later, the Hokies sported an 18-13 record, including a 10-8 mark in league play, as they entered the ACC Tournament.

Tech won its final five regular-season games and entered the conference tournament as the No. 6 seed after finishing in last place in each of the past four seasons. The Hokies closed the regular season with a 77-62 upset of then-No. 7 Miami at Virginia Tech Carillon Court, sending their lone senior, Shane Henry (center of photo), out a winner.

The win over Miami marked Tech's second over a top-10 team this season (then-No. 4 Virginia on Jan. 10) — a first for the program since 2007. The Hokies hadn't beaten two ranked teams in the same season since 2010.

Justin Bibbs led Tech in the upset with 19 points, while Zach LeDay — who was named honorable mention All-ACC by both the media and the league's head coaches following the regular season — added 16.

## THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

## EXPERIENCE

"Playing for Virginia Tech is a blessing. It's something you cannot take for granted. It helps me to be motivated to be the best I can and to be the best to my abilities. It's an amazing feeling to be able to represent Virginia Tech on a national stage. To be able to do what I love and do it for the school that I love is just awesome. It's real important to have the support of everyone. It's a factor and plays a big role in how the games go at home. It's always nice to have a great fan base."

**Justin Bibbs**  
Sophomore | Dayton Ohio

## The Donor File



### Lisa and John Rudd

**HOKIE CLUB LEVEL:**  
Hokie Benefactor

**CURRENTLY RESIDE:**  
Blacksburg, Virginia

**GRADUATION YEAR:**  
John (Class of 1986),  
Lisa (Class of 1989)

**FAMILY:**  
Will (son)

## Q&A

**Q: A Hokie is ...**

**A:** a servant leader in the spirit of *Ut Prosim* and any fan or supporter of Virginia Tech who strives to help other Hokies develop and perform as highly as possible.

**Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...**

**A:** of the spirit and friendliness of students, alumni, and fans, and how everyone pulls together when our Hokie Nation faces challenges.

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

**A:** We have great memories of so many bowl games and have been to every one in which the Hokies have participated since 1984 when we were both in the Marching Virginians. Each bowl was memorable in its own special way, win or lose.

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

**A:** One year of membership was offered at no cost when we graduated, so we said, 'Why not?' It just grew from there.

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

**A:** It was the school where we most felt at home because of the people, academics, and beautiful campus.

**Q: Do you have any game day superstitions? If so, what are they?**

**A:** A great tailgate is required, as is making it to our seats in time for "Enter Sandman" and doing the Hokie Pokie after the third quarter.

**Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.**

**A:** A beautiful mid-October home football game with crisp weather, changing leaves and blue skies combined with an afternoon start time that leaves plenty of time for tailgating and visiting with friends and family.

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

**A:** We usually try to do menu themes for food, often tying the food to the opponent's mascot or region. For example, Cajun for LSU, North Carolina barbecue, Tex-mex, or grilled Wahoo!

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

**A:** The excitement and community spirit generated by sports. Also, the opportunities created for student-athletes to compete at the highest level while developing leadership skills and furthering their education.

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

**A:** we enjoy supporting the scholarships for the student-athletes who work so hard at their sports as well as in academics.

**Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...**

**A:** all of them! (Lisa works in the athletics department and will not pick favorites!)

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

**A:** Bryan Randall, a great athlete and leader who helped bring the Hokies their first ACC championship.

**Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is ...**

**A:** a tie between Lisa Witherspoon (women's basketball); and Angela Tincher (softball). Both also were quiet leaders who helped their respective programs to unprecedented heights.

## 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.

### Monogram Club Board of Directors

**OFFICERS**

President  
Vice President  
Secretary  
Treasurer

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

**SPORTS REPRESENTATIVES**

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Spirit Squads  
Swim/Dive  
Tennis - Men  
Tennis - Women  
Volleyball  
Wrestling

Jon Hand ('98); hand323@yahoo.com  
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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); dawnccliffe15@yahoo.com  
Blair Nelson ('04); bleason19@cox.net  
Rodrigo Zampieri ('18); rsz95@vt.edu  
Whitney Davis ('10); whitd@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!

**GO HOKIES!**

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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/vtmonogram.club



**Tech and Maryland agree to football series**

Virginia Tech and the University of Maryland have agreed to a four-game football series starting in 2026, as announced by both schools on Feb. 17. That game will renew a series whose origins date back to 1919.

Each school will serve as the host for two games, with Lane Stadium serving as the site for contests in 2027 and 2029, while Maryland will be the home team for games in 2026 and 2028. The initial game of this series is slated for College Park, Maryland, on Sept. 19, 2026.

Maryland holds a 16-15 edge in the series, but Tech has won five of the past six meetings. The two teams last met Nov. 16, 2013, when Maryland won on the final play of a 27-24 overtime game at Lane Stadium.

Here are the future dates:

DATE	LOCATION
Sept. 19, 2026	College Park
Sept. 18, 2027	Blacksburg
Sept. 16, 2028	College Park
Sept. 15, 2029	Blacksburg

Maryland becomes the sixth Big Ten team on the Hokies' future slates, joining Penn State, Michigan, Purdue, Rutgers, and Wisconsin. Tech concluded a two-game series with Ohio State, another Big Ten program, this past season.

**All-ACC Academic Teams announced**

During the second week of February, the Atlantic Coast Conference announced its all-academic teams for several fall/winter sports, and Virginia Tech was well represented on those teams.

To be eligible for consideration for the team, a student-athlete must have earned a 3.00 grade-point average for the previous semester and maintained a 3.00 cumulative average during his/her undergraduate

academic career. Graduate students needed to maintain at least a 3.5 grade-point average for both the previous semester and for his/her graduate school career.

The following Tech student-athletes made the teams for their respective sports:

**Men's basketball**

- Jalen Hudson** (business)
- Devin Wilson** (political science)

**Women's basketball**

- Vanessa Panousis** (human development)
- Regan Magarity** (communication studies)

**Men's cross country**

- Thomas Curtin** (sociology)
- Darren Barlow** (mechanical engineering)
- Daniel Jaskowak** (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
- Brent Musselman** (human nutrition, foods and exercise)

**Women's cross country**

- Lauren Berman** (general engineering)
- Katie Kennedy** (public relations)

**Abigail Motley**

(international studies)

**Football**

- Chuck Clark** (human development)
- Augie Conte** (consumer studies)
- Brandon Facyson** (biology)
- Eric Gallo** (business)

**Men's soccer**

- Daniel Lauretano** (communication studies)

**Women's soccer**

- Jordan Coburn** (public relations)
- Ashley Meier** (psychology)
- Murielle Tiernan** (residential environmental design)

**Volleyball**

- Lindsey Owens** (biology)
- Rhegan Mitchell** (human nutrition, foods and exercise)

Meier made the team all four years of her career, while Tiernan, Coburn, Owens, and Lauretano each made it for the third straight year. Barlow, Clark, Jaskowak, Panousis, and Wilson made the squad for a second consecutive time. 



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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

**Williams' rebuilding job  
surprisingly well ahead of schedule**

It's the political season, as most of you probably have surmised from the constant barrage of advertising, debates and news stories filling the airwaves.

But in Blacksburg, a worthy candidate refused to do any campaigning.

"I won't win coach of the year," Virginia Tech basketball coach Buzz Williams said shortly after his team's 64-61 victory over Pittsburgh. "I'm not political enough."

Politics aside, Williams' platform certainly merited votes for the ACC Coach of the Year award. The polls closed and he finished behind Miami's Jim Larranaga, though he probably picked up a few swing voters after the Hokies won their final five regular-season games.

No one expected Williams to turn the Hokies' fortunes in just the second year of his tenure. Yet Tech, picked to finish 14th by media members in the league's preseason poll, registered a winning season overall, won 10 ACC games and served as the sixth seed in the league tournament.

This was a program that won eight league games combined the three previous seasons and finished in last place all three years.

"I don't know that anybody could have predicted this," Williams said.

Much of the Hokies' transformation is twofold. First, it came about because of their talent. Fans knew Seth Allen possessed the ability to be a quality ACC player, but who pegged Zach LeDay as nearly a double-double guy? Who foresaw Justin Bibbs as a 3-point specialist? Who expected three freshmen to contribute more than 20 points and 10 rebounds per game?

Williams and his staff cobbled together a rather interesting group. Tech's roster features two transfers (Allen and LeDay), two junior college transfers (Shane Henry and Johnny Hamilton), three guys whom he didn't recruit (Bibbs, Jalen Hudson and Devin Wilson), and a couple of walk-ons, including one (Matt Galloway) who was a manager last year.

"It's a collection of scraps all kind of thrown together and we've learned how to make it into a meal," Williams said. "I don't know that anybody in the mix could have thought this would happen."

"What has been as good as I've ever seen, particularly as a head coach, is the spirit and love that they have for one another and how they play for one another. ... That may not

happen again in my career – to be able to get the recipe exactly the way that it is. It's been very fulfilling and it's been a lot of fun. I'm humbled and thankful for it all.

Therein lies the second reason behind Tech's transformation – Williams and his staff and their role in getting this collection to mesh into a cohesive and functioning team. They got the players to buy into their philosophy and what they wanted to accomplish.

That usually takes time. Most coaches say at least four years. It took Williams and his staff less than half that time.

Together, the Hokies became the third team in ACC history to win at least eight more conference games than the previous season.

"I think the culture that Coach is trying to instill in us is really coming to light," Wilson said. "Everyone has really bought in. We're two feet in. I think that's contributing to us being a lot better than we've been the last two years."

Now, the Hokies have been fortunate. Seven of their conference wins were by seven points or less. They won five of those by four points or less.

They also took advantage of the bottom part of the league. Tech went 6-0 against the bottom five teams in the ACC standings.

"All of this is so fragile," Williams admitted. "You can say, 'Well if you guys had beat Notre Dame [an 83-81 loss], or Seth, if you had made that layup against Syracuse with under 1:40 left when you were up seven [a 68-60 overtime defeat], man, what would that be?'"

"Yes, I know. I get all that, but we also were 5-2 in two-possession games or less and nobody has played in more in this league. We could also be 2-5. It's [the margin of error] just so razor thin."

Williams knows that the Hokies haven't arrived yet. They still need to climb the mountain. After all, they went 2-6 in the regular season against ACC teams that finished ahead of them in the standings. They also need to overcome the program's past, one with only two NCAA Tournament appearances in three decades.

But at least they can see the mountain now.

The polls have closed for this basketball season, but there will be another election next season. Williams and the Hokies appear well positioned to be among the frontrunners.



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behind the mic | with Jon Laaser

# 'Dad'

I am sure that, at this point, you have noticed that I have used this space in my first year to allow you to get to know me. I have held many jobs in the past in which I have allowed my on-air persona to represent me. In Blacksburg, I feel comfortable sharing more of myself publicly—and your reciprocation of that openness has been exceptionally gratifying.

In that spirit, I am at ease informing you that this past month has been an exciting one professionally, but a difficult one personally.

You may recall my column recounting my love of college basketball and my dreams within the game. The Hokies played more one- or two-possession games than any other team in the conference. That means late-game drama. That equates to outstanding games to broadcast. That resulted in me getting to live my dream. It allowed me to call relevant games at the highest level to a passionate listening audience.

That listening audience is expanding by the game, but has never failed to include my parents, Mark and Debbie. They tune in back in Chanhassen, Minnesota and have mastered

syncing our radio broadcast to the television feed. My phone unfailingly will buzz within a few minutes of the final horn.

*Great game. Great broadcast. We enjoyed it. Travel safe. Love, Dad.*

That was a text message from my dad two minutes after the win over Wake Forest.

*Holy Cow! What a win!! Glad for all of you. Great broadcast, too!!*

That was my mom's message immediately following the win over Florida State on Feb 20.

I get caught up in the moments, and my performance in them. Through all my stops, I've always had the luxury of receiving support, companionship, and love from my parents without the burden of reciprocating. They provide it selflessly. They always have. It has been so thoroughly consistent through the years that I have, at times, taken it for granted. In moments of strength, I could "fly solo" with the knowledge that they were always there if I crashed—financial and emotional support never more than a phone call away when I did.

That safety net has allowed me to take chances I never would. It has allowed me to live what I was taught—dream big, fall hard,

try again. It has connected me back home from every corner of the country. It has expanded our "family" to remote outposts that none of us had ever heard of when the journey started. Most importantly, it has provided comfort.

Comfort leads to confidence for me. Both have been shaken in the past few weeks.

My dad is sick.

It's hard to write that. It's hard to think about that. He is 65, but has mostly aged outside my line of sight. Absence has a way of keeping things you look upon fondly the same, even if they aren't. Unfortunately, this news has forced me to accept that things have changed—my parents have aged.

"If you can't come home for Christmas, then we will bring Christmas to you," was my dad's reaction to the news that the Hokies were headed to Shreveport, Louisiana for the holidays.

"No, it will be a fun adventure. We're kind of bored with Christmas in Minnesota anyway," my mom insisted when I said it wasn't worth the trouble.

Not surprising, they flew to Dallas and drove to the Independence Bowl. They are now proud Hokies. It also wasn't surprising when my dad mentioned he was experiencing some back pain. He has been a diabetic since he was in his 20s. Various ailments were par for the course through the years. He'd never complain about them much, but I always knew they were there. I looked past that this might be a symptom of something larger.

My dad has endured trauma in his life, the kind that has emotionally crippled many. He was not immune to it and made plenty of mistakes while working past the damage. However, he has used those missteps to help others. Through Faithful & True Ministries, he has impacted countless lives while counseling, writing, and speaking throughout the world. He uses his own experience as a compass.

He appreciates that many whom he has counseled consider him in a hero. However, I believe his fulfillment comes from knowing that he is mine.

I am a mirror of him. I have always known that. Our minds work differently than people around us. I have always known that, too. Not better or worse, just different. We seek immediate gratification, action, and excitement. We are easily bored, prone to low-level depression, and illustrate addictive tendencies.

But we are also quick-witted, self-deprecating, and empathetic. We recognize emotions in others that sometimes they don't see. We are eager to relate to them because doing so helps them—and helps us.

In short, he's the only one in the world who truly understands me. He considers my broadcasts my sermons and cites God's plan for my opportunity to speak to so many so frequently. I'm coming around to that way of thinking.

