

TSL Extra

Issue 1, November 17, 2000

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TSL EXTRA

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

Welcome to the first issue of the TSL Extra. Funny that after all this work, just nine little words open the door for you.

You hold in your hands the next step in the evolution of HokieCentral ... err, TechSideline.com. Knowing what voracious readers and huge Hokie fans you all are, we thought this would be a great way to provide some extra content for you, and to increase your enjoyment of Virginia Tech sports.

It has been hard work producing it, and every month, it will continue to be hard work, but it's also fun. Call me crazy, but when I see 7 or 8 big fat articles about Hokie sports wrapped up into one publication, I dig it. Knowing that I was the one to pull it all together, along with the able contributions of our writing staff, makes it all that much better.

I could blow a lot of cheery smoke at you about how great and interesting the TSL Extra is going to be to you, and that may be true, but I wanted to tell you something else, something important. I won't pull any punches with you: the TSL Extra is also an important revenue generator for us. As you know, Dot-coms have been biting the dust left and right, on both a large scale (Pets.com, anyone?) and a small scale, and it's an all-out race for survival at this point. Anyone can start a web site, but over the course of the next few years, we're all going to find out who can keep one going.

The TSL Extra is the third and final state of a three-legged revenue strategy for TechSideline.com. First, we launched TechLocker.com, our sister web site and on-line store. Second, we added third-party banner advertising to TechSideline.com. Lastly, we launched the TSL Extra.

We're going to give this strategy a go for a little while and see how the numbers add up on the bottom line, and if we need to make adjustments, we will. Too many of you have told me on too many occasions how important TSL is to you, and that you'll help out in any way necessary to keep it going.

Hey, I'm with you on that one. I love my job, and I want to keep doing it.

So, here's what you can do: keep visiting the site often (which generates ad revenue -- remember to click an ad while you're there), shop at TechLocker.com (hey, if you're a TSL Extra subscriber, you get a 10% discount!), and subscribe to the TSL Extra (hmmm, you've already done that, unless you're reading a bootleg copy).

But you can also do other things: (1) spread the word to others; and (2) more importantly, tell us how we're doing! When you're done with this issue of the TSL Extra, drop me an email, and let me know what you did and didn't like about it. We can't make it better without your feedback.

One more thing -- thanks! Thanks for supporting TechSideline.com. Enjoy the TSL Extra, and be sure to get back to me with your thoughts on what we can do to continue making TechSideline.com and the TSL Extra the best sources for Hokie sports news and entertainment.

Enjoy issue #1.



P.S. -- As we do our best to earn an honest living, we greatly appreciate your unwillingness to share your TSL Extra password with others, as well as your discretion in not posting any of TLSX's articles on any websites.

Interview

Interview With Chris Colston

Chris Colston grew up in Roanoke and graduated from Virginia Tech in 1980 with a Marketing degree. After trying his hand at a few Marketing jobs and not having much success (“I realized my error,” he says), Chris got into journalism in 1983 as the editor of the *New Castle Record*.

In 1985, in the second year of existence of the *Hokie Huddler*, Colston was offered a job as editor of the *Huddler*. He held that position for 11 years, eventually leaving in 1996 to go to work at *Baseball Weekly* as a copy editor. He became the assistant operations editor but eventually returned to writing. He is now currently working full time as a baseball writer for *Baseball Weekly*, where a story he wrote titled “Revisiting Roto’s Roots” made the list of Notable Sports Writing of 1999, compiled by Glenn Stout.

Colston is the writer of *Turn up the Wick!*, Frank Beamer’s autobiography. Recently, TechSideline.com had the opportunity to interview Colston about the book, how he became involved in it, and the process he went through to write it. A review of the book will be posted soon on the main TechSideline.com web site, and we wanted to present the full text of the interview here in the TSL Extra.

TSL: How did it come about that you were the one picked to write the book about Coach Beamer?

CC: It’s kind of interesting how it happened. The way I remember it, after the Syracuse game in 1999, I called Coach the next Monday and asked him if he would be interested in doing some kind of book. Because I knew Tech was going to have a great year. I mean, after seeing the way they beat Syracuse 62-0, I knew this was something special.

He said he had been approached by several people about doing books, and he wasn’t sure

what he wanted to do, and he wasn’t going to make any decisions until the season was over. He basically said he didn’t want it to jinx anything. I said that’s fine, and he said call me at the end of the season.

In the meantime, Lindy’s came out with their *Sugar Time* magazine and asked me to do a piece on Coach and also to recap each game. So I called Coach Beamer up about that, and we talked a little bit more about doing a book. He said, “Well, there’s still this guy that wants to do my book...”

And I told him I was looking more to do a coffee table kind of thing, and I just wanted to touch base with him on it. And he said, “Yeah, it could be.”

So, my name was out there, and then, when Tech went to the Sugar Bowl, a company came to the university and said they were going to do a coffee table book on the Hokies ... *if they won the Sugar Bowl*. If they didn’t win, they still might do the book, but they were wondering if I would write the copy. I said, of course, I’ll do that, and that’s how I got my press pass to the Sugar Bowl.

Well, Tech lost, so that fell through. But then this guy Mike Bynum, the publisher of *Turn up the Wick!*, had apparently approached Frank about the book. I had been talking to Frank, and I still have a lot of friends in the athletic department, and I think Coach talked to some people. Frank tells me that I was the first person he thought of. I don’t know why — maybe because I had been talking about it with him, and we were there together at Tech for about 10 years, when I was working on the *Huddler*. So we knew each other pretty well.

So I got a call from him, and he asked me, would you be interested in doing this? So I said,

Analysis

From the Top Down: Building and Maintaining a Coaching Staff

by Gary Criswell (VirginiaPreps.com)

Note from the Editor: this article is shown in one-column format to accommodate a table that appears later.

Before I sat down to prepare this article, I took the time to watch the season premiere of *The West Wing* on NBC. The episode depicted how the show's fictional cast originally found their jobs in the White House. I was struck by how closely that episode mirrored the process of putting a college football staff together.

Both of these processes link professionals together that have an acute love for their craft and they know that they will practice that craft under intense scrutiny. The blending of personality, experience, loyalty, and knowledge is essential for any staff to go about achieving their primary goal: building a winning football program.

The typical College Football staff by nature is in a constant state of change. It is how well the Head Coach manages these changes (or delays them when the staff is really in synch) that will sustain his program's success. Let there be no mistake; there are very few jobs that are less stable than being a college coach.

College coaches exist in a world where change is looked at not only as good, but also mandatory. Rosters completely turn over every five years, support staffs turn over constantly and facilities are constantly being scrutinized in an effort "to keep up." In the current state of parity in college football, today's conference whipping boy often becomes tomorrow's newest member of the AP's top 20, just because they changed coaching staffs.

There are no manuals that I know of that teach how to build a successful Division I coaching staff. That formula is as unique as each individual Head Coach. While the fruits of a great staff are obvious, the path to get there is solely determined by the Head Coach, who is ultimately held accountable.

The nature of the business demands that the Head Coach brings in "his" people. He has to. More than any undertaking that I have ever been associated with, the job security of a college staff rests on all of the staff and how well (and closely) they can work together. The staff must reflect the personality of their boss.