In recent years, my mom has joined the ministry. They now form a dynamic tandem in the interest of counseling couples and families. My mom is equally remarkable from a strength perspective. She has stood by my dad through all the years—most good, some bad. I have watched him transform from a

fiercely independent person who didn't feel understood to someone who openly shares his life. She provides that balance for him. She provides it for the rest of the family as well.

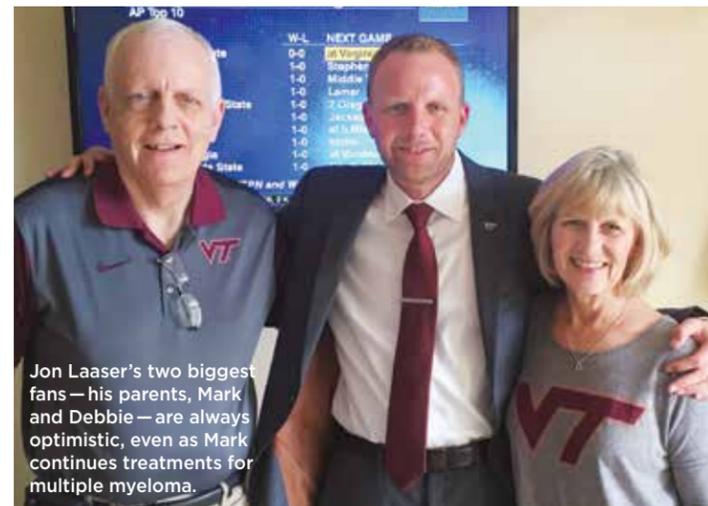
In college, my dad and I drove back and forth from Phoenix to Minneapolis ... twice! We blew a tire together in Butte, Montana on the way to my first affiliated baseball job in Yakima, Washington. We once traded in two cars at the same time because I wasn't so good at getting the oil changed on either. He thinks I should have been in the big leagues years ago. He's been willing to foot the bill while I

The message couldn't have been any more on target. That collage now hangs above my dad's favorite chair at their house in Chanhassen. My brother, Ben, jokingly calls it their shrine to me.

When I sent it, I simply thought it was a thoughtful Christmas gift. It has more meaning to me now. I like to think that Blacksburg is watching over him while he receives treatment for multiple myeloma. The picture was taken during the Ohio State game. They were in attendance, of course, and I was above the crowd in the broadcast booth for the first time. In a new position, one I hadn't held before, watching over them. I like that the picture will remind them of that.

My dad's cancer is highly treatable and he has adopted the mantra, "We're going to kick this thing in the butt!" We are approaching it optimistically and as a team.

My mom, as she always has, balances the expectations with the new reality—for all of us. I have come to terms with the short-term reality of lack of travel and a reduced schedule. A long-term version without their collective support is not one I can yet imagine, but I have been forced to think about it for the first time in my life and that, in and of itself, is difficult.



Jon Laaser's two biggest fans—his parents, Mark and Debbie—are always optimistic, even as Mark continues treatments for multiple myeloma.

wasn't—and drive the miles necessary to get here. A care package from my mom would usually arrive shortly after we would.

I took the hard road in the industry. I didn't in life.

For Christmas, I collected my press credentials from my first football season at Tech and arranged them under a panoramic of Lane Stadium. I had Frank Beamer sign a note for my parents and included that as well.

"Thanks for getting this guy to Tech," the note from Beamer said.

My dad likes to quickly turn the attention back to Tech athletics when I infer about treatment. I plan on doing that as well, with the same level of enthusiasm I hope you have come to expect.

But first, I will go home, grateful that my new role comes with a gap in the schedule at the perfect time. I appreciate your understanding my periodic absence in the months to come and look forward to exciting times ahead. Both for the Hokies and for my dad—an avid fan ... of me and y'all.

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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](mailto: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: What were your thoughts on the Tennessee violations? Seems like quite a few, but that's not surprising for a program from the SEC. Sincerely, Lauren in Christiansburg.**

**TP:** "Well, the 18 violations initially reported encompassed eight different sports, with four involving the football program. All 18 were Level III violations. These are violations that are deemed 'isolated or limited in nature; provide no more than a minimal recruiting, competitive or other advantage; and do not include more than a minimal impermissible benefit.' It is the next-to-lowest of the four levels when ranking the seriousness of any offense.

"Two of the four football violations involved publicity for recruits. A recruit and his family walked into the basketball arena behind head coach Butch Jones, who was ahead of the group. The crowd cheered when he entered, but UT acknowledged that the cheering could have inadvertently drawn attention to the recruit. The other violation involved a mid-year enrollee posting a photo on Twitter of himself and a recruit on an official visit.

"Normal corrective actions in situations like these would include a plan to reduce/eliminate the chance of a similar future occurrence, and rules education provided by

the athletics department compliance office staff to the relevant parties."

**Q: There seem to be a lot of NCAA rules cases in the news these days. How many schools are being investigated by the NCAA? I'd be curious to know. Thanks, Tom in Christiansburg.**

**TP:** "I'm not sure the current number, but I do know that, at this point last year, the NCAA was investigating 20 schools for academic misconduct alone, including 18 Division I schools and one each in Division II and Division III. The NCAA usually declines to name the schools that it is investigating, though cases at high-profile schools and at public universities are much more likely to quickly make it into the media (e.g. Louisville, Ole Miss, North Carolina)."

**Q: How long do you think it will take the NCAA to investigate the ugly situation at Louisville? It seems like there are a lot of people involved and I'm not sure how many people the NCAA has on this particular case. Thanks for the insight. Bruce in Blacksburg.**

**TP:** "There really is no way to know how long an investigation will take place, though the average investigation takes less than a

year. Complicated cases take longer, as I expect this one might. We could very well have the same conversation a year from now and not have any answers.

"The process involves more than conducting interviews. It involves gathering computer data and phone records and reviewing school documents. All this information needs to be collected from a four-year period (2010-14). So you're talking about interviewing 40 or 50 players, various assistant coaches, managers and support staff members, while also going through four years of phone records, emails, recruiting logs, compliance files, etc. That takes time.

"If there is evidence of wrongdoing, the NCAA will send Louisville a notice of allegations, which details the rules allegedly broken and provides the supporting evidence. As we've stated in other pieces, the school can agree to the allegations and proceed to the NCAA Committee on Infractions in an expedited manner, or the school may file a response within 90 days (with extensions often permitted). The Committee on Infractions then reviews the response and schedules a hearing, with a final report generally issued two to four months later. The university then has 15 days to appeal, if it so chooses, and the length of the appellate process is extremely variable." 

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# KELLY WILLIFORD

**WOMEN'S TENNIS**  
Basking Ridge, New Jersey  
by Jimmy Robertson

**Kelly Williford**, a standout on the women's tennis team, graduates this summer with a degree in economics and a minor in communication studies. She hopes to work in a corporate office or perhaps with a bank in the future.

**Q: Why did you decide to pursue a degree in economics?**

**KW:** "I was up in the air. I really liked meteorology, but I thought it would be too narrow of a major even though one of my teammates is doing it and seems to enjoy it. Later on, I was thinking of doing marketing. Then I started on the business track and I enjoyed it. When it came time to decide, I liked economics and decided to pursue it. I like that it's kind of vague. It's specific sometimes, but a lot of the time, it's up to your interpretation. It goes both ways and I've been enjoying that. Then, being able to project things and looking at the future and having an idea of what may happen is interesting."

**Q: What's been the toughest part of pursuing this degree?**

**KW:** "Balancing athletics and academics is tough, but the toughest part for me has been the scheduling. A lot of classes are on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We have lifting in the morning and then I have two classes, practice, and then another class. It's been difficult to balance that and find time to go to review sessions when you have questions or to see a professor during office hours. Otherwise, it's just keeping up with the material, knowing the formulas, and applying those. But that's obvious. That's part of the major."

**Q: You haven't done an internship, but you did go to the Dominican Republic as part of a leadership course at Virginia Tech. What did you learn from that experience?**

**KW:** "I learned so much. I learned about myself and obviously a different country. I've been to Europe, but there are so many things they take for granted. When I came back, it was just crazy to see the difference between a first-world and a developing country. So much is taken for granted and some kids are never going to have what you have."

"When we went on one of our trips to Orlando [for tennis], there are all these things, like Disney World. But for the kids there [in the Dominican Republic], a fun day for them is playing baseball. They don't have Disney, but they're still having fun. There is still a smile on their faces. I could go on for hours about that trip, but it was a great experience."

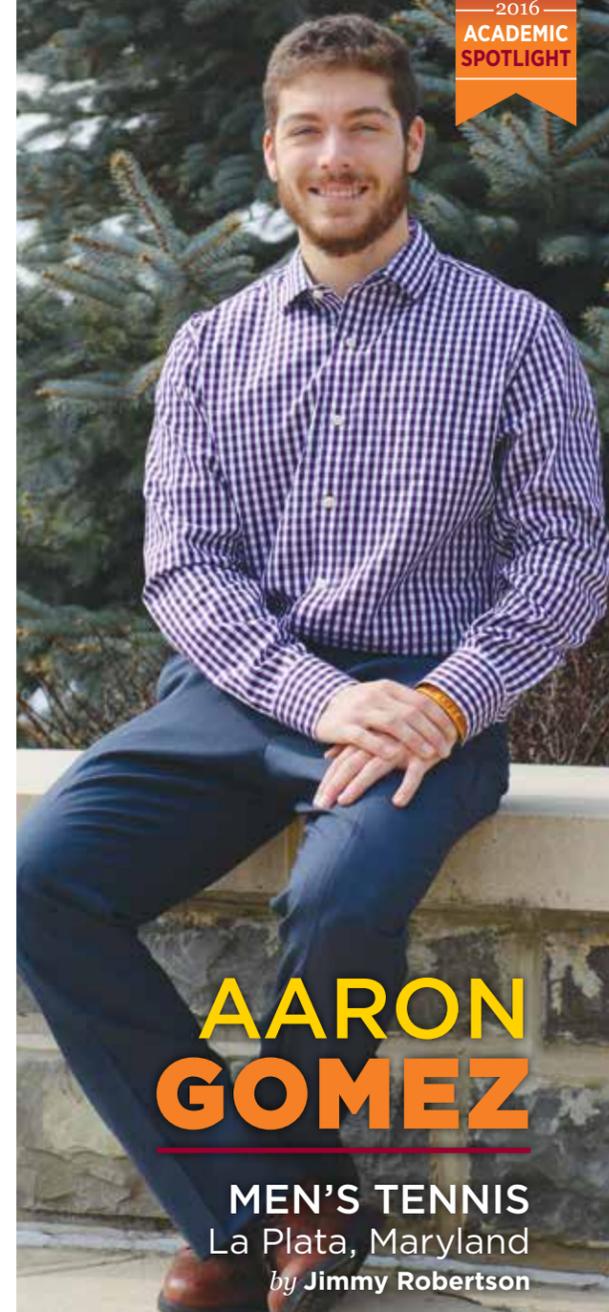
**Q: What are your future plans?**

**KW:** "I'll walk [at graduation] in May, but I won't finish all my coursework until this summer because I also want to get a minor in communication studies. So I'll do that and then start deciding on my future plans."

"My dream job would be managing a company because I think I'd be good at that. I think I have that type of personality and skill. I think I'd be good with that whole aspect of leading a group."

"I could do a lot of things. I'm flexible. I think I have a lot of things that I haven't tapped into yet. I may try to do an internship while playing professionally. I may do grad school, but I think I'll wait for a few years. I could get interested into banking. I think money is cool — where it goes and things of that nature."

"I talked to a few companies at a recent Career Fair, just trying to see what interests me, and I received a lot of good feedback. I have a lot of options and it's just a matter of narrowing it down to the one that is best for me." 



# AARON GOMEZ

**MEN'S TENNIS**  
La Plata, Maryland  
by Jimmy Robertson

**Aaron Gomez**, a men's tennis player, graduates in May with a degree in psychology and he plans to put that to use as a coach. He has a job lined up teaching tennis at an academy in Northern Virginia when he graduates.

**Q: Why did you decide to pursue a degree in psychology?**

**AG:** "I started out in business, but I wasn't successful in it. I didn't think getting C's as final grades was good and I was struggling. I thought I should switch because I didn't like it and didn't want to do it any more. So I switched to psychology. I knew I wanted to do something in coaching and I thought this would be a good way to go, especially if I wanted to do sport psychology in the future."

**Q: What do you like about psychology?**

**AG:** "I like it because it's very dynamic in terms of how individuals react to the environment, what our initial responses are in certain situations. Not only that, it helps you look at different situations or contexts as a system. You understand how things work. You put things together and solve problems in a systematic approach. I think psychology is a well-rounded topic to learn. As I advance in the program, I'm learning more about child development and theories. There is a lot to it."

**Q: You mentioned coaching. Is that part of your future plan?**

**AG:** "Yes, I'm currently employed at an academy [Four-Star Tennis Academy in Merrifield, Virginia] at which I used to train at and have been offered a job — I already have a position, but I'll work full time when I graduate. I get to work with younger individuals to develop them and endorse them to coaches at schools they hope to attend, like here or wherever else they might want to go."

**Q: Was there a turning point when you decided to go down this road?**

**AG:** "In the summer after my sophomore year, I really learned a lot in terms of how to work with kids and I learned a lot about the sport. I learn more and more as I go. I've learned a lot the past three years in terms of experiencing things. I feel like my experiences could change and help other people in whatever they want to do. I believe my having played will help a lot of people."

**Q: Why do you think you'll like coaching?**

**AG:** "Well, I've been doing it for three years [in the offseason], waking up at 5 a.m. to make the drive and get there by 7. Every time I wake up, I'm so excited to go. To me, it's a worthwhile relationship to serve someone else. It's about having meaningful connections with other people. It's meaningful to me. I really do try to help people in whatever they want to do on and off the court. Tennis is not just about hitting a ball. I try to have a relationship with my students, and to me, that's the best part about coaching. Then watching them grow as an individual, how they develop as a player — I really want to do something like that." 

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## QUINTET OF TECH FEMALE STUDENT-ATHLETES HONORED BY ACC

*The Tech athletics department has shown a commitment to the development of female student-athletes — of which upcoming fundraisers for women's sports are the latest examples*

*by Jimmy Robertson*

Five Virginia Tech female student-athletes received prestigious academic-related recognition from the ACC in mid-February—which should come as no surprise, given the department's comprehensive commitment to its student-athletes, but in particular, to meeting all Title IX standards, which require that men and women be provided equitable opportunities in sports.

The latest example of that commitment—which comes in the form of scholarship dollars, facilities, equipment, nutrition, medical care, tutoring, and more—can be found on hokiesports.com, as the athletics department started an auction of Virginia Tech Fan Experience packages, along with Hokie memorabilia and gear.

Some of the items up for bid include:

- A trip for two to the 2017 ACC Women's Basketball Tournament in Greensboro, North Carolina
- Honorary Coach for the Day—an opportunity to join the team of your choosing for pregame film, on-field warm ups, the pregame speech and during the national anthem.
- Trip for two to Puerto Rico with the Virginia Tech volleyball team, which will be Aug. 31-Sept. 4
- Golf with Jon Laaser and Andrew Allegretta at the Pete Dye River Course

- Lunch with Virginia Tech Director of Athletics Whit Babcock and Hokie All-American Kevin Jones

- Enter Sandman Spirit Event of a Lifetime—experience the football pregame from a Virginia Tech cheerleader's point of view, including the Hokie Walk, "Enter Sandman" team entrance and "Let's Go Hokies" pregame cheer.

In late April, the department will hold its first annual "She Is" women's sports luncheon. Attendees will enjoy lunch with Hokie student-athletes and head coaches of Tech women's sports teams while experiencing an exclusive introduction to Tech's new Nike uniforms and receiving behind-the-scenes access.

All proceeds from the auction and the luncheon go toward the benefit of women's sports.

"I think they are great ideas," said former Tech softball player Kylie McGoldrick, one of three recipients of the ACC's Weaver-James-Corrigan Award. "It's one thing to study the issue of women in sports, but now you're seeing women being hired by professional teams for various roles. I hope that continues to happen. I think Virginia Tech has always put in the time and resources to prepare us for those types of roles and this luncheon is another example of that."

McGoldrick, along with Ashley Meier and Carol Kahoun, were among just 43 recipients in the ACC to be honored with the Weaver-James-Corrigan Award by league commissioner John Swofford. The award consists of a postgraduate scholarship in the amount of \$5,000 to be applied toward graduate school education once undergraduate requirements are completed. Those honored have performed with distinction in both the classroom and their respective sports, while demonstrating exemplary conduct in the community.

McGoldrick and Kahoun graduated last May, while Meier will graduate this May.

McGoldrick, a three-time All-ACC selection and a four-time member of the All-ACC Academic Softball Team, received an undergraduate degree in marketing management, with a concentration in professional sales. She currently works in Tech's Hokie Club office, helping to raise money for Tech athletics while pursuing a master's degree in sport management, with a concentration in administration, from Liberty University.

"There are a lot of opportunities in sports—coaching, marketing, fundraising," she said. "I love working in it, and I hope that as I climb the ladder, I'll be presented with more opportunities."

Meier wrapped up her senior season on the pitch this past fall. She earned All-ACC honors in each of her four years and departs as the Hokies' second-leading scorer (73 points) and second in career goals (30). She made the ACC's All-Academic Women's Soccer Team each of her final three seasons.

Meier, from Strongsville, Ohio, is pursuing a degree in human development. She currently works as an undergraduate researcher in the Department of Human Development at Tech. She has applied to several graduate programs and plans on getting her master's degree in occupational therapy.

"I shadowed three occupational therapists and one of those shadowing experiences was for a whole semester (144 hours) at Carilion Clinic in Radford," Meier said. "I have known for a long time that I want to help others as my occupation and I am very excited to move onto this next stage of my life."

Kahoun played on the women's tennis team for three seasons before using her final season to be a student assistant coach. That freed her to finish coursework on two degrees—human nutrition, foods and exercise and psychology. The Visp, Switzerland native now attends graduate school in Switzerland and is pursuing a master's of advanced studies in sports administration and technology.

Two other former Tech athletes, Morgan Conklin and Jordan Coburn, were granted internships as part of the ACC Futures Internship Program. The conference partially funds 10-month internships and each school nominates three student-athletes for one of seven positions. Those chosen will get to intern with any of four organizations—the league office, FOX Sports South, Sun Sports, or ESPN.

Both Coburn and Conklin landed internships with Fox Sports Florida, though at offices in different cities. Coburn, from Ellicott City, Maryland, will be in Fort Lauderdale and working in the marketing department. She graduates in May with a degree in public relations and minors in business leadership and marketing.

"As someone who is passionate about pursuing a career in the sports industry, it was a no brainer for me to accept the offer," Coburn said. "I think this internship will provide a great stepping stone for me as I enter the sports industry. After my internship with FOX Sports Florida comes to an end, I hope to have gained the skills needed to succeed in a fast-paced environment, as well as how to effectively market a sports brand."

Conklin, who graduates in May with a degree in communication studies, will be in Orlando, helping to produce the network's

"inside the team" shows. The network covers six professional teams in Florida—the Miami Heat, the Orlando Magic, the Tampa Bay Rays, the Miami Marlins, the Tampa Bay Lightning, and the Florida Panthers. The aspiring broadcaster from Midlothian, Virginia worked on many of Tech's ESPN3 Olympic sports broadcasts the past two years, as well as a sideline reporter for the Hokies' spring football game last April. She hopes to get some on-air experience during this internship as well.

"I knew I wanted to work with a network at some point to see what it was like and this internship is giving me that opportunity, which is awesome," Conklin said. "I have really only worked in collegiate sports, so this will open my eyes to more of the professional sports world and behind the scenes of all of it. As for after this internship, I'm hoping it can lead to a full-time job of some sort in the field of sports broadcasting."

Graduate school, master's degrees, lofty plans—that is what administrators like to hear in regards to their athletes. These young women have placed themselves in positions for success in their future careers.

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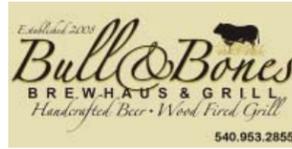
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# OBJECTIVES CLEAR

## FOR TECH 'D' *This Spring*

*After a lot of juggling last season, particularly in the secondary, defensive coordinator*

*Bud Foster wants to get his personnel set in the proper places this spring in hopes for more consistent play*

*by Jimmy Robertson*

**VIRGINIA TECH'S** traditionally strong defense suffered a bit of a setback last season, as the Hokies incurred injuries to key players and inconsistency from others. As a result, Bud Foster's unit ranked 75th nationally in rushing defense (180.7 ypg) and 59th in scoring defense (26.3 ppg). The Hokies did not rank in the top 15 nationally in any category related to defense.

Foster will be working for a new head coach now, as Justin Fuente took over for the retired Frank Beamer. He'll also be working with two new assistant coaches, with Galen Scott coaching the safeties, whip linebackers and nickel defensive backs and Brian Mitchell coaching the corners. Together, they hope to move players into the proper spots and bring consistency to production overall, with the hope of returning Tech's defense to its customary level.

Foster sat down and answered some questions a couple of weeks before spring practice started:

**Q: How would you assess your unit's play last season?**

**BF:** "We had some injuries up front to guys whom we were counting on from the previous year. We lost two big-time football players in the back end early in the season — C.J. Reavis (university suspension) and Kendall Fuller (knee injury). That put us in a situation where we were playing a bunch of freshmen and a lot of new guys. We played them in different spots week after week, but never got any continuity out of it. We went week to week to week, but really didn't run our defense — at least as far as what we like to run. We just played man-free [coverage] and brought a little pressure that way — and that was about it. We were not consistently good. That was the bottom line."

**Q: After the bowl game, you mentioned getting the secondary squared away as one of your top offseason priorities. Is that still a priority and how do you envision the pieces fitting?**

**BF:** "No question, that's going to be critical for us. We want to get people in spots, so we can get back to having a good foundation. I want to be able to make adjustments without the kids looking at me like I have three heads. We need to get the right people in the right spots in our secondary."

"You take a guy like Adonis Alexander. He played safety, he played rover, and he played corner. You take a guy like Chuck Clark. He played safety, he played corner, he played nickel, and he played rover. In the last game, Donovan Riley played corner all year, but then he's starting at safety. We were just trying to make it work from week to week and we didn't have enough consistency."

"Right now, going into spring ball, Chuck Clark is our free safety. We're looking at Terrell Edmunds at rover, with Greg Stroman and Adonis Alexander as our corners and then we should get Brandon Facyson back for next fall. Anthony Shegog would be at our whip and Mook Reynolds would be our nickel guy. That's kind of our thought process going into spring ball."

*Continued on page 22*



# OBJECTIVES CLEAR

Continued from page 21

**Q: What are some other areas of concern as the Hokies head into spring practice?**

**BF:** “The other big concern is our defensive end positions. Right now, we have Ken Ekanem and we’re going to keep Vinny Mihota at end. Seth Dooley is one of our top backups, but he’s out for the spring, so you have two guys with experience. After that, you have four freshmen—three of whom we redshirted [Darius Fullwood, Houshun Gaines, and Trevon Hill] and one who came in this January [Jimmie Taylor IV]. We need to grow up in those spots in a hurry.”

“We did very little with the ones we redshirted last fall. You saw some flashes that they could do some things, but they’re so raw. They didn’t understand the technique that they were playing and we didn’t scrimmage as much last year. We didn’t do a lot of middle drills with those guys, as we’ve done in the past. We needed that practice time for other areas. You saw flashes from those guys, but there just isn’t enough information on them. That’s going to be a key position for us as far as our development as a defense.”

**Q: At least at defensive tackle, you have some depth, with Nigel Williams, Woody Baron and Steve Sobczak returning. Also, you’re adding Ricky Walker and Tim Settle to the mix after**

**redshirt seasons. How excited are you to see them?**

**BF:** “Ricky played quite a bit for us as a freshman [in 2014]. If he can get back and play with twitch, hopefully he’ll be better. He has some experience. He’s a big kid and has the ability to move.”

“Tim is a guy who has dropped some weight. He has a lot of ability, but we have to make sure he sustains those abilities and not just become a two- or three-play guy who is then done. We need to continue to work on his conditioning so he can play at a high level. Even in our early morning workouts, I see a guy with a lot of ability, but he needs to do it all the time. He’s a big kid who can move his feet and has a lot of potential. I look forward to the spring and watching him learn and grow.”

**Q: A guy who played more as the season went along last fall was Anthony Shegog. How would you assess his play and where does he fit in this defense?**

**BF:** “We got him involved more as the season went along. He has a fluid body and can move. We got him in there more because he can play in space a little better than some of the others. He can do some things from a defensive back standpoint, but you can also get him closer to the ball and he has some abilities.”

“We’re looking to play him as our whip and he could do some other things. He could be a rover or he could be a backer. He’ll probably play our ‘bandit’ in our 30 package [three defensive linemen]. Derek Di Nardo did a nice job in that package a couple of years ago. The

kid [Shegog] is versatile and I like what he’s about. He’s a good football player.”

**Q: Tremaine Edmunds also received a lot of playing time toward the end of the season, including the start he received in the bowl game. How did he play and do you envision keeping him at backer?**



Tremaine Edmunds

**BF:** “We’re going to keep him at backer. We don’t have a lot of options there. At mike linebacker, we’ll have Andrew [Motuapuaka], with Carson Lydon backing him up. Sean Huelskamp is going to be out [with an injury]. Then at backer, we’ll have Tremaine. He played pretty well in the bowl game. He’s a big kid, he can run, and he can blitz. The one area where he can improve is in coverage and I think he will be better there because of his length. Then we’ve got Jamieon Moss backing him up. We don’t have a lot of depth at those two spots.”

“But I don’t see us moving Tremaine right now. Maybe in another year, if he’s 250 or 260 pounds, we would look at that. Right now, he’s staying at 235 and we’ll keep him at backer.”

**Q: From an overall perspective, what do you hope to get accomplished with the defense this spring?**

**BF:** “Well, in addition to getting our personnel set, we need to get our defense fundamentally sound again. We gave up too many big plays last year. Our rushing defense ... we have to get better at that. We’ve been pretty good at that over the years. We’ve been consistently good at stopping the run and making offenses one-dimensional, but we gave up too many big plays last year and we’ve have to be better there. We have to be gap sound and make sure our perimeter fits are good. Those things really cost us a couple of games. They cost us the East Carolina game and the Pitt game.”

“So we have to be fundamentally sound, but part of that gets back to guys playing the

same position and getting the same reads. They need to be consistent in what they’re seeing. It doesn’t need to be a situation where, one week, they’re here, and the next week, they’re somewhere else. You can’t get consistently good that way. That’s not to say we’re not going to move someone around, but you can’t just jump around and expect guys on the perimeter of the defense to perform soundly. You can’t be a good corner if you’ve been getting reps at safety and you can’t be a good safety if you’ve been getting reps at corner. That’s the bottom line. We’ve got to get back to fundamentals and being sound in our fits.”

**Q: You’re working with two new coaches in Galen Scott and Brian Mitchell. How has that transition been working out?**

**BF:** “It’s been going well. Brian is going to coach the corners and Galen is going to coach the free safeties, rovers, whip linebackers, and the nickel spot. Cody Grimm is going to help him. We just brought Brian aboard and I’m really excited about him. I like his demeanor and his experience. He’s been at BYU and Texas Tech; he’s been in the Big 12, with the spread offenses and things of that nature. He’s been a coordinator. I think he brings a wealth of knowledge and experience—more so than we’ve ever had in the back end coming to us.”

“The new staff has gotten along very well and interacted well on and off the field. We have a great chemistry and I’m looking forward to working together during spring ball.”

**Q: Following Coach Fuente’s hiring, you said that you looked forward to working with him and his staff because you thought that what they did offensively could help you as a defensive coordinator. Isn’t that right?**

**BF:** “No doubt. Their offensive staff ... those guys have a lot of experience just in different things. I know one thing that they like to do—and we haven’t done it yet—is a self-evaluation. They look at us and we look at them. We give out pluses and minuses. We’re always trying to grow, learn, tweak, and stay ahead of the posse, so to speak. You’re always trying to be cutting edge—or at least be on par with what’s going on with today’s football.”

“I’ve always thought we have played pretty good defense over the years, but we’ve spent a lot of time talking to defensive coaches. We need to spend time talking to offensive guys. That’s where Justin and his thought process comes in. He wants us to know what the offense is giving away, so we can see what can make them better and I’m excited about that. You also have to have thick skin because you might get your feelings hurt, but that’s part of it. It’s going to be interesting to share ideas and cross-reference each other. They’ve seen a lot of things defensively and we’ve seen a lot of things offensively over the years. It’ll be good to pick each other’s brains.”