The Resumes

It is ironic that I would even refer to resumes because they are not used as much as they are in the business world. Obviously experience is still the key to an assistant's qualifications for the job, but there are intangibles that could make an applicant "the right fit." That is a statement that cannot be overused when referring to the delicate balance of skills and temperament that is needed within a coaching staff.

It is the assistants that "fit" that can take the heat, circle the wagons when things get tough, and work as a unit in a world full of huge egos. It's the interview and the X & O's session on the grease board that gets a candidate a new job. At two of my interviews, we used the back of my resume to draw plays on.

As I mentioned previously, there are no magic formulas for staff building. While observing coaching staffs and seeing what makes them tick, I have established a hierarchy of coaching skills. I submit that every productive coaching staff as a whole has a great compliment of each of these skills, with each assistant contributing more in some areas, while being compensated for in other areas by his fellow assistants. The skills of the successful Head Coach play off of the skills of his assistants, and the successful Head Coaches are quick to recognize and compensate for their weaknesses.

John Ballein: From Mohawk to Main Man

by Neal Williams

To look at John Ballein now it is almost impossible to imagine.

He's a handsome man who, at 39, is pushing into middle age nicely. He's got a head of salt and pepper hair, not enough gray to take completely away his youthful look and not enough dark to make him look quite like a kid.

And you think, this man once had a Mohawk haircut?

"My mom actually gave it to me," Ballein said with a laugh, "the day before I went to football camp my junior year. I just wanted to do something crazy and that's about as crazy as I could do. I loved it. It felt good."

That Mohawk was one of the first things Virginia Tech coach Frank Beamer saw when he was looking at a videotape from some youngster who wanted a job on his then-new staff. Beamer is the exact opposite of Mohawk and his first through was, "No way."

Fortunately, his defensive coordinator at the time convinced Beamer to look past the 'do and more closely at the main underneath. Beamer listened to Ron Zook and, to this day, calls it one of the best decisions he's made at Tech.

"Ron said there's something I like about this guy and I said, 'Ok, let's go on to the next step,'" Beamer said. "I'm glad I took that next step. You talk about a guy who is important to this program. If it had been just me, I would have probably walked away from one of the best recruits we've ever had here."

These days, Ballein is indeed central to the success of the Hokies' football program. He was recently promoted to Associate Athletics Director for Football Operations, a title upgrade from Assistant Athletics Director for Football

Operations.

"Either way," he said in his self-deprecating way, "I've got 'ass' after my name."

Ballein is nobody's ass. To fully describe all he does would take a full season. Cory Bird, a senior rover for the Hokies, came up with the best description.

"Coach Ballein," Bird said, "is basically a liaison between the world and the football team."

But before we examine Ballein's duties, let's go back to that videotape - yep, the one with the Mohawk - for a moment. That tape and the story behind it speaks volumes about Ballein and his determination, his work ethic.

From Bentleyville, Pa., Ballein played linebacker at Division II Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He earned a degree in health and physical education from there. He received a master's degree in physical education from Old Dominion University in 1985.

While at ODU, he was working as a teacher and a coach at two Tidewater-area high schools. He spent time at Woodrow Wilson and Western Branch.

He wanted to try his luck in Division I football and realized he had a major strike against him.

"In this business, you have to know somebody. It's a good ol' boy network," Ballein said. "I had ties nowhere. I played Division II football. I had to do something to separate myself from everybody else."

These days, video resumes are routine. Back in 1986, when Ballein was angling for a collegiate job, they were not. He decided to make a tape telling the college football world about himself.

Bruuuuuuce: One of the Best

by Greg Kehr

It wasn't long ago that Bruce Smith was wreaking havoc in the backfields of the AFC East. Along with Reggie White, Bruce was and still is one of the most feared defensive ends in NFL history. Unfortunately for Bills fans, they don't get to see him play under the Western New York sky on Sundays anymore.

Bruce graduated from Virginia Tech in 1985 and remains to this day (until Michael Vick leaves), the biggest and best graduate the Hokies have ever produced, in terms of his NFL career. In the draft that year, the lowly Buffalo Bills had the first pick and decided to scoop up the talented defensive end from down south and bring him up north to form what would turn out to be one of the best defenses the NFL has ever seen.

Ever, you ask? What is that old cliché, defense wins championships? Well, four straight AFC titles...I think that bears consideration as "winning championships." Look at it this way, Bruce was the Rookie of the Year in 1985, having an instant impact on the National Football League, and then followed that up with 15 sacks the following year in 1986!

Jevon Kearse was the "freak" last year on his way to the Rookie of the Year, but what has he done this year? Not I am not comparing Jevon to Bruce yet; Jevon Kearse certainly has all the tools to get to that level. But Bruce Smith was the original "freak" when he was young, and in a way (he's a 37-year old man), he still is a freak. How else can you explain Pro Bowl after Pro Bowl, eleven in all, and holding the second spot in sacks all-time behind Reggie White (who incidentally is another freak — man, that's a lot of freaks! Freakin' this, freakin' that...but I digress).

The point is, Bruce Smith is one of the best defensive players of all time, period. During his career in Buffalo, only three seasons didn't

result in at least ten sacks. One was his rookie year, one was last year, and the last was 1991, when he was hurt. Give me that consistency year in and year out and I'll take it.

Some may argue that he is the best ever, not just one of the best — I'll stay out of that one. But from a football player's standpoint, seeing the specimen that is Bruce Smith coming at you, it had to be an unpleasant sight. Six-foot-four, 280 pounds and speed to boot!?! I don't think so, funnyman.

I remember my first chance to see Bruce in person was back in 1988 at what was then called Rich Stadium in Orchard Park, New York. The game was against the New England Patriots and ironically, for those who follow the NFL closely, a little quarterback by the name of Doug Flutie led the Patriots (for those of you who are still confused, Doug now quarterbacks the Bills in Rob Johnson's absence — as Mel Allen used to say, "How about that!").

The game was close from beginning to end, and on the final play from scrimmage Doug Flutie, like he has his whole career, rolled out of the pocket and wandered out into the flat around the 40-yard line. The Patriots needed a touchdown, if I remember correctly, and the Hail Mary wasn't out of the realm of possibility (Flutie versus Miami in the Orange Bowl, we all know about that one).

As Flutie rolls toward the sideline and looks downfield, from mid-field you see number 78 get to his feet and start running for the quarterback. He's ten, maybe fifteen yards away. But the entire stadium can see it coming: Flutie looking downfield, not finding anybody and his back to the best defensive end in the game, who is bearing down on him like a rabid dog foaming at the mouth.

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Tech on Turf

by Will Stewart

Editor's Note: this article is displayed in a one-column format to accommodate tables that it contains

(All stats through the 2000 Central Florida game)

It's a discussion that comes up on the message board sometimes: is Virginia Tech a better football team on grass than they are on artificial turf?

It's a complicated question, and the answer isn't easy. The analysis is complicated by the fact that Tech plays on grass at home, and the only time they play on turf is on the road, so naturally that's going to skew the results.

Many Hokie fans, swayed by what they have seen in Lane Stadium, and the Orange Bowl, and the Carrier Dome, and Mountaineer Field, say that Tech is a better football team on grass. Other Hokie fans, recalling the 1998 Music City Bowl (turf) and both Sugar Bowls, say that astroturf enhances Tech's speed and makes them a better team on the fake stuff.

I decided to gather up some data to present to you that might help you answer the question if Virginia Tech is a better team on grass than on turf. The answer isn't simple, and whether or not the data are conclusive is up to you to decide.