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Virginia Tech's Joey Dance wasn't afraid of the spotlight, as he beat NC State's Sean Fausz for his second ACC title at 125 pounds.



## DANCE, ZAVATSKY CLAIM TITLES AT ACC WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

*Joey Dance and Zack Zavatsky won the 125- and 184-pound weight classes, respectively, and the Hokies finished in second place behind NC State*

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech and NC State wrestling programs are putting together a nice little rivalry these days. The Hokies beat the Wolfpack during the regular season to win the ACC's dual meet crown, but the Wolfpack got revenge at the ACC Championships.

Despite getting seven guys into the finals of their respective weight classes, the Hokies couldn't win enough of those matches and finished second behind the Wolfpack at the league's main wrestling event, which was held March 6 at John Paul Jones Arena in Charlottesville.

The Wolfpack totaled 90 points, while the Hokies finished with 81.5. North Carolina came in a distant third with 56.5.

"Last year, we went to Pitt and stunk it up, but we didn't stink it up today," Dresser said following the final match. "We got beat by a very good team that had a hot, hot day.

There is a reason they were ranked second in the nation. I think we've got a lot to build on going forward. We're not going to hang our head on this performance. I thought we did some really good things."

Tech and NC State were matched in the finals of five weight classes. The Hokies' Joey Dance got things started off on a good note for Tech, beating the Wolfpack's Sean Fausz 5-1 at 125 pounds. Dance went into the tournament as the top seed at this weight class.

But Tech only won one of the remaining four matchups between the two schools. The Hokies' Solomon Chishko fell 3-2 to the Wolfpack's Kevin Jack at 141 pounds. Chishko and Tech's coaches thought he had gotten a late takedown, but the officials didn't grant it. Dresser challenged the ruling and the officials reviewed it, but they agreed not to award the takedown.

At 157 pounds, NC State's Thomas Gantt, the top seed, got a late takedown and beat the Hokies' Nick Brascetta 3-1. At heavyweight, the Hokies' Ty Walz lost 5-2 to two-time defending national champion Nick Gwiazdowski, who ranks as the best heavyweight in the country.

"When you get this far down the line, there are so many close matches," Dresser said. "They just won the close matches."

Tech's only other win in the finals came from redshirt freshman Zack Zavatsky, who beat the Wolfpack's Pete Renda 5-2 to win the ACC title at 184 pounds. Zavatsky controlled the match from the start, earning praise from Dresser.

"Zavatsky was the man today," Dresser said. "He's a super freshman. He's just keeps getting better and better. When you go out and try to score points the whole match,

good things happen. The last time he wrestled the NC State kid, who is very good, he went out and got ahead and kind of shut down and backed into a win [a 9-5 win on Feb. 12]. He went out the whole time this time to try and whip his butt and that's what everybody has to learn."

Zach Epperly and Jared Haught were the other two Hokies who made it to the finals of their respective weight classes. Epperly lost 3-2 to Ethan Ramos of North Carolina, who was the top seed at 174 pounds. Haught also lost to a top seed, falling 4-2 to Duke's Conner Hartmann at 197 pounds.

"I think if we wrestled all those over, we could win five or six of those," Dresser said. "Every match we lost was a close one. But you've got to win those to do good things."

"We're usually awesome on offense, but we didn't have it in a few of the finals," Dance said. "There were a few matches where I thought if we had just went after the guy a little more, we would have won the match. Some of our guys needed to be more confident and attack. If you have confidence and believe that you can win, you're going to do great in this sport."

In other weight classes, Tech's David McFadden finished third at 165 pounds. McFadden beat Pittsburgh's Cody Wiercioch 4-2 in the third-place match and went 3-1 in the tournament, with his only loss coming to NC State's Max Rohskopf in the semifinals.

At 133 pounds, Dennis Gustafson came in fourth after losing to NC State's Jamal



Zack Zavatsky won his first ACC crown, beating NC State's Pete Renda 5-2 in the championship bout at 184 pounds.

Morris 10-4 in the third-place match, and at 149 pounds, the Hokies' Sal Mastriani went 1-2 in the tournament, losing to Duke's Mitch Finesilver 4-2 in the semifinals and then falling to NC State's Beau Donahue.

"It wasn't our day today," Dance said. "NC State had a great tournament. If we wrestled

this tournament tomorrow, it could be a different outcome."

Eight Hokies qualified for the NCAA Championships — all seven who made it to the finals of their respective weight classes and McFadden. Those were to be held March 17-19 in New York City. 



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It's safe to say that Ty Walz has officially arrived on the national scene.

It started as a simple tweet from Pete Moris (@PeteMoris), Virginia Tech associate athletics director for strategic communications, on Feb. 19 in which he wished the heavyweight and the rest of the Hokie wrestlers good luck at the NWCA National Dual Championship Series that weekend. Accompanying the tweet was a photo of Walz flexing his arms in a bodybuilder's pose, muscles and veins rippling beneath his skin.

The post received a modest 16 retweets and 29 likes, but it did catch the attention of World Wrestling Entertainment Hall of Fame broadcaster Jim Ross, who embedded the photo in a tweet back at Moris the next day.

"He looks like he's JACKED," Ross (@JRsBBQ) said. "@WWE bound?"

Walz's teammates went nuts, and rightfully so. When someone as influential as Ross—who was WWE's television announcer and senior vice president of talent relations during

professional wrestling's heyday in the late 1990s—mentions you to his 1.4 million followers, he leaves you with no choice but to reply.

"It's just some great Photoshop!" Walz (@T\_wiggity\_walz) retweeted in response to his hulking physique.

Walz shrugged off his momentary brush with fame, but make no mistake about it—he

has become a sight to behold this year in his redshirt junior season. After going an impressive 55-23 on the mat throughout the past two seasons in Blacksburg and earning All-America status last March, the Cleveland, Ohio product has taken it to the next level this year. He rattled

off 19 consecutive wins before his first loss and sat at 22-2 entering the 2016 NCAA Wrestling Championships. His only losses came at the hands of NC State's Nick Gwiazdowski, a two-time national champion.

Walz ranks among the top five nationally in the heavyweight division depending on which wrestling site one checks. For sure, he is a main reason why the Hokies entered the postseason ranked in the top five nationally as a team.

The Tech wrestling program has grown by leaps and bounds under head coach Kevin Dresser in recent years, culminating in top-10 finishes at each of the past three NCAA tournaments heading into this year's NCAA Championships. Walz has played a prominent role in this rise, as he went 27-14 as a redshirt freshman and 28-9 last season. A year ago, he won three matches in the consolation round to become just the program's third heavyweight to earn All-America honors and the first since 2006. *Continued on page 28*

# HEAVYWEIGHT BIG FOR HOKIES THIS SEASON

*After getting a late start in the sport of wrestling, Ty Walz made up for lost time and ranked as one of the best nationally in his weight class this season*

*by Matt Kovatch  
Special to Inside Hokie Sports*

# HEAVYWEIGHT Continued from page 27

Walz's growth as a wrestler has been nothing short of amazing. He didn't even start wrestling until he was in the seventh grade. That's very late in a sport where most of the elite begin around the age of 5, but Walz's intentions centered on becoming a football player. He only took up wrestling in middle school when the coach came to football practice looking for kids to join the team.

"He told us it would make us better at football, so I said I'd do it," Walz remembered.

Walz said he was terrible at first, but took fourth in the city during his eighth grade year. He decided to attend a private school—St. Edward High in Lakewood, Ohio—specifically to continue his football career. He knew nothing about the wrestling program, which happened to be one of the best in the country.

He dabbled as a thrower on the track and field team as a freshman and continued with football as a middle linebacker/nose tackle throughout his sophomore year. Wrestling, though, came to him naturally. He specifically credits head coach John Hoffornan, who coincidentally wrestled at the University of Iowa with Dresser in the 1980s.

"The coaches at St. Edward took me under their wing and I learned everything I could," Walz said. "I was a sponge the whole time I was there. Everything was new to me, but I feel like starting wrestling later in life benefitted me. I hadn't developed any habits yet, good or bad. I was in a good [wrestling] room, so my coach wasn't going to let me start a bad one [habit]."

Walz ended up becoming a Cadet national champion during his sophomore year, and when combined with the acceptance that he wasn't going to get any faster or taller ("I'm 5-11, but if I'm talking to girls, I'm 6-0," he admitted), giving up football and becoming a full-time wrestler was an easy decision. Walz won the Ohio state title as a senior, helping St. Edward to its 27th

state championship in 35 years.

Coming from a military family, Walz heavily considered attending Air Force after graduation, but the link between Hoffornan and Dresser was too strong and he soon made his way to Blacksburg, where he had to make a tough decision on his future weight class. Heavyweights can be anywhere between 198 and 285 pounds at the NCAA level.

"I had been wrestling at 220 pounds in high school," Walz said. "So in college, I was a little big to wrestle at 197 and a little small to wrestle at heavyweight. If I were to wrestle at 197, I would have needed to lose a lot of weight and I would have needed to change how I lifted weights. But I felt like I would never be limited by being 60 pounds smaller than someone and that being the reason why I would lose."

Dresser effectively made the decision for him because of roster needs at the time, so Walz spent his freshman year as a redshirt while transforming his body.

"I had a hard time at first adjusting to the weight and wrestling guys that weighed 285," Walz said. "We have a phenomenal strength and conditioning coach in Terry Mitchell and he helped me every single day in the weight room. Now wrestling bigger guys is kind of easier for me."

Walz explained that, although it's nice to eat what he wants while his smaller teammates have to skip meals, too much fluctuation in weight from week to week really affects your performance. He focused this year on maintaining a consistent 240 pounds whether he was training or competing—and his results reflect his efforts. He just hopes for another opportunity to avenge his losses to Gwiazdowski.

"Big losses motivate people to get in the room and change things, but those matches [against Gwiazdowski this year] let me know

that I've closed the gap a little bit," he said. "You don't criticize yourself after a match that you've won as much as you would if you've just lost. Going undefeated would've been cool, but I think the losses are good things and I learned a lot from them for sure."

With one more year of eligibility remaining, Walz has time before he moves on to his next chapter, but it's something he thinks about regularly. He continues to pursue a degree in real estate and property management and wants a career in that field some day. As with many student-athletes, though, he finds the thought of his athletics career suddenly ending a tough pill to swallow.

"It will be weird not being in a wrestling room every day," Walz admitted. "I would love to coach and still be able to train with the guys."

If coaching doesn't pan out and he's not yet sitting behind a desk managing commercial properties, Walz has some other options. A lot of college wrestlers try their hand at mixed martial arts, and while he concedes that his lack of height would present too much of a reach disadvantage to be competitive, he also knows there is money to be made as a training partner. He recently learned that NASCAR recruits heavily from the college wrestling and football ranks for ex-athletes to be on pit crews changing tires and operating the jacks. NASCAR actually stages a scouting combine for guys to demonstrate these skills—something that Walz's teammate, Dan Garwood, is training for right now.

If all else fails, maybe Walz can reconnect with Ross. Granted, it's a different type of "wrestling," but he's already raised some eyebrows and the WWE currently boasts another St. Edward High School alum in Dolph Ziggler.

"I looked up the [WWE] salaries after that tweet and they were pretty impressive," Walz said jokingly. "Maybe I'll start paying a little bit more attention to it now." 

## GETTING TO KNOW TY WALZ

**Favorite pro athlete:** LeBron James. "I'm from Cleveland, so I'm not a bandwagon fan!"

**Favorite movie:** The Big Lebowski. "It's freaking hilarious."

**Favorite TV show:** Vikings. "That's my inner savage coming out."

**Favorite music:** Indie rock

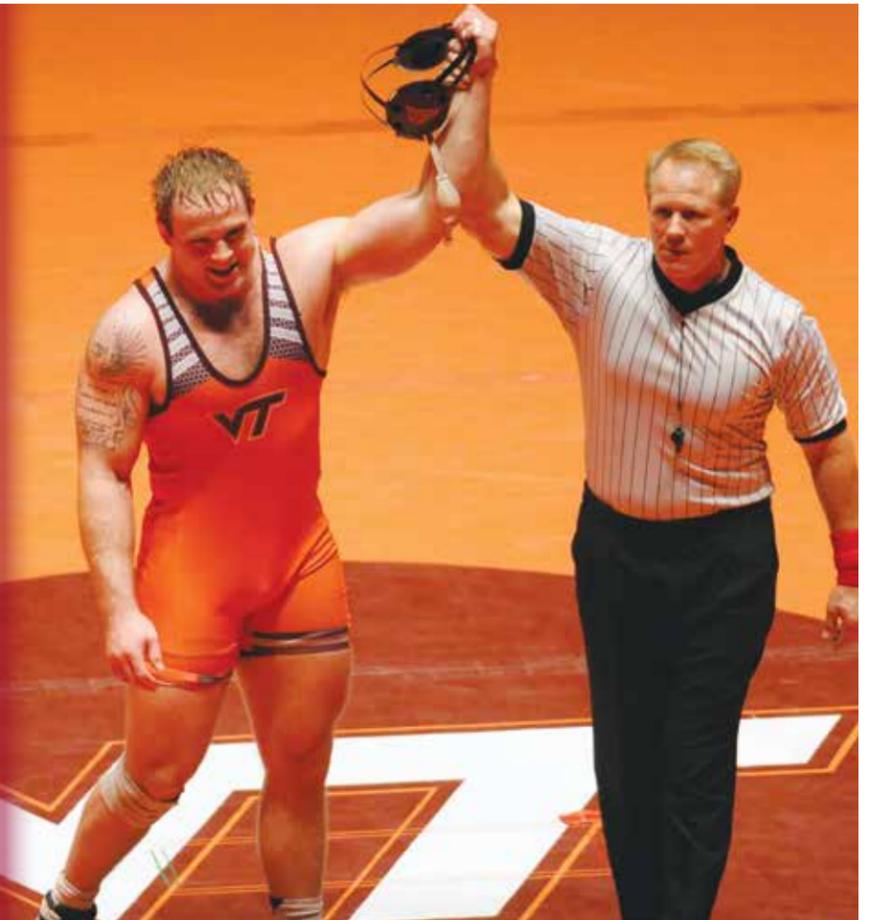
**What car do you drive?:** Jeep Cherokee. "I will probably drive a Cherokee for the rest of my life."

**Do you have any pets?:** Miniature Italian Greyhound. "It's at my mom's house, but it's basically mine."

**Favorite food:** Chipotle. "I ate it two days ago, I ate it last night, and I will probably eat it again tonight."

**Lift of choice in the weight room:** Power cleans. "I enjoy all the Olympic lifts."

**Favorite course:** Housing, Energy and the Environment. "It was about the things to implement in a building to certify it as green. Besides helping the environment, those buildings usually sell better and are easier to market."



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**CHAMPIONSHIPS**

*The Tech men finished in fifth, while the women's squad came in 12th*  
 by Jimmy Robertson

Hanna Green became a two-time champion in her event, as she brought home Virginia Tech's lone gold medal from the 2016 ACC Indoor Track and Field Championships held in late February at the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center in Boston.

A year ago at Virginia Tech's Rector Field House, Green edged Clemson's Natoya Goule in a meet-record time of 2 minutes, 3.43 seconds, but she had no such worries this time around. She won by more than a second over Duke's Anima Banks, finishing with a time of 2:04.76.

"It wasn't super hard, but I feel like I haven't had a real fast race—one that's really pushed me," Green said. "It was much less stressful this time. This is what I had hoped for. I wanted another ACC title, so I'm happy with it."

Behind Green, the Tech women's team came in 12th with 25.5 points. Other point scorers for the Hokies included Rachel Pocratsky (fourth, 800), Nora McKiver (fourth, 200), Erica Hjerpe (seventh, pole vault), Hannah Meador (eighth, pole vault) and the 4x400 relay team of McKiver, Green, Pocratsky and Courtney Blenden, which came in sixth.

On the men's side, the Hokies—who won this meet last year—came in fifth with 58 points. The Hokies were missing some key figures for the ACC Championships, including Patrick Joseph (mono) and Manuel Ziegler (hamstring). Syracuse won the men's title.

"What caught up with us was that we had certain people injured—key people," said Dave Cianelli, Tech's director of track and field and cross country. "We couldn't afford that and still have a legitimate shot. We didn't necessarily have a great meet, even with the people whom we had here, but if we can regroup, get healthy, and get everyone together, I think we have an excellent shot during the outdoor season."

The Tech men brought home two silver medals and three bronze medals. Thomas Curtin finished second in the 5,000-meter run, losing to Syracuse's Justyn Knight by less than a stride and finishing with a time of 14:01.78. Pole vaulter Torben Laidig came in second with a best mark of 17 feet, 1.5 inches.

Neil Gourley performed well for the Hokies. He finished third in the 800, setting a school record with a time of 1:48.10. Gourley also anchored the distance medley relay team that included Daniel Jaskowak, Jared Bane and Vincent Ciattei. They came in third with a time of 9:38.69.

Tech's other medal came from pole vaulter Brad Johnson, who also recorded a best mark of 17 feet, 1.5 inches. Laidig, Johnson and



Virginia Tech's Torben Laidig won a silver medal in the pole vault at the ACC Indoor Championships in February.

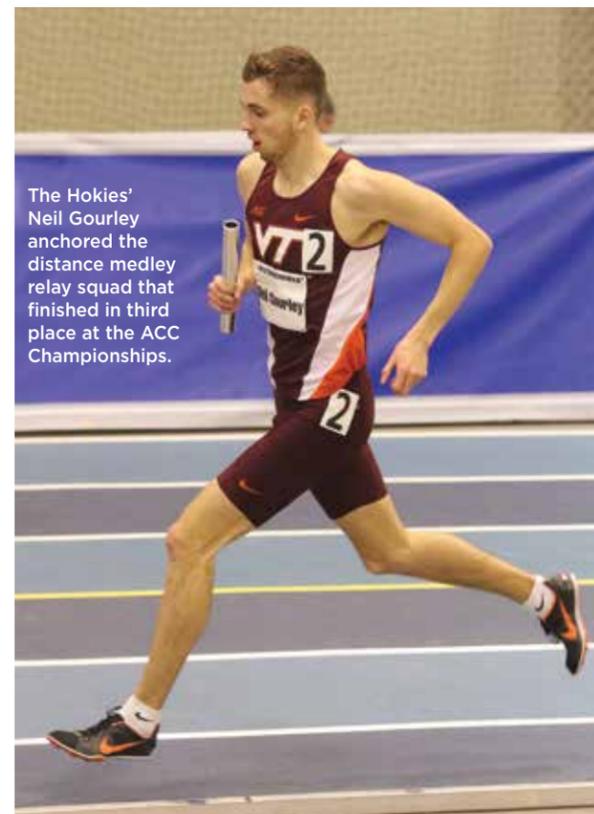
Deakin Volz all recorded the same best mark, but Laidig reached it in fewer attempts.

The Hokies' pole vaulters finished second, third, fourth, fifth (James Steck) and eighth (Jared Allison) in the event.

Curtin also scored points for Tech in the 3,000, finishing fifth with a time of 8:07.53. Other point scorers for the Hokies included Jaskowak (3,000, sixth), Darren Barlow (mile, seventh), Tomas Kruzliak (fifth, weight throw), and David Prince (eighth, long jump).

The outdoor track and field season began following the conclusion of the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships. The ACC Outdoor Track and Field Championships will be held May 13-15 in Tallahassee, Florida.

"In 2012, the last time we were up here [in Boston], it was kind of the same scenario," Cianelli said. "We came in with a very legitimate chance to win [on the men's side] and did not have a good meet. Florida State won pretty handily. We came back to the ACC outdoor meet in Charlottesville and we won. That was one of the best team meets we've ever had. Everything just clicked and everyone did what they were supposed to



The Hokies' Neil Gourley anchored the distance medley relay squad that finished in third place at the ACC Championships.

do or exceeded expectations. Everything fell together.

"I feel this same thing can happen. It's just a matter of getting everyone there healthy and I think we have an excellent chance of being right there. I think we have a little more margin for error just because of the additional events [hammer throw, discus, and javelin are outdoor events in which Tech has excelled]." 

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Getting up at 5 in the morning, trudging out the door, facing winter's icy blast in pitch darkness, and driving to the Christiansburg Aquatic Center in a vehicle as cold as Santa's sleigh would leave even the most optimistic of human beings in a foul mood. A grueling practice provides ample reason for even more grumbling, leaving many student-athletes in the sport of swimming and diving thinking that the "normal student" gig looks like a good option at this ungodly hour.

Brandon Fiala knows this. He's lived this experience for three years as a swimmer on the Hokies' swimming and diving squad. Like the majority who participate, he loves swimming, but he and his teammates discuss their demanding sport on a regular basis—how to get out of these early-morning grinds and yet find the practice time needed to become the ACC's very best.

Now, he finds himself in the unique position to address this exact issue.

The young man from Centreville, Virginia will be one of three ACC student-athlete representatives—and 15 student-athlete representatives from the Power-5 conferences—serving as voting members at the 2017 NCAA Convention. In 2014, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors voted to restructure how schools and conferences governed themselves and allowed student-athletes to have a voice and a vote at every level of decision-making.

Few understand the significance of this. Last year marked the first

time in the history of the NCAA that student-athletes were allowed to vote on legislation that impacts them. Fiala becomes the first Tech student-athlete to be a part of such a historic transition.

"Through SAAC [Student-Athlete Advisory Committee], I've heard a lot about it [the new voting structure], but I never thought I'd be a part of something like this and have that kind of impact," he said. "In a way, I've always thought about it, but never thought it was realistic.

"College athletics is something I've always wanted to delve into a little bit. This opportunity was the first step for me. I was shocked and honored that they would give it to me and wanted to pursue it."

Fiala is one of approximately 50 student-athletes at Tech who serve on SAAC, a leadership group of student-athletes from all sports that, in essence, represents student-athletes' interests and expresses their opinions to Whit Babcock, the Hokies' director of athletics, and his administrative staff.

Danny White, an assistant AD for student-athlete development, works with the group and vetted four or five Tech student-athletes as potential ACC representatives. He followed the criteria set forth by the league, which included finding a junior or senior who serves on SAAC and who is willing to serve at least one year as a

representative, but maybe two. The ACC also wanted someone willing to engage with student-athletes, campus leadership, and conference leadership to understand all sides of the issues.

White narrowed his choice to Fiala and submitted his name to Babcock, who, in turn, nominated Fiala to the ACC office.

"When you're in your third or fourth year on SAAC, you're already in a small group," White said. "But then you factor in Brandon's GPA and athletic accomplishments and his work in the community, and he was hard to beat. He's also outgoing and he knows the issues. We think he'll do very well in that type of environment."

Fiala, Florida State football player Wilson Bell and Duke track and field athlete Madison Granger were selected as the ACC's student-athlete representatives.

Not surprising, Fiala takes his role seriously, and in mid-February, both he and Bell were assigned to the time demands subcommittee. This subcommittee will look at the amount of hours that student-

athletes spend working on tasks related to their respective sports compared to time spent on academic pursuits and personal interests. In addition to his fellow SAAC representatives at Tech, Fiala will be reaching out to the SAAC groups at Virginia, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and Boston College to get feedback.

Being a swimmer certainly gives him a distinct perspective on the issue, considering he and the Hokies practice at 5:30 a.m.—like many schools.

"Swimming is one of those sports that pushes the time demands limit," he said. "That's just the nature of our sport and we accept that. We know that coming in. So yes, time demands is an important topic to me personally because I see the effects.

"Some of my best friends are wrestlers and that's another sport that's very affected. My experience as a swimmer, as opposed to some of the other sports that are less demanding on time, is unique and I hope I can bring that unique opinion to the committee."

Fiala likes the idea of an NCAA rule forbidding sports teams from practicing between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.—an idea that appears to be gaining traction. Such an initiative would give him and his teammates an extra 30 minutes of sleep daily, which he says is a huge deal.

Of course, ideas like this could put him at odds with Hokies' head coach Ned Skinner and the rest of the staff. *Continued on page 34*

# FIALA

—Part of—

# HISTORY

at

# TECH

***Hokies' swimmer Brandon Fiala was the first in school history to be the ACC Most Valuable Men's Swimmer at the ACC Championships—and he will be the first athlete from Virginia Tech to represent the ACC at next year's NCAA Convention as well***

*by Jimmy Robertson*



# FIALA

Continued  
from page 33

"I have faith in Brandon," Skinner said. "There are a lot of things that I disagree with in life, but I've learned to adjust and I think Brandon is the type who would go there and represent student-athletes the right way. He wants to find that balance [between pursuing athletics, academics, and other interests]."

"Brandon gets it. He's fair. I don't think he's the type who has an agenda. He cares about swimming fast and he cares about doing well in school. It's cool that he's a part of this and I know he's looking forward to it."

The team also talks about other ideas. They worry that the NCAA may go too far as well. Many want more time to pursue other interests, yet they know that they need the practice time to enhance themselves athletically.

Therein lies the dilemma for Fiala and the rest of his subcommittee. They need to shepherd the ideas of a lot of people into one core solution that benefits all involved.

"In the end, we realize that we need to find a balance," he said. "That's my goal—finding a balance between pursuing athletic goals and keeping us sane."

"There is a limit. You need that. I know that pushing the 20-hour week [the NCAA allots 20 hours each week for practice] is something I need to do to get where I want to go. I have to find the line for myself to see what is too much

for the student-athlete and yet what do we need to do to get where we want to go in our careers. In the end, we're here to get better and the only way to get better is to keep pushing toward where we want to go. My opinion is a little gray. Yes, there should be time restrictions, but only to an extent."

Fiala hesitates when it comes to time restrictions because he stands as one of the ACC's best swimmers. In late February, he won two gold medals and a silver medal and he set two meet records on his way to being named the ACC's Most Valuable Men's Swimmer at the 2016 ACC Swimming and Diving Championships. He won gold medals in the 200 breaststroke and 200 individual medley and the silver in the 100 breaststroke. His winning time of 1 minute, 52.87 seconds in the 200 breaststroke and his time of 52.28 seconds in the preliminaries of the 100 breaststroke were meet records.

Fiala won his first ACC gold medal last season when he captured the 200 IM and he earned honorable mention All-America honors at the NCAA Championships in the 400 IM. The ultra-competitive Fiala aspires to do more.

Perhaps a lot of that competitive drive comes from watching his older brother, C.J., who scored points for the Hokies in six events at the ACC Championships last year. C.J. started his swimming career with the Northern Virginia Swim League—one of the biggest in

the nation—and his success coerced Brandon into the sport.

Not that he was competitive in just swimming. Brandon played lacrosse, basketball and baseball and he rarely turns down an opportunity to play a pickup game of hoops over at McComas Hall.

"A lot of swimmers just swim from [age] 10 on. I wasn't that type of kid," he said. "I wasn't the kid who liked to do just one sport—and I'm still not. I like to go play pickup basketball and I like to throw the lacrosse ball around, stuff like that."

He also gets that competitive drive through genetics. His father, John, ran track at West Point and his mother, Karen, played soccer for Virginia Tech in the mid-1980s.

His mother had very little to do with his decision to come to Tech. The five-time All-American out of Westfield High School came to Blacksburg for his first official visit during the recruiting process and nothing else measured up to it.

"All the subsequent visits after that, I compared everything to Virginia Tech," he said. "I set Virginia Tech as the standard. I tell recruits that swimming is a time bomb and sooner or later it's going off. What are you going to do when that goes off? I realized Virginia Tech would provide me the best opportunity to pursue my goals after swimming. It's gone beyond my expectations since I've been here

and I'm so grateful for that. Virginia Tech has given me way more than I ever expected."

Fiala plans on competing at the U.S. Olympic Trials held in Omaha, Nebraska in late June in hopes of making the U.S. Olympic team that will be competing in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil later this summer. But his chances are admittedly slim. After all, Ryan Lochte, a nine-time Olympic medalist and four-time gold medalist, holds the world record in the 200 IM, and Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian of all time (22 medals, 18 gold), hopes to make another Olympic team at the age of 30 and he holds the world record in the 400 IM.

"Your goal is to try to make the Olympic team, but my goal is to go for the experience and to get a feel for what it's like to be on that stage," Fiala said. "I've never been on that stage. It's going to be fun."

Following that, Fiala has one more year of eligibility remaining at Tech before graduating in May of 2017 with degrees in both finance and accounting. His parents think his competitive nature would lend itself well to a career on Wall Street or in the courtroom. Fiala prefers corporate finance.