1.0 An Overview of the Data

First of all, I decided to start the analysis in 1993, the first bowl game of the Frank Beamer era. There's no particular reason for that, other than the fact that I thought the data should represent not just the Beamer era, but the bowl teams of the Beamer era. So the data that I'm about to present runs from the beginning of the 1993 season through the 2000 Central Florida game.

Here's a quick look at what I found:

Venue	Record	Winning %	Ave. Score	Margin
Grass, all games	57-13	81	34.2-16.8	+17.4
Grass, home games	41-6	87	36.3-14.6	+22.1
Grass, away games	14-4	78	30.8-17.9	+12.9
Grass, neutral games	2-3	40	26.0-32.8	-6.8
Turf, all games	16-8	67	28.6-20.2	+8.4
Turf, away games	14-7	67	28.2-20.0	+8.2
Turf, neutral games	2-1	67	31.7-21.0	+10.7

At first glance, the data support the notion that Tech is a better football team on grass. They win 81% of their games on grass, versus just 67% of games on turf. That's a simplistic view of the stats, though, and it's obviously skewed by a 41-6 record on the home grass of Lane Stadium.

2.0 Road Games and Neutral-Site Games

For Charlottesville Hokies, a Decade of Change

by Art Stevens

The first sign that things had changed was in the mall, of all places. The sports apparel shop had a wall full of Virginia stuff, like it always did, but it was the side wall.

And if you were coming from the middle of Fashion Square Mall, one of Charlottesville's finest shopping centers (by default), you saw the front window which was full of something else entirely.

Mostly Michael Vick jerseys; a few other orange-and-maroon shirts thrown in for good measure.

Welcome to the strange world of the Charlottesville Hokie. There seems to be a more pronounced VPI factor in Charlottesville than Wahoo influence in Blacksburg—at least these days.

"A lot more Hokies have emerged from the closet," said Leon Tilley, Class of '55 (Business).

Think about it—there's not much else going on in Charlottesville than the University of Virginia, or in Blacksburg other than Tech, for that matter. That rivalry, to a lot of people, drives the I-81 corridor, at least on Saturdays in the fall. And to be in the heart of it, well, it's gotta get tough sometimes, right?

"You get the heckling," said Tilley, who retired two years ago after four decades with Columbia Energy Systems. "We went to a sports bar to watch the Tech/Miami game. Some obnoxious young kid next to us was cheering loudly every time Miami did something good. A bunch of people were supporting him, clapping with him.

"One of my salesmen had season tickets (at Scott Stadium), and his tickets were right next to the student section. Every year, he would come back and tell me horror tales about them yelling,

throwing their drinks on him.

"I worked in Emporia a while ago, and it's a lot different there."

Tilley keeps things like that fan and that Miami loss in perspective, thankful for the joy of watching Vick and the rest of the team over the past few years. He's not one to rub that success in Virginia fans' faces, and doesn't appreciate it when fellow Tech fans do.

Around this time a decade ago, the sides were reversed, with Virginia ranked No. 1 for a spell and the Hokies going through a rough patch. But Tilley didn't notice much of a difference, or worry that Tech was being passed for good, like some Virginia fans do now with Tech.

"No, I didn't worry," he said. "My first year, we beat Maryland and the University of Richmond, and that's it. The year before that, I don't think we beat anybody. So anything was better than that.

"I never thought I'd see the day when we'd contend for a national championship."

Carl Mathews, a born-and-bred Charlottesville resident who happened to go to high school and room in Blacksburg with a certain TSL web host, remembers that 1990 year vividly.

"I was really skeptical they were that good, just as I think Virginia fans were until the game here last year," said Mathews, Class of '87 (Finance), now director of merchandise for Crutchfield. "I think we were lucky in the same way they were. Every week two or three teams right in front of them got beat, and they hadn't really beaten anybody.

"I don't think it's any comparison (to Tech last year). The vindication (in 1990) was when

Inside TSL

by Will Stewart

The inside story at what's going on at your favorite web site. At least, we *hope* it's your favorite web site.

“Here Comes Bama”

Without a doubt, one of the most interesting things that happened to me this past month was an interview I did on the Paul Finebaum radio show in Birmingham, Alabama. Finebaum does a radio sports talk show every day from 3:00-7:00 central time on WERC in Birmingham.

For some reason, Finebaum's producer decided to email me on October 31st and ask if I was interested in appearing on the show for about ten minutes. Sure, I said (granted, there aren't a lot of Hokies in Birmingham, Alabama, but I love being on the radio and always say yes, given the opportunity).

Why in the world would a radio show in Alabama want me on the air? Well, I can't answer the question of why the webmaster of an independent web site would be an attractive guest to them, but I can tell you what they wanted to talk about: the Beamer-to-Alabama rumors that were making the rounds at the time, and still are, as of November 15th.

First, some background: in an article that appeared on Thursday, October 26th in *The Tuscaloosa News*, sports editor Cecil Hurt dropped this little bombshell in an article about Alabama football, and the impending opening in the head coaching job: “It is a fact that a Virginia Tech assistant coach with local ties has contacted prominent Alabama boosters and proclaimed Frank Beamer's interest in the (Alabama head coaching) job.”

I don't put much stock in what Mr. Hurt said, but

if it were true, the assistant coach in question could be either tight ends/offensive tackles Coach Danny Pearman, who coached at Bama from 1990-1997, or defensive backfield coach Lorenzo Ward, who played at Alabama from 1986-1990 and was a graduate assistant coach there from 1991-1993.

On Monday, October 30th, one day before I appeared on Finebaum's radio show, Beamer shot the rumors down on his weekly Hokie Hotline radio show by saying, “... that is just absolutely crazy, it's just crazy. Sounds like somebody wants to screw up a good recruiting year for Virginia Tech. I don't know where it came from. I have no desire to leave Virginia Tech.”

So the stage was set. Beamer had denied any interest in the job, but without knowing this, Finebaum wanted to talk to me about it. And the resulting conversation provided me with an interesting look at the situation from another perspective, namely, the Alabama one.

Finebaum started out by asking me what I had heard, and I relayed to him that Beamer had shot down the rumor on his radio show just the night before. I also told him about Beamer's quote from last year or the year before, when after flirting with yet another head coaching opportunity, he said words to the effect that Virginia Tech would be his “last college coaching job.” That was a statement that most observers agreed ruled out another college job, but not a possible NFL job.

Finebaum didn't really seem to want to hear that, because it indicated that Beamer would not be interested in the soon-to-be-vacant Alabama head coaching job, and therefore, our conversation was essentially over, less than a minute in.

So he took a different tack, asking me about

Interview

Interview With Chris Colston

(continued from page 4)

“Well, I would love to do it.”

I asked him when the thing was due, and it was just about the same time as our first baby. And I was just starting this new full-time writing gig, but I was still juggling the operations editor job and the writing, until they found a replacement for me. So I’m working two jobs, taking a Lamaze class, going on the road, I had a pregnant wife, and now this comes up. I really didn’t know how I was going to pull it off.

We came to an agreement, and I thought, maybe if I worked really hard, I could pull it off.

So basically, it came about because of me talking to Frank during *Sugar Time*, and talking about the coffee table book, and then he thought of me after talking to Mike Bynum.

TSL: Would you consider Coach Beamer to be a friend, or did you have strictly a working relationship with him when you were at Tech?