"It sounds bad, but I like dealing with money," he laughed.

Of course, plans can change. The 20-year-old also possesses an interest in athletics administration, especially now with his

College athletics is something I've always wanted to delve into a little bit. This opportunity was the first step for me. I was shocked and honored that they would give it to me and wanted to pursue it.

Brandon Fiala  
on being named an ACC  
representative to the 2017  
NCAA Convention



newfound task of being a conference representative to the 2017 NCAA Convention. His background in finance could be attractive to athletics directors, as most ADs and administrations are keenly focused on revenue generation these days.

Such a position would give Fiala a way to scratch his competitive itch while remaining in athletics.

"I've been interested, just working with and getting to know the people in the athletics department," he said. "I'm an accounting and finance major, but that doesn't mean I want to go into accounting and finance. I've always been interested in athletics administration and being a part of what runs the athletics department."

"I think this is a great opportunity. I'm going to be meeting most of the athletics directors and most of the FARs [faculty athletic representatives] and learning how everyone does things. That's something I'd be interesting in pursuing because I love college sports."

Fiala is at the starting blocks of his future, with the gun cocked and ready in the starter's hand. He simply needs to decide what he wants his future to be—finance, athletics, or both.

One thing is for sure. With his training, just as with his résumé to be an ACC student-athlete representative at the next NCAA Convention, he will be tough to beat. 

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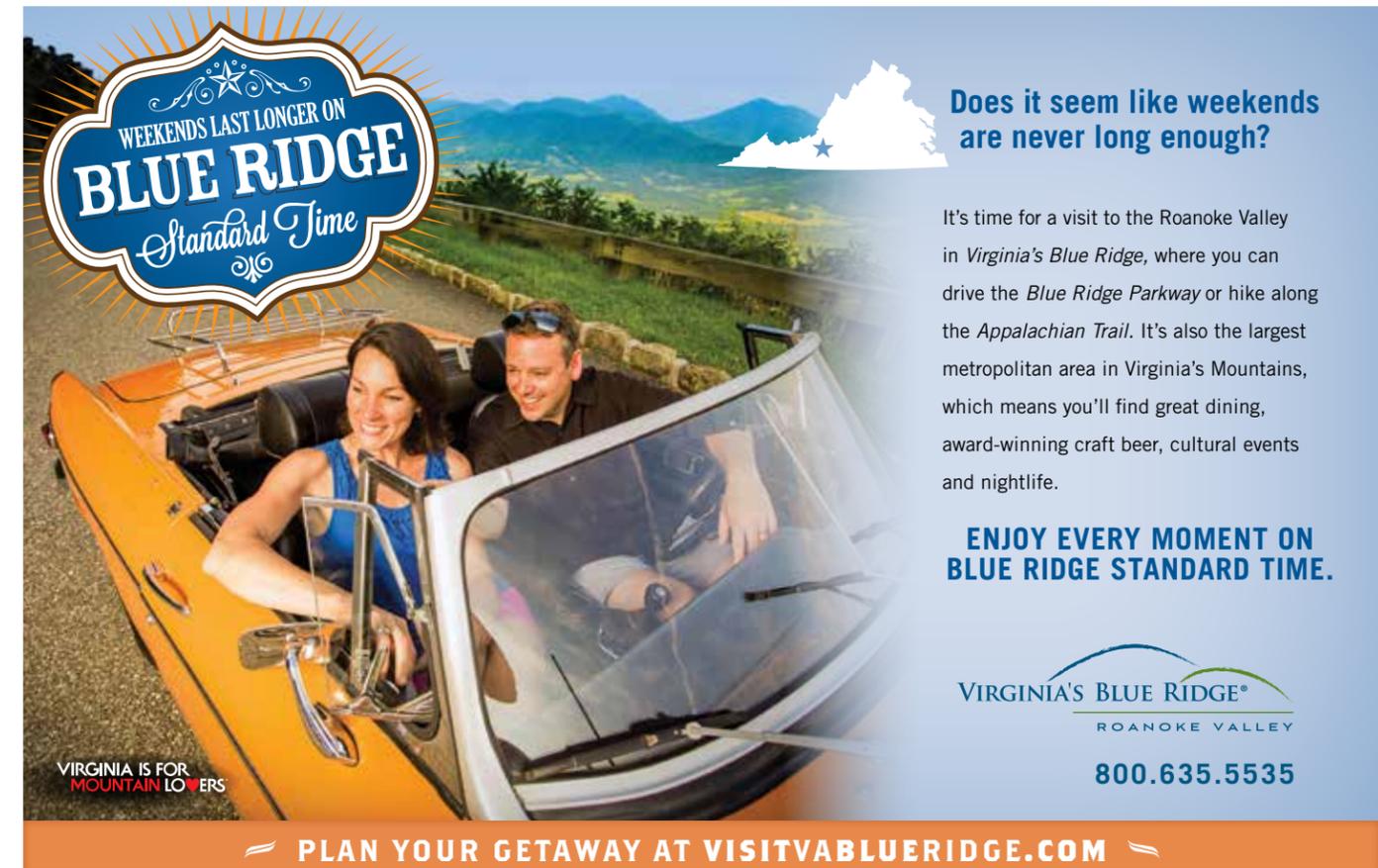
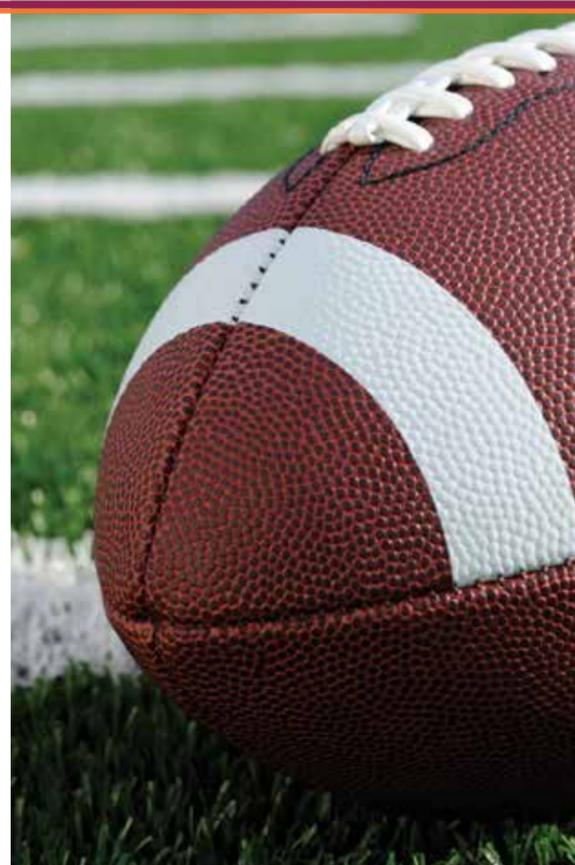
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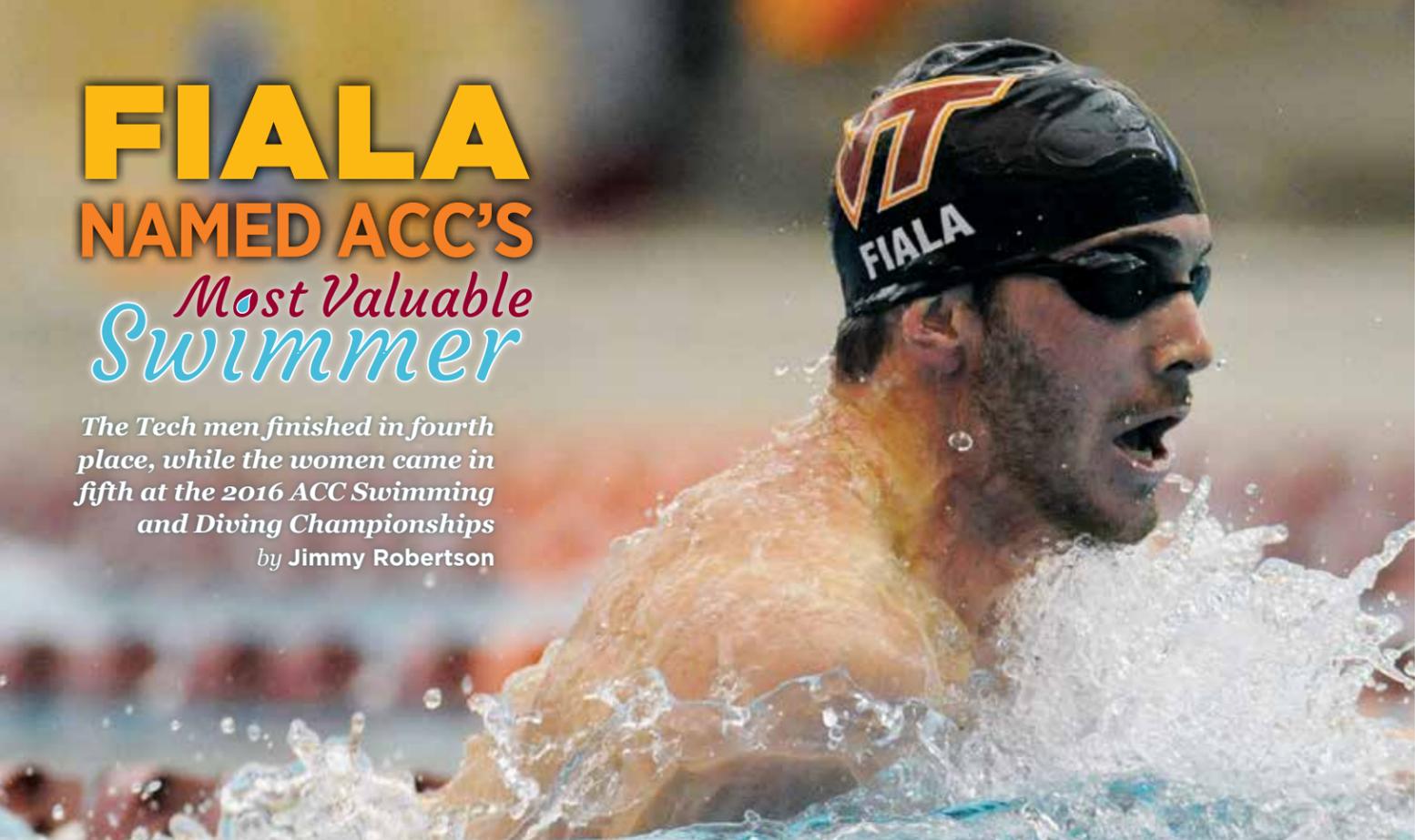
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# FIALA NAMED ACC'S Most Valuable Swimmer

The Tech men finished in fourth place, while the women came in fifth at the 2016 ACC Swimming and Diving Championships  
by Jimmy Robertson



NC State and Virginia carried home the team championships at the 2016 ACC Swimming and Diving Championships held in Greensboro, North Carolina in late February, but Virginia Tech's Brandon Fiala stole the show.

Fiala won three medals—including two gold medals—and set two meet records on his way to being named the ACC's Most Valuable Men's Swimmer. The junior from Centreville, Virginia became the first Tech men's swimmer to earn such an honor.

Behind Fiala, the Tech men's team finished fourth. The Tech women's team came in fifth.

Fiala won a gold medal in the 200-yard breaststroke, setting a meet record with a time of 1 minute, 52.87 seconds. He also won a gold medal in the 200 individual medley (1:42.26) and he nearly brought home a third gold, losing in the 100 breaststroke (52.28 seconds) by a hundredth of a second. He set a meet record in the 100 breaststroke in the preliminary round with a time of 51.86 seconds.

"I'd have to say a little just because of the level of success," Tech swimming coach Dr. Ned Skinner said when asked if he was surprised at Fiala's performance. "His times were among the nation's best. I always thought he was capable of that and it's not like I'm floored. But when you're throwing down times that are ACC meet records and right at conference records, it's astounding.

I'm glad he was rewarded with the conference swimmer of the meet award."

Fiala also participated on four relay teams that scored points for the Hokies. The 400-yard freestyle relay team, comprised of Lucas Bureau, Brent Benedict, Fiala and Harrison Pierce, came in fifth with a time of 2:54.62. The 200 medley relay team of Zachary Switzer, Fiala, Drake Becksted and Ian Ho

came in seventh and the 200 freestyle relay team of Benedict, Bureau, Ho, and Fiala also came in seventh. The 400 medley relay team came in fifth.

Robert Owen and Mauro Castro-Silva won the Hokies' only other medals. Owen claimed gold in the 400 IM with a time of 3:41.08, while Castro-Silva earned a bronze in the platform diving event with a finals score of 383.20



Robert Owen won a gold medal in the 400 individual medley at the ACC Championships, defending the gold medal he won in this same event last year.

points. The sophomore from Monterrey, Mexico finished third, fourth (3-meter) and sixth (1-meter) in the three diving events.

The Tech men's diving team accounted for 247 points. In addition to Castro-Silva's bronze-medal performance, the Hokies got strong performances from Logan Stevens, who came in fifth (362.05) in the platform event, and Eduardo Castro-Silva—the brother of Mauro—who finished sixth (339.25). Eduardo finished seventh in the 3-meter event as well. In the 1-meter event, Ben Schiesl came in eighth.

"Ron [Piemonte, Tech's diving coach] did such a good job of getting these guys ready," Skinner said. "He took seven divers [men and women] and everyone one of them scored. Mauro led the charge, and his brother, Eduardo, just showed up in January. So it was nice to have the brother duo be so prolific."

Owen scored in two other events for the Hokies, finishing fifth in the 200 backstroke and seventh in the 200 IM.

Other point scorers in individual events for the Hokies included Michal Szuba (fifth, 500 freestyle), Bureau (sixth, 200 freestyle), and Switzer (eighth, 400 IM). The 800 freestyle relay team of Bureau, Szuba, Adam Stacklin and Norbert Szabo came in sixth.

"Forty percent of our men's team was freshmen," Skinner said. "They all scored individually. They all came back having learned a lot, so I think the future is bright going forward."

On the women's side, the Hokies rallied three places in the final two days of the competition behind Klaudia Nazieblo and Weronika Paluszek, two Poland natives who combined to win four medals.

Nazieblo won a silver medal in the 200 butterfly, completing the event in a time of

1:55.30. Maggie Gruber finished in eighth place for Tech and she claimed fifth in the 100-yard butterfly as well.

Nazieblo also earned a silver medal in the 400 individual medley, swimming that race in 4:07.63. The Hokies' Fiona Donnelly came in eighth in the same event with a time of 4:14.87.

Paluszek won a bronze in the 200 breaststroke on the final day, finishing in a time of 2:07.95. She also earned a bronze in the 100 breaststroke with a time of 59.37 seconds.

"They bring so much to us," Skinner said of Nazieblo and Paluszek. "There must be some formula out there [in Poland] to identify someone who is gritty. You look for them in high school and coming out of club swimming—and hopefully you get it right.

"Sometimes people take this edge and determination to another level. Klaudia is such a sweet, soft-spoken young lady. You wouldn't know it by talking to her, but she gets in the water and she's just tough. Then Weronika is a little more outspoken and you know she's tough—but in a positive way. Their determination, willingness to race, and desire to beat people is inspirational. They both exhibit it."

Other strong individual performances came from Jessica Hespeler, who finished seventh in the 200 freestyle, and Ashlynn Peters, who came in seventh in the platform diving event.

Tech's relay teams fared well, too. The 400 medley team of Nazieblo, Paluszek, Gruber

The Hokies' Mauro Castro-Silva finished in the top six of all three diving events at the ACC Championships.



and Hespeler came in fourth, while the 800 freestyle relay team of Hespeler, Donnelly, Sydney Pesetti and Gabrielle Bishop came in fifth. The 400 freestyle relay team of Adriana Grabski, Alice Boutant, Hespeler and Nazieblo finished sixth and the 200 freestyle relay team of Gruber, Grabski, Auriane de Premilhat and Nazieblo was seventh. The 200 medley relay team of Nazieblo, Alyssa Bodin, Gruber and Grabski finished eighth.

The NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships were held March 17-19 in Atlanta following the publication of this magazine. The men's competition is slated to be held a week later at the same venue. 

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# From BASKETBALL COACH To BUSINESS OWNER

Former  
Tech guard  
Myron Guillory spent  
several years coaching in the college  
ranks, but now he helps run a family-  
owned personal care service in his  
native Louisiana

by Jimmy Robertson



Myron Guillory expected to land a job in the business world once he graduated from Virginia Tech.

It just took him a little while to get to that point in his professional career.

Guillory, a former shooting guard for the Hokies from 1994-98, got into coaching first after his playing days ended and after he received his degree in accounting in 1998. Not long after his graduation, he got a call from Rickey Broussard, then the head coach at Nicholls State in Thibodaux, Louisiana, asking if Guillory would be interested in an administrative assistant position. He recruited

Guillory out of Barbe High School in Lake Charles, Louisiana, so he knew Guillory well.

Guillory took him up on the offer.

“Not necessarily,” Guillory said when asked if he planned to get into coaching. “That wasn’t a plan of mine, but I got a phone call from Rickey Broussard. He was looking for an administrative assistant, so I took the job there because he mentioned I could get my master’s and things of that nature. Once I got in it, I really wanted to stick with it. It really got my attention after speaking with him.”

Guillory worked there for two years, getting his MBA in the process in 2000. He decided

then to return to Virginia and marry longtime girlfriend Courtney Ottley, a former Tech cheerleader and graduate. She worked in human resources at Newport News Shipbuilding, and he got a job there, too, working as a sourcing agent. He purchased raw materials for aircraft carriers and submarines.

“I said, ‘Well, I think I have to start making a little bit of money to be married,’” he joked.

But Guillory jumped back into coaching in 2002 when then-head coach Billy Lee hired him as an assistant at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina. The director of athletics at Campbell, Stan Williamson, was the AD at Nicholls State when Guillory worked there and aided Guillory in securing the position.

Guillory worked for three seasons at Campbell before joining Dale Layer’s staff at Colorado State. While there, he became acquainted with current Virginia Tech coach Buzz Williams, who had worked at Colorado State two years earlier and claims Layer as one of his best friends.

“I know Buzz really well,” Guillory said. “I came in after Buzz had left. I think he ended up going to Texas A&M and I came in a year or two after he left to go there.”

Guillory worked two years at Colorado State, but Layer was let go after the 2007 season. As a result, Guillory worked at his family’s business in Louisiana before returning to the coaching ranks two years later after Layer got the head coaching job at Liberty.

Guillory worked with Layer for two seasons before deciding to get out of coaching.

“Once you start having children and you’re not home, that was kind

of what made me say I want to spend more time raising my kids with my wife,” Guillory said. “Four years ago, I decided to get back into our family business, which is in-home personal care.

“Needless to say, although I have a lot of responsibilities, I still have enough flexibility to spend time with family. That’s what got me out of the coaching profession, but I definitely enjoyed it while I was in it.”

In 2011, Guillory moved his family back to Southwest Louisiana and returned to helping run his family’s business—Heaven-on-Earth Network, Inc. This company serves to assist

the elderly and developmentally disabled with everyday tasks such as eating, meal preparation, cleaning, grooming, household chores, transportation, and more.

He and his brother also dabble in other business interests. The two of them branched into franchising with restaurants and currently operate a Church’s Chicken, a nationwide fast-food restaurant that specializes in fried chicken and is headquartered in Sandy Springs, Georgia.

Guillory misses the relationships that he established with the players while coaching, but he gets a similar feeling while overseeing his current employees. He sees many similarities between coaching and running a business.

“Coaching is about motivating individuals and helping them realize that they’re talented individuals and just maximizing talent,” he said. “It’s the same thing in the business world. You’re trying to motivate employees and let them know that, ‘Hey, you can take it a step further.’ I enjoy that part of it. There is a bond and you’re building relationships. I’m a relational person and I like building relationships with people. That’s something I look forward to every day.”

Guillory played at Tech during arguably one of the greatest times in the basketball program’s history. He played in 29 games

as a freshman in 1994-95 when the Hokies captured the 1995 NIT title and he played 25 games as a sophomore on the 1995-96 team that won a game in the NCAA Tournament before losing to eventual national champion Kentucky in the second round.

“We were a close-knit group of guys,” Guillory said. “I don’t think we were necessarily the most talented, but we played the best team ball. We played teams like Providence [in the 1995 NIT], with Austin Croshere and Eric Williams, who were NBA players, and we beat them there [91-78] and that showed that we trusted one another. We went through that whole stint my freshman and sophomore year and we won because of that.

“And then, going to the NCAA Tournament, that was a dream of mine as a kid. Those two moments were highlights in my career.”

Guillory played for legendary and popular head coach Bill Foster for his first three seasons. As a senior, following Foster’s retirement, he played for Bobby Hussey, a longtime Foster assistant who was elevated to the head coaching position in the spring of 1997.

Guillory started 17 games as a senior and averaged six points per game. He admitted that he and Hussey butted heads at times, but the former Tech coach—who passed away in 2007—helped Guillory land those assistant

coaching jobs once he graduated from Tech. That’s something Guillory still hasn’t forgotten.

“Coach Hussey could be difficult—and don’t get me wrong, I didn’t help the relationship either,” Guillory said. “But after I was done playing, he really reached out to help me in the coaching profession. He was probably the most instrumental guy in giving me a lot of information and helping me with other jobs. He really went out of his way to help me. I was very appreciative of Coach Hussey.”

After three separate stints in college coaching, Guillory doesn’t see himself getting back into the coaching profession. The time spent away from home just doesn’t resonate with him any more.

He enjoys spending time with his wife and their two children—a 10-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter. He’s not willing to sacrifice that time.

“I think my family and I are pretty content where we are,” Guillory said. “I don’t have any regrets. God has you in places for a reason. I’ve gone through the whole coaching phase and learned a lot about teamwork. God has prepared me for what I’m doing right now, which is having a business and having employees working together as a team. All my playing days and all my days as a coach have led up to where I am right now.” 



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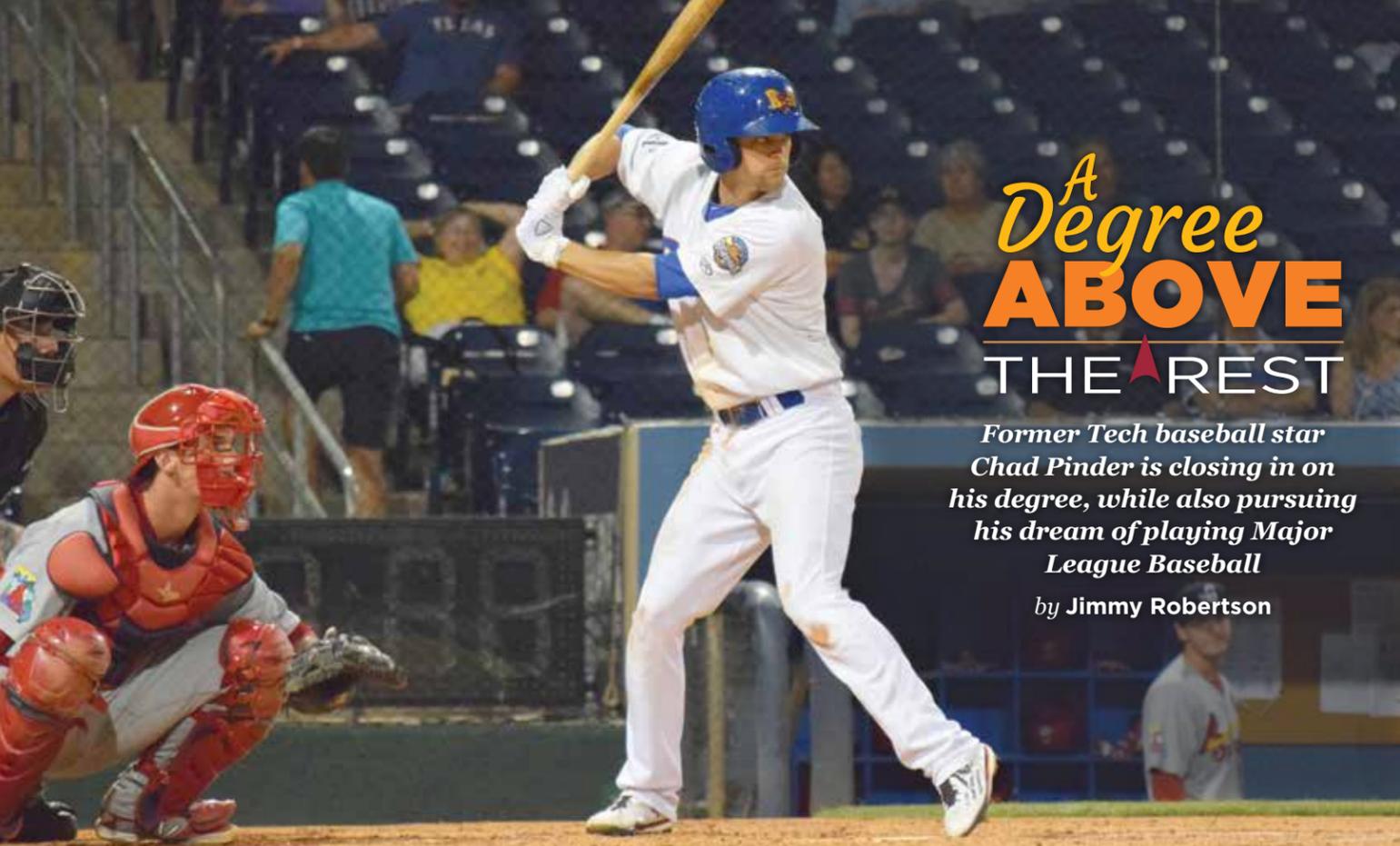
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# A Degree ABOVE

## THE REST

Former Tech baseball star Chad Pinder is closing in on his degree, while also pursuing his dream of playing Major League Baseball

by Jimmy Robertson

Chad Pinder may become the next former Virginia Tech baseball player to play Major League Baseball, but the young man is on the verge of accomplishing something of much more importance.

Pinder needs to pass just two courses to earn his degree from Virginia Tech—and he plans on doing just that next fall.

Like most good baseball players, Pinder departed following his junior season after being selected by the Oakland A's in the second round of the 2013 First-Year Player Draft. The first-team All-ACC choice hit .321 that season for the Hokies, with eight homers and 50 RBI and he decided to begin the pursuit of his dream of playing Major League Baseball.

That put his pursuit of a degree in communication studies on hold—but only temporarily. Unlike a lot of student-athletes who leave school early in all sports, he decided to come back and finish what he started.

"I knew when I left that I wanted to get it done," Pinder said. "Graduating from Virginia Tech was a priority going into college, but getting to play professionally was also a big deal for me. When I got drafted, I knew I wanted to—piece by piece—get my degree work done."

Pinder began that process in the fall of 2014—he spent the fall of 2013 in the Arizona Instructional League working on his game. Needing 36 credits, he came back to Blacksburg that fall and took four courses. He went to classes, took notes, and fulfilled homework obligations.

He then planned to put his degree pursuit on hold until his baseball career was finished. But this past August, Mike Swanhart—who works in Tech's Student-Athlete Academic Support Services office and coordinates the academic pursuits of the Hokies' baseball team—called Pinder.

Not once.

Not twice.

Multiple times.

"He was asking me if I planned to take classes in the fall and I wasn't sure," Pinder said. "I didn't know. He actually stayed on me for two and half weeks, pushing me to take classes. Finally, I decided to take some classes. I took four classes in the fall and then he started pushing me to take two classes in the Winter Session. So I took two classes in the Winter Session. Now, I have two classes left. I'm going to take one in the summer and take an independent study in the fall as my senior capstone. I'll be done in December."

"The support system at Virginia Tech has played a crucial role, with Mike Swanhart and Coach [Pat] Mason. Even when you're there, they preach how important it is. It's easy to overlook that when you're young and in college. As life continues, you realize how important it is. Those two guys, in particular, have been instrumental in helping me get my degree. I owe them a lot."

A degree would put Pinder in rare company. Very few professional baseball players earn a degree. Two years ago, a FoxSports story came

out about the topic, citing less than 5 percent of Major League Baseball players having a degree.

The length of the season is the big hindrance—spring training starts in February and the season runs through September. But Pinder is proving it can be accomplished.

This past fall, Pinder played in the Arizona Fall League while taking four online courses. That forced him to use his time wisely. Practices and games often cut into studying and homework for the courses.