CC: I’m not a golfing buddy with Coach, or anything like that. He wouldn’t want to play golf with me, because I’m awful. I would say it was always professional between me and him. I’d never even been at his house until I did the book. I wasn’t picked because I was a guy who hung out with him. But we always got along well. We always had a mutual respect.

TSL: So when you set out to start writing this book, what were the goals? Did you want it to be a comprehensive autobiography?

CC: The book could have been subtitled, “How Frank Beamer Built Virginia Tech Into a National Football Power.” That was my take on it. We could have spent a lot more time on his childhood and his youth, and it could have been more purely autobiographical, but I don’t think, and I don’t think Frank thought, that that was

what we wanted to do.

He’s got very little ego. He didn’t want it so much about him, as he wanted it to be about him in relationship to the program, now — the building of the program. So really, we touched on some things that were about him — his youth, the burns, high school football, how he got into Tech, and his Murray years and Citadel years — but the majority of it is how he built the program up. The tough early years, and the turnaround.

TSL: Did you learn a lot writing the book, or was it mostly stuff you knew before, from when you worked at the *Huddler*?

CC: Let me tell you, I mean, I learned so much. That’s the thing I’m really proud of where the book is concerned. It’s got basically 90% new material. I was there in the beginning of his career, and I read everything about Frank, so I’d done my research. I had about 22 pages of questions for Frank, typed out.

I was trying to get fresh stuff, or if we were covering ground that had already been covered, I was trying to get new information on top of what had already been said. So, yeah, I would say that a good 90% of it was stuff that I had never known about him before.

TSL: What was the biggest surprise in writing the book?

CC: I think without question it is how close Bobby Ross came to being the coach at Virginia Tech (instead of Beamer back in 1987). People knew Ross’s name was out there, but they never realized how close he came. Frank almost didn’t want to tell me that story. He said, “You know, people might not .. they might go, ‘Wait a minute’...”

Interview

Interview With Chris Colston

(continued from page 11)

TSL: Any Hokie fan with a brain is glad that Ross didn't get the job.

CC: That's what I told Coach Beamer!

TSL: Bobby Ross is a job-hopper. He was on his way to the NFL. He's a great guy and a great coach, but he's not a guy who's going to stay at Virginia Tech.

CC: Well, it's like Fate. It worked out for the best. I just never knew he was that close to taking the job, and that he and Coach Beamer had such a great relationship and such mutual respect that Bobby backed out so Frank could have the job. Frank was willing to back out, Bobby was willing to back out ... finally, Bobby backed out, and Frank got the job.

TSL: What do you think are the best parts of the book?

CC: The parts that I enjoyed the most were about the way he is off the field, outside football. The stories about him playing golf, showing his competitive nature, and how he is just as a person. And I thought the recruiting stories were really fun.

I spent basically two weeks with Coach. One day I was with him virtually all day. I showed up at his office at 10 or 11 in the morning and didn't leave his house until after midnight. One night I spent the night over there, I was there so late.

I spent a lot of time with him, and it was going better than I thought, and one time, he had a trip set up to Norfolk, to give a speech, on a Thursday. I was going to fly with him in a private plane and get a lot of interviewing done. But by that point, I had gotten so much done that there wasn't much point in doing that, and there wasn't really a need.

He said, "You know what you ought to do, is talk to some of my coaches." In one day's notice, he was able to get his whole staff over to John Ballein's house. And John brought a bunch of beer, and Boomer's sandwiches from Greg Roberts, and Greg came up. We went over there, and for over two hours, those guys just sat in a circle and drank beer and ate sandwiches and chicken wings, and told one great story about Frank Beamer after another. There's where I really got a lot of great material for the book, particularly the recruiting stories.

We had two sessions like that, and I don't know how many staffs would do something like that. On one day's notice, come over and spend that kind of time.

They could have sold tickets to any Hokie fan or sportswriter in the state. It was worth a thousand dollars. It was so priceless. We obviously couldn't use everything that was said, but it was magical, just hearing those guys talk about him. And it's so clear, the love they have for him, and the respect they have for him. And they razz him — he's one of the guys. It's not like he's this god. But you can tell, there's so much respect for him. It's genuine. You can't fake that.

TSL: Who else did you talk to?

CC: I tracked down Dave Braine on his cell phone one day. I caught him on his way out west to do his annual fly-fishing trip. I talked to Bobby Ross, and this was the Friday before the NFL draft! He was a little bit busy, but you can tell, he's got so much respect for Frank that he was willing to take so much time out right before the draft.

I tracked down (former Tech athletic director) Dutch Baughman and talked to him. I couldn't use a lot of what he said. You know, he hired

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Frank. He loves Frank. He's very pleased that it worked out for Frank. He's sad that it didn't work out for him (Dutch).

And I talked to Coach's family. His brother Barnett in particular was a great guy. He's a genuine good ole boy, and very in awe of what his little brother has done.

We talked to a lot of people, and you learn the most about someone by the way other people talk about him, not by what he says himself, but by what other people say.

TSL: How long would you say it took you to write the book?

CC: It was one of the most incredible things. I started this thing in March of 2000. It took me two weeks, working almost every day, to do the research. I went through every Huddler, Roanoke Times, all that stuff. Background information can take forever.

It took three weeks of doing nonstop interviews. I had 14 mini-cassette tapes, two hours each. I just had a ton of stuff. Then, transcribing it ... that just took forever.

It took two and a half months, non-stop. That's working all weekend, and when I went home it was all I would do. My people at work were very understanding about the project. When we got the proofs, I was talking to Frank every day, on corrections and tweaks. That was a lot of hard work.

I was amazed at how open and honest he was. Some of these questions were tough questions. And I didn't want to pull any punches. He didn't want to talk about the arrests (1996) that much, or firing the assistant coaches (1993). I was really surprised that he was that open about things.

He was really open about his burn accident as a kid, and to this day, that's tough for him to talk about. In the book, he says that he had thought about getting the scars fixed, but he's okay with it now. It's part of who he is. But that was a tough thing for him. He's badly scarred. It's not just his face and neck.

But he answered every question, and it was hard, because I would have to ask him things like, "Well, what exactly ?"

The funny thing was, he saw it (the burn accident) one way, and Barnett saw it another way. Barnett was there. So once Barnett gave me his version, I had to go back to Frank and ask him things like, "Did you actually kick the gas can, or was it rolling, or what?" You know, I hated to do that, but I wanted to get the details right.

But he was fine, he was cool with it. He was wonderful throughout the whole thing. It really could have been a pain in the butt, but he was a first-class guy about it.

TSL: What would you change about the book if you could do it over again?

CC: The only thing, if I could do it over, would be that I would add more to it. I wish I had had the time to go into more detail. So much of it is interesting. We had a limit of 60,000 words, and it ended up being 62,000 words. We had a May 1st deadline, and I was under pressure to get it done. If I could do it over again, I just wish I had the time to write more.

TSL: How many copies were presented, and where were they distributed?

CC: The deal was, I think there were 20,000 printed and the Tech Bookstore got exclusive

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Interview With Chris Colston

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rights to this. You can get it in the Richmond area at the VCU bookstore, the Northern Virginia area at the Maryland bookstore, and in the Virginia Beach area at the Old Dominion bookstore. You can also get it at TechBookstore.com, as well as at the actual Tech Bookstore.

TSL: Thanks, Chris.

CC: Thank you. I enjoyed writing the book, and I hope Hokie fans enjoy reading it!

Analysis

From the Top Down

(continued from page 5)

Let's take a brief look at these coaching skills and how they relate to both the Head Coach and his assistants. They are listed in their order of importance for each job.

	Hierarchy of Coaching Skills	
	Head Coach	Assistant Coaches
Most Important Skill	Gathering talent	Teaching
	Organizational skills	Accountability for his segment
	Disciplining players	Evaluating personnel
	Motivational Skills	Motivational Skills
	Evaluating personnel	Disciplining players
	Accountability for his program	Organizational skills
Least Important Skill	Teaching	Gathering talent

This scale goes a long way to explaining why some assistant coaches have a difficult time making the transition to Head Coach. It also meant to establish a basic truth; that while a good Head Coach is probably pretty good at all seven skills, his assistants don't necessarily have to be. For example, I have seen good staffs that have a few assistants that aren't good recruiters, but you can bet that the staff also includes a couple of assistants that are recruiting horses.

Let's take a few moments to look at the type of assistants that might be prowling your favorite campus.

The Apprentice

The single most important dynamic within a coaching staff is accountability. The best thing that an assistant can say about his boss is that "he lets his assistants coach." College football is way too complex for Head Coaches to micromanage. That independence supplies each assistant with his own little fiefdom where he can establish a bond with his players while building within the program's system.

It is the Head Coach's job to orchestrate his assistants so they feel that independence and apply their own initiatives while still being on the "same page." This is why I believe that great coaching staffs produce good Head Coaches, not just because of the success that they have been around, but because they have already made some of the big decisions that they will make in their future job.

The Head Coach's job really begins and ends where he holds his daily staff meetings. It is there where he will formulate the game plans and then critique them after each game. The greatest lesson that the apprentice Head Coach learns is how his boss handles his fellow professionals. Chances are he is already making big decisions during the game.

The Lifer

Don't let me leave you with the impression that it is the secondary responsibility of a Head Coach to produce future competitors for his job. In fact "letting your assistants coach" also develops a second type of valued assistant; the "lifer." I cannot think of a successful coach in the country that doesn't have at least one assistant that has been with him (usually through several schools) for an extended amount of time. Look for the title; "Assistant Head Coach" as a hint who might be a "lifer" on your favorite staff.

Analysis

From the Top Down

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As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, a Head Coach must have at least some of his “own people” to be successful. Coaching is a lot like any other enterprise; the longer that a staff stays together, the smoother the process of winning games becomes. Lifers are the glue that holds a staff together. They also allow their boss to coach past his retirement age.

The Bird Dog

Recruiting is everything. I cannot overstate this point. You must consistently recruit talented athletes with emotional and academic staying power to enroll at your school. There are assistants that get and keep their jobs because of their ability to lure 17-18 year olds onto college campuses.

Recruiting specialists are less prevalent than in the past because of NCAA staff restrictions, but they still exist. (Before there were restrictions on what a “part time” coach could be paid, football factories would pay a “part time” veteran coach high five figures to coach his position responsibilities and let the young “full time” assistant coach recruit at a lower salary). Recruiting is not necessarily a young man’s game, but it is a relationship game, and Head Coaches must attend to those relationships with a crafty blend of recruiting talent.

This is a good time to mention that recruiting has done more than any affirmative action program could do for the placement of black assistant coaches. The need to recruit young black athletes has dictated that every college staff have at least a couple of black coaches. This is not to say that these assistants only recruit black athletes, but it is good to have black coaches on campus to provide a comfort zone and role models for minority recruits.

Before you raise your eyebrows to these statements, consider the fact that as a white coach at a historically black university, I used the lack of minority coaches as a weapon when I recruited against I-A programs. I have also had the opportunity to recommend several black assistants that I have coached with or against for positions at I-A programs. These recommendations were made at the request of schools looking only for black assistants.

The Mechanic

Technical things go wrong with any program. Sometimes the damage is so great that a new assistant is brought in for his particular expertise with a particular system or technique. The most common “mechanic” brought in is an offensive or defensive coordinator.

I am always leery of this change, because the coordinators inevitably want “their own people,” and the staff gets disrupted further. Also I have noticed that “the mechanics” are often not good recruiters, even though I can think of no good reason why this is true.

So while his coaching segment might improve, the long-term impact may not be so positive. The “mechanics” that I would feel the most comfortable with as a fan or alumnus would be the guy that is brought in because of where he coached and what he learned from his former employer. Recruiting contacts that the “mechanic” has would also apply when using this hiring strategy.

Analysis

From the Top Down

The Homeboy

Many staffs include a guy with the most local knowledge; a coach that they inherit or bring in that has ties with the previous staff. These guys know where all the bones are buried and can really be a big help as the new staff gets to know the University bureaucracy. Never underestimate a coaching staff's relationship with the admissions, financial aid, housing and food services departments within each University. I also consider staff members that played under the Head Coach and came back to coach under him as homeboys. All homeboys are serious candidates to be lifers.

As a postscript I will admit that watching the Virginia Tech coaching staff develop and work through the years served as the inspiration for this article. I believe Tech's success is due to the fact that their coaches do fit loosely into some of these coaching "typicals" and that helps bring stability to the staff because every assistant understands his role. I also contend that Tech's coaches also challenge each other to step outside their stereotypes and to branch out professionally. I know that Hokie fans want me to label each assistant as to their "type", but I'm hoping that you did that while you were reading this article.

My years as a college football coach were the most rewarding professional experience of my life. That experience has shaped my new career in sales and on the radio on a daily basis. My hope is that when you watch your favorite team compete you will better understand how your coaching staff works. Probably just like your workplace, the proper blending of talents, experience, efforts and personalities makes for a successful enterprise.

Enjoy the game!

Gary Criswell has a varied and interesting career, including stints as a high school JV football coach and head wrestling coach at Henrico High School, a baseball umpire, and an assistant football coach at Virginia Union University. Gary now works as a Sales Manager for Network Business Furniture, serves as an analyst for WRNL's High School and College

John Ballein

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He sent one to every Division I school.

“I spent the greater part of my salary on postage,” he said.

Nibbles? None. Beamer, who didn’t know Ballein at all, was the only coach who called and said, “No thanks.” That stuck with Ballein. He was prepared to take his videotape down a level to Division II when Zook called. He wanted to talk to Ballein. No jobs were available, but Zook suggested Ballein come to Blacksburg anyway, help out, find a regular job and see what develops. Two weeks later, a graduate assistant’s job opened and Ballein was on the way.

He got rerouted into his current job almost by accident. He envisioned himself being an on-field coach forever. After a year at Tech, Beamer helped him get an assistant’s job at another school. Two months into that job, Ballein realized he didn’t approve of the way things were run at his new school. He didn’t like the way the players were being treated.

He called Beamer, who told him to come back to Tech. They’d find something. Ballein came back and helped with recruiting. Eventually, his job evolved into what he’s doing now. And these days, he can’t imagine himself being an X and O coach again.

“Not in any way,” Ballein said. “I think if a person in this position has a desire to coach, you’ve got the wrong person. A lot of things would get left out because they wouldn’t be concentrating on this job.”

Bird’s description - a liaison to the world - is about perfect.

College football is an all-consuming thing, particularly in season, for coaches and players. They can easily lose contact with the outside.