Taking those classes also forced him to make sacrifices. Days off were spent doing homework and trying to get ahead.

"There were times when, being in Arizona in the fall and having an off day, you're thinking, 'Man, I'd really like to go play some golf, but I've got to do a physical geology project,'" he said. "Those are the times when you think, 'Gosh, this isn't fun.'"

"But at the end of the day, when it's all said and done, I'm two classes away from getting my degree and not having to go back when I'm 28 years old or 29 or whatever it is. I'm going to be better off for it. You've got to look at it in the grand scheme of things. You're doing what you've got to do for your future and what's best for you down the road."

Pinder will become the latest member of that talented 2013 group to get his degree. He said that Devin Burke, Jake Joyce, Colin O'Keefe and Eddie Campbell all departed after the 2013 season without their degrees—the

latter three were drafted. But all of them came back and finished their degree requirements.

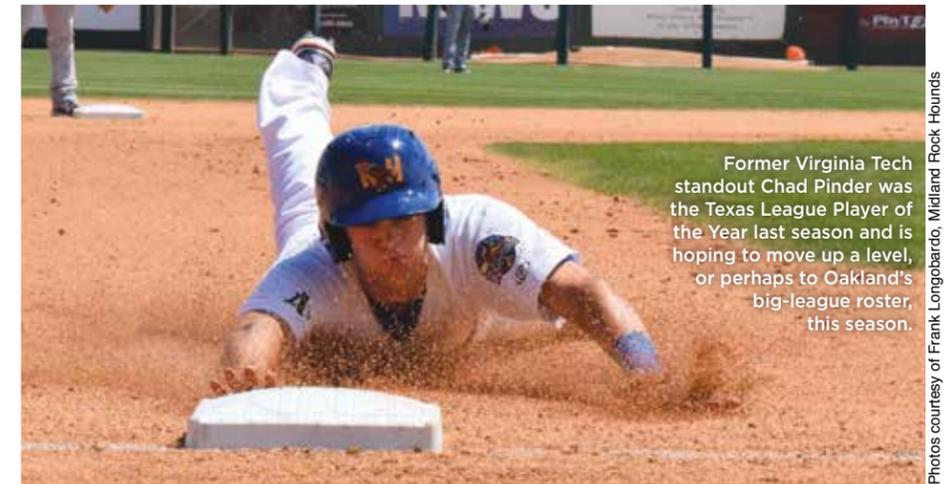
Also, last fall, Sergio Render, a former football player, wrapped up work toward his degree requirements six years after playing his final game in a Tech uniform. All of these athletes have proven that it can be accomplished with discipline and focus.

Pinder delivered that exact message to several members of the Hokies' freshman class recently. He came to town for "Baseball Night in Blacksburg" and stopped by the SAASS office to speak with Swanhart and meet with the freshmen.

His message?

"While you're on campus, take it seriously," he said. "It's easy to brush it off, but what you do now while you're on campus through the three or four years or however long you're here will affect you later on in life. If you're slacking or falling off in classes, not doing well, and having to retake courses, it pushes you back. If you happen to move on to the next level, it puts you behind—and I can speak from experience."

"When I left, I had 36 credits to take instead of 30, which is what I should have had. I got myself into a little trouble and had two more classes to take. If you look at it now, I'm two classes away from graduating. I shot myself in the foot. I'm doing what I can to rectify that now, but I told those guys to take care of business while you're there. Get it done and cherish the time you have there."



Former Virginia Tech standout Chad Pinder was the Texas League Player of the Year last season and is hoping to move up a level, or perhaps to Oakland's big-league roster, this season.

Photos courtesy of Frank Longobardo, Midland Rock Hounds

With most of his schoolwork completed, Pinder can spend spring training focusing solely on baseball and his dream of playing in the Major Leagues. He worked at several infield spots last season and hopes to be in Nashville at the start of this season—hopefully a byproduct of hitting .317 with 15 homers and 86 RBIs for the A's Double-A affiliate in Midland, Texas last summer.

His 86 RBIs led the Texas League and he was named the Texas League's Player of the Year. Nashville serves as the home of the A's Triple-A affiliate.

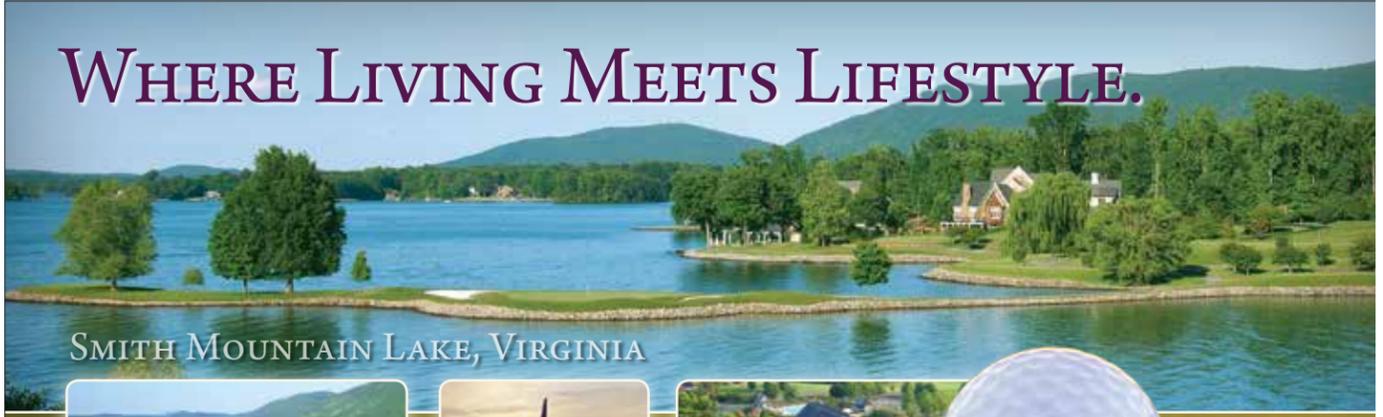
"My first summer going into pro ball was kind of a slap in the face," Pinder said. "It kind

of woke me up. You buy into the professional side of things and how different it is. Then you just get adjusted.

"Each year, different parts of my game have helped me develop into a more solid player. That happens with time, reps, playing more games, and practicing every day. I think I'm going in the right direction. I'm excited for this year and ready to work on things and get ready for the season."

Pinder left for the A's spring training complex in Mesa, Arizona on Feb. 16. The A's open the season on April 1 and most minor league teams begin action on April 7. 

# WHERE LIVING MEETS LIFESTYLE.



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# TRIP TO Southeast Asia BENEFICIAL FOR TECH AD

Whit Babcock spent 10 days in January touring Nike facilities in China and Vietnam and learned a lot about Nike's businesses and the local culture  
by Jimmy Robertson



Whit Babcock went on a 10-day, Nike-sponsored trip to Southeast Asia in January, and after clearing customs in Seattle on his return to Southwest Virginia, Virginia Tech's director of athletics decided to grab a bite to eat.

"I had a double cheeseburger—and it was good," Babcock smiled.

Babcock missed some of America's guilty pleasures, such as a good cheeseburger, but he found enough Southeast Asian cuisine to his liking. That, and all he learned both about himself and about Nike's business processes, made the trip even more worthwhile.

Nike officials approached Babcock about

going on the excursion not long after the university named him as the athletics director. Those officials did not know Babcock because Cincinnati, Babcock's previous employer, did not have its apparel and equipment contract with Nike. So they wanted to get to know him largely because Virginia Tech and Nike have a long relationship dating back to the early 1990s.

Each year, the company takes five or six athletics directors to Southeast Asia, paying all the expenses while allowing those AD's to tour a number of factories and to calm any concerns over working conditions. They also use the trip to strengthen those relationships.

Nike has been working with the Tech athletics department for the past year. Members of the company's graphic identity group—or GIG, for short—came to Blacksburg and looked at Tech's logos, uniforms, and fonts. They also took photos of the campus, met with coaches and analyzed the Tech's overall "brand." All of this came at no cost to Tech.

Some schools completely change their look, while others take a more modest approach. Babcock and his staff plan on unveiling the Hokies' future look in terms of the logo and uniforms in the near future. Some of the new apparel will be unveiled at the Celebration of



Tech AD Whit Babcock (far right) and two other ADs met with Nike officials at one of the company's corporate offices in Southeast Asia.

Women's Sports Luncheon on April 22. Babcock waited until this year to go to Southeast Asia because he wanted to get his staff in place. He, Oregon State AD Todd Stansbury, and Iowa State AD Jamie Pollard were part of the same group that went on this latest trip.

"A lot of my friends in the industry have done it and they say it's an amazing trip," Babcock said. "I was a little hesitant to say yes, but it was 10 days and just one 'work' week. I'm getting into year No. 3 and we have good people here [at Tech] who know how to run the department. So I thought I'd go do it."

"It was way out of my comfort zone. I haven't even been to Mexico or Canada, so I'm not exactly a world traveler, though I have been to a lot of states in the United States. But this trip was great."

Babcock flew from Roanoke to Atlanta and then took a 16-hour flight from Atlanta to Tokyo. Then he took a six-hour flight to Vietnam.

The contingent spent four days in Vietnam, touring three different factories in and around Ho Chi Minh City, the largest city in the country and one that sits in the very

southern part of the nation. "One of the factories had 25,000 employees," he said. "We met with the Nike leadership over there and talked about everything from how they run a business to creating a culture."

"It was a learning experience just from the travel, but also from the business side of it, the relationship with the other ADs, and the relationship with Nike. You're literally going to

the source where the Virginia Tech product is made—the uniforms that our student-athletes wear. We went to a shoe factory and we went to a factory that did all the Nike Combat stuff. Then we went to a factory that did a lot of the licensed products—a lot of the stuff that our teams wear."

The group then went to three different cities in China—Guangzhou, with a population of 13 million; Shanghai, with a population of 24.2 million; and Beijing, with a population of 21 million. They saw the factories in or near those areas, including the one that served as the home for the original Air Jordan shoes.

"Some of these factories are two hours outside the major cities and they're in rural areas," Babcock said. "So we had a few authentic lunches and a lot of people speak English, which made things a little easier. From a leadership standpoint, a cultural standpoint and a relationship standpoint with Nike, it [the trip] was great."

They also spent a day and a half in Hong Kong, though not to tour a factory. While there, they met with some of Nike's corporate officials.



Much of Nike's clothing line comes together in factories such as this one in Southeast Asia.

The trip also presented an opportunity to take in the local culture. In Vietnam, the group took a "foodie" tour, eating some of the local cuisine. They also went to the Museum of the American War, which focused on the Vietnam War, but from a Vietnam perspective. In China, they toured the Great Wall of China—and Babcock ran into a couple of Virginia Tech alums on that particular visit.

Interpreters traveled with the group, helping them overcome any language barriers. They also dealt with extremes in weather, going from the warm climate of southern Vietnam to the freezing cold winter of Beijing.

"It was winter in Vietnam, but I'd compare it to being in Miami," Babcock said. "Then you're going to Beijing, which is in the northern part of China. So it was like going from Miami to the upper peninsula of Michigan." *Continued on page 44*

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HOME

AWAY

SEPT. 3  
LIBERTY

SEPT. 10 AT BRISTOL, TN  
vs. TENNESSEE

SEPT. 17  
BOSTON COLLEGE\*

OCT. 8  
AT NORTH CAROLINA\*

SEPT. 24  
EAST CAROLINA

OCT. 15  
AT SYRACUSE\*

THURSDAY, OCT. 20  
MIAMI\*

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AT PITTSBURGH\*

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## TRIP TO Southeast Asia

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From a business perspective, Babcock found that many of the ideas, processes, and such being implemented by Nike could work within the structure of the Tech athletics department, even though the department is on a much smaller scale.

"A lot of the things we're talking about in our athletics department, they are, too," Babcock said. "They want to maintain a culture and a strong brand that's been excellent, one like Nike and Virginia Tech. Yet we're all asking ourselves how do we continue to grow and evolve to stay as a leader?"

"A lot of their methods are interesting when you saw the incredible low turnover rate that they had with their employees and also some of the things they did for their staff. For example, over there, they had a no-margin grocery store for their employees. They bought everything at cost and sold it at cost and that was a perk of being an employee. They had started to bring in a lot of Western leadership on employee morale—things like that. The leadership part was great.

"I also learned how to delegate. I have terrific people here and it was nice. I had confidence in them and I learned a lot in spending 10 days with two other ADs, the way they handled certain things."

Babcock kept a journal during the trip, writing down notes, thoughts and ideas. He said he had referred to it already since arriving back in the United States.

Toward the end of the trip, the ADs are asked to contribute some money toward a "microloan" program that Nike uses to help women in the Cu Chi district not far from Ho Chi Minh City. Women can borrow money from the program to establish small businesses, which help to develop poorer communities.

The ADs, though, do not get paid back. The women pay the money back when and/or if they can and it simply gets reinvested into the program.

"I really liked that program," Babcock said. "To see the impact of some philanthropy and to realize how good we have it was really good for my heart."

Tech AD Whit Babcock (second from the right) visited the Great Wall of China on his Southeast Asia trip along with Iowa State AD Jamie Pollard (right) and Oregon State AD Todd Stansbury (left). They met two Virginia Tech alums while there.



Babcock said he learned a lot about himself, but that comes as no surprise. He and his staff embrace lifelong learning, encouraging others to do things that help them develop professionally.

"To go over there was way out of my comfort zone, but I do feel when you do things like that, then you can have growth as a person and a professional leader," he said. "The trip had a profound impact. I learned a lot about life, leadership, business, and friendship.

"I greatly missed Blacksburg. I wouldn't trade it for Blacksburg, but it was a tremendous learning experience." 



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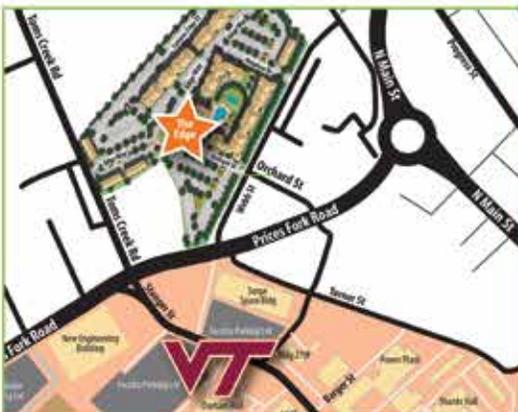


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