Coaches not only have their players to deal with and games to prepare for, they have recruiting responsibilities.

Players have practice, film study, class — it’s a full-time job and then some.

That’s where Ballein comes into play.

If a player has a problem, any kind of problem, Ballein tries to help. Who should I call about this parking situation? Where do I go to switch this class from Tuesday night to Monday night? My girlfriend doesn’t love me anymore.

“They know,” Ballein said, “that door is always open.”

There’s so much more. Ever try to move a football team - players, coaches, support staff, equipment - from one location to another? Try it just once for a full appreciation of what Ballein does all year. Plane schedules, buses, hotels, meals - all have to be arranged well in advance.

Who makes all the arrangements for visiting recruits?

You guessed it, Ballein.

Players call him coach, even though he isn’t. It’s a sign of their respect for Ballein, who is married to former Tech basketball player Stephanie Green. They have two daughters.

“He’s always trying to help us out, anything at all,” linebacker Ben Taylor said. “You go to him, he’ll fix it right up.”

Said Bird, “It adds something special to a program to have someone like that. He’s always around, always accessible.”

John Ballein

Ballein has been described a variety of times as Beamer's right-hand man and that's true, though it is only a part of his job. He's is Beamer's frequent golf and racquetball partner and he doesn't exclude the big guy from his practical jokes. The brain that thought of Mohawk is still active and crazy. Everybody in the office is fair game, until it is time to get down to business.

Ballein takes particular pride in being "Radar" to Beamer's "Colonel Potter." For example, Tech has 16 players who can't eat in the dining hall on Monday nights. They have a class and there isn't enough time after practice to get over there. So the meals are delivered. One recent week, the Hokies changed their practice schedule and Beamer mentioned in a staff meeting that the dining hall needed to be notified.

Already done.

"I'm kind of like the batteries in the back of the clock," Ballein said. "You never see them, never notice them when the clock is working."

It's clear he loves his job, as hectic as it can be at times. The phone is always ringing. One of the two doors in his office leads directly to Beamer's office. The other leads to a lobby. Somebody on either side is likely to need Ballein's help at most any hour.

"When you're dealing with good kids, and I look at them as kids and not players, it's great," Ballein said. "The best thing about the kids is they know they can come to me about anything, anything at all. A girl, parents, personal things, school. There is such a wide variety of things.

"I'm fortunate I'm in a position where they feel comfortable coming in here."

Bruuuuce: One of the Best

(continued from page 7)

You can probably guess what happens...TOUCHDOWN!

NO, NO, NO! Bruce completely blind-sides Flutie, the ball is fumbled and rolls harmlessly out of bounds as time expires. Game over, and the chorus of "BRUUUUUCE!!!" echoes throughout Western New York as the Bills win.

If you are a Buffalo Bills fan, the glory days really started around that time. And that specific play was etched in my mind forever, simply because he never gave up. He was blocked, blocked again, had to run half-way across the field to chase down an elusive quarterback, and the best part about it was everyone in the stadium was watching and waiting for him to save the day.

He was Superman. We Hokie fans look at Michael Vick now like *HE* is Superman. Well, during his career in Buffalo, Bruce Smith was Superman every week, during every fall, for 15 years.

I actually had the chance to meet Bruce Smith one evening a couple of years ago, and again, he did something that will be etched in my mind forever, just like that play against the Patriots.

I was working during the Wade Phillips Show, which was a coaches show on our network up here in Upstate New York, and every week, Wade had a player join him to talk with their host Paul Maguire and answer questions from the audience.

I don't remember much about that particular show, but when we went to break, Bruce stood up, received an ovation from the audience, and made his way towards the doors leading out of the field house where we were broadcasting. As I was on the other side of the set/audience, a friend and co-worker of mine was escorting

Bruce out and told him I was a Virginia Tech graduate.

Bruce didn't hesitate. He looked over at me and said, "Go Hokies." That's it. Nothing extravagant, nothing earth shattering, just something from the heart, something simple and meaningful. It wasn't the "hey-how-you-doing-I'll-never-remember-you" that you get at an autograph signing or when passing a celebrity in a hallway. Instead it was timely - the Hokies were ranked and enjoying success that not even Bruce himself experienced during his Tech career – and it was sincere. Bruce has always been soft-spoken and quiet, and this was for the most part, vintage Bruce.

He didn't know my name and we didn't go out for drinks after the show. The point is, he didn't brush off the notion of having a Hokie in the building like some future HOF's may, he was proud of his school and its tradition, and he made a young, fellow alum feel damn good in the process. It may not seem like much, but to have Bruce Smith look you in the eye and say "Go Hokies" and smile, when you are someone as passionate as I am about my school, it was a moment that I'll never forget.

Interestingly, fans and citizens of Western New York may not have all the rosy feelings that I do when it comes to Bruce Smith. There were hold-outs before training camps, the still mysterious drunk-driving/sleeping incident in Virginia Beach a few years ago, and probably countless other moments during the course of 15 years. Fans are fickle and some hold onto negatives more so than the positives.

The facts though, are very simple for Bruce Smith, the football player. He did as much on the field for the Buffalo Bills as anyone who has ever put on a uniform, at any level, for any team. He almost single-handedly put the Bills into the

Bruuuuuce: One of the Best

upper echelon of the National Football League, a perch they have maintained for more than a decade now.

It is probably safe to say that Bruce Smith epitomizes football in Buffalo. Many will say Jim Kelly; others will say Thurman Thomas. I, on the other hand, will say Bruce Smith. Not because he is a Hokie, though that does help. He is Buffalo Bills football because he was here first, he helped lead the identity of this team throughout his career and in doing so, was and still is one of the greatest players ever in the NFL.

You don't get to where you are in life on pure talent. It happens all the time in all walks of life. There is luck, there is fate, and there is help along the way given by countless numbers of people. Bruce Smith, on his rise to Hall of Fame status had all these. He chose to stay in-state and go to Tech. He played on a team that allowed him to be an utter menace to opposing teams. He was given the tools, his body, to be a star. But he worked and worked to make those tools better.

The people at Tech, the people in the Bills organization and many others deserve special thanks for making Bruce what he is today. A rural school in Blacksburg and a small market in Buffalo gave Bruce Smith the stage. But teammates, coaches and a winning attitude made Bruce Smith the football player he is today. The Vince Lombardi Trophy has been the only thing to elude him. And with a little luck, or maybe some fate, it look's like he's got a very good chance to get another shot at winning it.

Buffalo Bills fans miss him on Sundays. I just hope all the Redskins fans understand and appreciate what it's like to have him on that field doing what needs to get done for that precious victory.

A word to the wise though: when you 'Skins fans are shelling out 20 bucks next year at camp just to park your car, don't complain if Bruce isn't there...he never really liked training camp.

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Tech on Turf

(continued from page 8)

When you take out the home grass record, the non-home records for grass and turf start to come more in line.

Venue	Record	Winning %	Ave. Score	Margin
Grass, non-home games	16-7	70	29.8-21.1	+8.7
Turf, non-home games	16-8	67	28.6-20.2	+8.4

When you look at the data this way, the difference between grass and turf performance is so miniscule as to be insignificant. The Hokies have played a nearly equal number of non-home games (23 on grass, 24 on turf) on each surface in the last 8 years, and on grass, they're just 3 percentage points better and just 0.3 points better per game. These differences are so small as to be nearly negligible.

3.0 A Look at Recurring Road Opponents

47 games are included in the non-home game data, and out of those 47 games, the bulk of the data (34 games) comes from games against UVA, ECU, and Tech's Big East opponents. Those are the only opponents against whom Tech has played more than one road game over the time period of 1993-present.

Recurring Opponents, 1993-Present

Opponent	Surface	Non-home Record	Ave. Score	Margin
Boston College	Turf	4-1	31-19	+12
Pittsburgh	Turf	3-1	35-21	+14
Syracuse	Turf	1-3	22-31	-9
Temple	Turf*	2-0	43-10	+33
Virginia	Turf*	1-0	20-17	+3
WVU	Turf	2-2	20-16	+4
Turf Data Totals		13-7 (65%)	29-20	+9
ECU	Grass	2-0	36-24	+12
Miami	Grass	2-3	15-23	-8
Rutgers	Grass	3-0	54-19	+35
Temple	Grass*	1-0	38-16	+22
Virginia	Grass*	2-1	29-23	+6
Grass Data Totals		10-4 (77%)	31-22	+9

* in 1993, UVA had turf in Scott Stadium, and in 1995, Tech played Temple on the grass surface of RFK stadium.

This subset of data seems to suggest that Virginia Tech is indeed a better team on a grass surface, but only in terms of winning percentage. In terms of scoring margin, there is no difference between grass and turf in these data.

Despite the presence of ECU, Miami, and UVA as tough road grass surfaces, Tech has an impres-

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Tech on Turf

sive 10-4 record as a road grass team against the opponents listed. The presence of Rutgers as a road grass game boosts the record here, but no more so than the presence of Temple as a road turf team does in the turf category.

On turf, against the trio of BC, Pittsburgh, and Temple, Tech has racked up a 9-2 record with an average score of 35-18 (+17 margin). Tech has had no trouble against those teams.

Where the Hokies get into trouble on turf on the road is at Syracuse and WVU, where they're 3-5 overall. Tech has absorbed two whippings at those places, a 52-21 defeat in 1996 at Syracuse, and a 30-17 defeat in 1997 in Morgantown. They have at least managed to make the other 3 losses close. Out of their 3 wins at WVU and Syracuse, only 1 was a laugher (27-0 over WVU in 1995).

4.0 The Bowl Games

The bowl games Tech has played since 1993 are only a limited set of data, so I'm not sure you can draw many conclusions from them, but they are interesting to look at. Here's the breakdown:

Year	Bowl Game	Surface	Opponent	W/L	Score	Margin
1993	Independence	Grass	Indiana	W	45-20	+25
1994	Gator	Grass	Tennessee	L	23-45	-22
1995	Sugar	Turf	Texas	W	28-10	+18
1996	Orange	Grass	Nebraska	L	21-41	-20
1997	Gator	Grass	UNC	L	3-42	-39
1998	Music City	Turf	Alabama	W	38-7	+31
1999	Sugar	Turf	FSU	L	46-29	-17

Here's what that equates to, in a grass/turf breakdown:

Venue	Record	Winning %	Ave. Score	Margin
Grass bowl games	1-3	25	23-37	-14
Turf bowl games	2-1	67	32-21	+11

If you went by this small set of data, you would think that Tech is a horrible grass team in bowl games and a great turf team. The grass data is skewed by two bowl games where Tech got thrashed: the two Gator Bowls, played in 1994 and 1997. The Hokies ran into BCS-quality teams both times, playing a hot Volunteer team in 1994 with Peyton Manning as a freshman QB, and an awesome North Carolina team in 1997.

And when you add in the 1996 Orange Bowl, which was a pretty close game that saw Nebraska pull away at the end, you get a pretty warped set of data for bowl games on grass. Only the 1993 Independence Bowl saves Tech's bowl record on grass from being a total loss.

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Tech on Turf

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When it comes to bowl games, you can argue that the Hokies are a turf team, but again, that conclusion would only be drawn from three games. But you have to admit that those three games have been good ones for Tech: the 1995 Sugar Bowl, the 1998 Music City Bowl, and the 1999 Sugar Bowl. The Hokies stood tall in all three games.

So What's Your Conclusion?

My own personal conclusion is that Tech isn't any better on grass fields than they are on astroturf fields. I think the key set of data is data set #2, "Road Games and Neutral Site Games." That data set presents results that do not include the home (grass) games, which are naturally heavily slanted in Tech's favor.

But you can draw your own conclusions. You can view the data used to generate this report on-line at <http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue1/techonturf.htm>, and you can even download the data in Microsoft Excel 97 format (directions are on the techonturf.htm page), so you can sort it and manipulate it yourself.

I hope you enjoyed this look at Tech's record on artificial turf and on grass. Future installments of "Inside the Numbers" will be equally mind-numbing in detail!

A Decade of Change

(continued from page 9)

Georgia Tech beat them. I remember thinking how great that T-shirt was—the one that said ‘No. 1 in the Nation,’ crossed out with the Georgia Tech score, then ‘No. 1 in the ACC,’ crossed out with the Maryland score, then ‘No. 1 in Virginia,’ crossed out with the Virginia Tech score, and then finally ‘No. 1 in Charlottesville,’ with a question mark.

“I remember being envious of the national media attention that Virginia was getting back then. I remember worrying that this would damage Tech’s ability to recruit top players. But I don’t remember any Virginia fans going out of their way, rubbing it in.”

Mathews, too, wasn’t worried that Virginia Tech was being surpassed. “I never had much fear of that. The Big East was coming together, I knew that would help, with the television contract with CBS.”

And now, with Vick? “It’s incredible, seeing how much attention he brings to the program. No other player has gotten more press the last two years. They can’t say anymore that if you go to Blacksburg, you won’t contend for the Heisman, you won’t be a star.

“Tech fans are a little more even-keeled. Without Michael Vick, Virginia Tech fans still love Virginia Tech. When he had to leave the Pittsburgh game, you could hear the fans kick it up a notch. After that, I don’t think the fans sat down for the rest of the game, except for timeouts.”

Mathews heads down to Lane Stadium with some frequency, and hasn’t missed a Tech game at Scott Stadium in years. But Tilley, for one, won’t make the trip down Route 250 to Scott Stadium from his home in the western part of Albemarle County, but his Lane season tickets are among his most prized possessions.

“It (Scott Stadium) is the worst location on earth,” said Tilley, whose Tech parking pass allows him to whiz into Lane late, and he said the time from his home to Lane is only an hour and 15 minutes more than it takes to get to Scott Stadium right down the road. “Too much trouble to get to it.”

Inside TSL

(continued from page 10)

Beamer's contract. "He makes about \$500,000 a year in total compensation," I said, "plus, if I'm remembering correctly, he has two separate one million dollar annuities that are his if he stays at Virginia Tech until 2005. So he definitely has a financial carrot at the end of the stick to stay here."

"Well, that's no problem," Finebaum countered, "because Alabama could hire him at a million or a million-five per year and easily make that up. Plus, they can add in their own annuity."

I couldn't argue that, and I conceded that SEC schools and Big Ten schools definitely have much deeper pockets than Virginia Tech does. "But why would Beamer leave?" I asked. "He walks on water here. The team could go 1-10, and no one would question him. They would question his assistant coaches, the players, the administration, and even the fan base, before they would question him. He's got it made at Virginia Tech, and what he has done here is very special to him," implying that it's not all about the money to Frank Beamer.

Regarding Beamer's statement about having no desire to leave Virginia Tech, Finebaum said that he had been lied to so many times by so many coaches that he had difficulty believing what any of them said anymore. I didn't really respond to that, except to say "You never know. But typically, in the past, when he has checked out other head coaching jobs, Beamer's statements have been very carefully worded to leave certain possibilities open. He uses statements like, 'at this time,' or 'my last college job,' that allow you to read between the lines. For him to say he's not interested in leaving, with no qualifiers, is a pretty emphatic statement for him."

I told Finebaum about Beamer's last contract renegotiation, in which he got pay raises for some of his assistants and got the second

annuity added to his contract. "At the time, based on that and based on statements made by Beamer, it was generally perceived that that was that, and the matter was closed once and for all."

"And now," Finebaum replied, "here comes Bama."

And all I could think was, "This guy's not listening to me."

I kept my mouth shut, though, and didn't respond to that statement. I could have stated that to Finebaum on the radio that day, but I thought about the Alabama audience that was listening. Their likely response would have been, "Well, isn't that cute? The little Hokie thinks we can't steal away his coach by waving Alabama tradition and a boatload of money in his face. He actually thinks you can take some guys at their word. How quaint."

But, yeah, that's what I think. I think they can't steal away our coach by waving Alabama tradition and a boatload of money in his face. And yeah, I do take him at his word.

Since that day, despite repeated pronouncements of "I have no desire to leave Virginia Tech," the rumor has not completely died down, but it does appear that all that will arise from it is renegotiated contracts for Beamer and his assistants. As of the date I wrote this article (November 15th), I truly believe that Frank Beamer will not leave for Alabama. So remember to read my recounting of my conversation with Finebaum in its proper context, given that it took place over two weeks ago.

The Origin of TechSideline.com

As you know, TechSideline.com was HokieCentral.com for four and a half years, until

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a request from the Virginia Tech Licensing Department to prohibit the use of “hokie(s)” and “virginiatech” in web site domain names necessitated a change. I had figured this was coming for years, and to be honest, I’m finally glad that it’s over with and that HC has a new name that I like. It’s going to take a little getting used to, but I like TSL.

I first heard the web site name TechSideline.com the day of Virginia Tech’s 1999 football game against Pittsburgh, and I liked it the first time I heard it.

I was sitting on the upper deck of a friend’s houseboat in Pittsburgh. There were about six of us gathered around, and we were having “The Name Discussion,” as I like to call it. That’s the discussion I had many, many times with many different people about whether or not HokieCentral.com should change its name, why it might have to, and what it should change to.

These discussions usually consisted of at least couple dozen names being thrown out, most of which were completely unusable or already taken. But the name suggestions would occur only after a (usually long) talk about why in the world the name would be changed, whether or not Tech had the right to request a name change, and whether or not I should fight it when the time came.

Once I could navigate someone through that part of the discussion and convince them that a name change might one day be necessary or desired, then we could commence with the suggestions for new names.

I pretty much wore myself out going through dozens and dozens of names on my own and hadn’t come up with any that I liked. I had some decent candidates, but not any real winners.

Coming up with a new name for HC was a tough job. Names using “hokie(s)” or “virginiatech” were off limits (I assumed that, even before the cease-and-desist letter), and I personally didn’t want to use anything involving “turkey” or “gobbler” in the name, because it’s awfully hard to be taken seriously when the name of your web site is something like turkeytalk.com or gobblertalk.com.

I had made my mind up to use a domain name with the word “Tech” in it, and that, my friends, is a difficult proposition. Due to the hand-in-glove nature of the relationship between technology and the Internet, domain names that used “tech” in them were mostly taken. The easiest and best names — techathletics.com and techsports.com — were long gone, of course.

So here I was, engaged in the Name Discussion again with a group of guys, some of whom were HokieCentral diehards, and others of whom barely ever looked at the site.

“How about TechSideline.com?” my buddy Matt Mayfield, the owner of the houseboat, threw in. Matt’s not that much of a sports fan, Tech or otherwise, but he enjoys a challenge and was participating fully in the discussion.

I nodded. That was one I had never thought of. “I like it,” I said, “but I think it might be too football-centric. HC is an all-sports web site.”

“Nah,” somebody else said. “Basketball courts have sidelines, don’t they? Soccer fields, lacrosse fields...”

“Hmm,” I noted, and filed it away. I liked it, but I wasn’t sure it would work.

Much time passed, and there was still a full year’s worth of wondering to go through about The Name. Last November, we almost changed

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it to DrillField.com, and this past summer, I came within an eyelash of changing it to OandMSports.com, but decided to stick with HokieCentral.com at the last second.

Many of you have asked why I never pulled the trigger on OandMSports.com, and what made me change my mind and decide at the last second not to go with it. Last summer, HC's parent company was applying most of the pressure to change the name at that time — Virginia Tech hadn't said a word to me. Without going into too much detail, let's just say that some personnel changes occurred at the parent company, and I decided to take control of the issue again and put it off.

And of course, in a letter dated October 2nd, the Virginia Tech Licensing Department requested that I make the name change by November 15th, 2000. The exact wording was "... we must ask you to stop using hokiecentral.com ..." which is about as vague as you can get; am I still allowed to forward hokiecentral.com to my new domain name? Does that qualify as "using it"?

By the time request was made by Virginia Tech to change the name, the domain name TechSideline.com had emerged from obscurity to be my personal favorite. Finally, with the help of a home page poll that also included some other options, I settled on TechSideline.com and went with it. Here's how the voting came out in the poll:

TechSideline.com	33.1%
TechSportsJournal.com	26.7%
DrillField.com	19.9%
MaroonPride.com	11.5%
OandMSports.com	7.7%
VictoryRow.com	1.1%
Note: 3214 votes cast	

Not only was TechSideline.com my favorite

choice, but it was the readers' favorite choice also.

So finally, after literally years of wondering and anticipation, the change has been made. I can't *begin* to tell you how glad I am to put this all behind me. When something hangs over your head for a long time, it's nice when it finally goes away.

I like the name, because being on the sidelines implies that you're as close to the action as you can be without actually getting into the game (unless you're a referee, but TechRef.com sounded like a dumb name for the new HokieCentral). The irony, of course, is that with Virginia Tech's refusal to grant press credentials to the web site, they have succeeded in keeping HokieCentral, and now TechSideline, on the sidelines and "out of the game."

So you could almost say that the name works on two levels.

Lastly, my buddy Matt logged onto the web site the other day from Slovenia, where he lives now — I kid you not — and was surprised to see that the name of the site had been changed to the name he suggested long ago, on that day in Pittsburgh on his houseboat.

The houseboat is long-gone, not being seaworthy enough to make a trans-Atlantic trip, but Matt's suggestion for a name will live on. He had this to say:

"I find it ironic that the guy that came up with the name of your site is probably the one that reads it the least. We don't hear much about Virginia Tech football here in Slovenia, unfortunately, and I just check in with your site every once in a while.

"And just to make it official, *I, Matt Mayfield,*

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*hereby release all rights to the name
TechSideline.com for the promise of one beer
sometime in the future.”*

Sure, Matt, the beer is yours. Just send the bill
to the Tech Licensing Department.

— *Will*