

TSL Extra

Issue 5, March 16, 2001

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TSL EXTRA

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ON THE COVER

*Cover photo of Kevin Jones is courtesy of PA Sports Fever (pennpreps.rivals.com).
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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

Wow, this issue is a whopper.

To new subscribers, welcome — you have jumped on board at just the right time, I think. To old subscribers (if there's any such thing, for a publication that is just five issues old), get ready for what may be the best issue yet of the TSL Extra. It's certainly the *biggest*.

This issue features a massive interview with Kevin Jones and his dad, Thomas Jones. Most of the interview is spent talking to Thomas, not Kevin. The elder Jones is more talkative than his soft-spoken son, and some of the questions I had to ask were a little controversial, so I spent most of my time talking to Thomas. He was a fountain of information and an entertaining interview subject.

A lot has been written about Kevin Jones and his recruitment, so you might think that you have already read all there is to know, but believe it or not, you haven't. Our interview contains some new and interesting stuff never before revealed anywhere else.

In addition to chatting with a new Hokie, we talk with a couple of old Hokies — Ken Oxendine and Corey Moore. Ken is playing for the LA Xtreme in the XFL, and Corey has completed his rookie year for the NFL's Buffalo Bills. We'll bring you up to date on what each of them thinks about where they are and where they're going.

This month's "Inside the Numbers" is a pet project that I have been dreaming about doing ever since I started the TSL Extra. In this issue, I take the defensive statistics for the Hokie football team from the past year and cram them into a formula designed to figure out which player was the most productive for the season overall, and which player was most productive for each minute that he spent on the field. One answer will not surprise you, but the other one will.

Those four headline articles are rounded out nicely by three other articles on a variety of topics: quarterback development, the challenge facing the Tech men's basketball team, and the latest "Inside TSL" — which, amazingly, does *not* contain any hit statistics this month (sorry).

All in all, it adds up to the biggest TSL Extra ever. I think you'll like this issue, but if you don't, then I've decided that there's just no pleasing you.

As always, folks, thanks for supporting the site by subscribing to the TSLX. Please spread the word about this fine publication (as long as the word is good), don't forget to take advantage of your 10% TechLocker.com discount ... and enjoy issue #5.



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 TSLX's articles on any websites, including our own.

Interview

Interview: Thomas and Kevin Jones

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

On Tuesday, March 6th, I had the opportunity to interview Virginia Tech recruit Kevin Jones and his father Thomas via telephone. Unless you have just recently emerged from living in a cave, you know that Kevin is the crown jewel of Virginia Tech's 2001 class of football recruits. A lightning-fast tailback from Cardinal O'Hara High School outside of Philadelphia, Jones was ranked as the top recruit in the country by both SuperPrep and Rivals.com.

Penn State and Virginia Tech waged a fierce recruiting battle for Kevin Jones. On January 24th, 2001, Jones gave a verbal commitment to the Hokies, and on February 7th, he followed through by signing his national letter of intent to attend Virginia Tech. Jones's signing with Tech ended a war between the Hokies and the Nitanny Lions that had reportedly gotten ugly down the stretch as the Penn State coaching staff realized they were about to lose a home-state player regarded as a franchise running back.

The Hokies have never signed a player ranked as highly as Jones, and in fact, Virginia Tech is rarely on the radar screen of recruits of Kevin's stature. But nevertheless, the Hokies were successful in convincing Jones that Virginia Tech was where he wanted to be, and this fall, he will wear orange and maroon.

My goal in interviewing the Joneses was to uncover some of the inside story and shed some light on his highly-publicized recruitment. I had planned on spending roughly equal amounts of time talking to Kevin and his father Thomas, who serves as Kevin's personal strength and conditioning coach and was heavily involved in Kevin's decision-making process.

As it turned out, I wound up talking quite a bit to Thomas, and relatively very little to Kevin. Like many young men his age, Kevin was soft-spoken, shy, and gave short answers. His father, however, was very helpful, and like most parents I have interviewed, very interested in talking about his son.

I also decided to post this material as a straight interview, without attempting to turn it into a profile-type article. Since this interview is so long, I have broken it up with commentary and points of clarification that appear in italics.

It was just after eight o'clock in the evening when Thomas Jones answered my telephone call. After exchanging a few brief pleasantries, we got down to the business of the interview. "I don't want to talk about Penn State," was the first thing Thomas Jones said. But in the end, he answered every question I had for him. I guess his desire to get the truth out overcame his desire to put the Penn State mess behind him.

We began by talking about how Kevin and Thomas became interested in Virginia Tech, and I asked him about the 40 times that Kevin ran at the Florida State and Virginia Tech football camps in the summer of 2000.

Interview

Kevin Jones

TSLX: In the spring of 2000, you brought Kevin down for a Super 8 indoor meet that was being held at Tech, on their Mondo track surface, even though Kevin was hurt and couldn't even run in the meet. Did you really just drive that far (5.5 hours) to see the track, or did you also have an interest in the football program at that time?

Thomas Jones: Well, what happened was, we watched the championship game (the 2000 Sugar Bowl between Florida State and Virginia Tech), and I told Kevin, "That school is a school you probably should look at. We want to see if this is just a flash in the pan, or if they're an up and coming program." I told him if we were going to go down for the track meet, we should check out the football facilities while we're there, and see if we like it.

TSLX: What did you think when you got there? Because I know you probably had been to Penn State a number of times. Penn State has a large facility (stadium) and a very impressive athletic program. What did you think when you saw Virginia Tech?

Thomas Jones: I liked what I saw, and Kevin liked it too. I'm not that big on big, extravagant things. Penn State, you know, it's big and there's a lot of things to do — more things to do than in Blacksburg, I can guarantee that. But Kevin, his decision is based on going to a school where he's going to go hit the books and play sports. Anything else is out in left field, as far as I'm concerned, and I try to instill that in him. Don't worry about the parties, don't worry about the night life, you're going to go to school to get an education and to play football.

That's mainly what I saw when we got to Blacksburg. That setting was perfect, as far as I'm concerned, and I led him into that area as much as I could.

TSLX: Have you lived in the Philadelphia area Kevin's whole life?

Thomas Jones: Yes.

TSLX: Was Kevin a Penn State fan growing up?

Thomas Jones: No (laughs).

TSLX: Did he have a favorite team?

Thomas Jones: The Florida Gators.

TSLX: So that was your first contact with Virginia Tech. You went into the football office, you met Coach Ward (VT defensive backs coach Lorenzo Ward), and apparently, that all went well enough for you all to continue visiting Virginia Tech and considering Virginia Tech. The next thing that happened came in the summer. You had been down to the Florida State football camp, and you stopped by Blacksburg and the Virginia Tech camp literally unannounced.

Thomas Jones: That's correct.

Interview

Kevin Jones

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TSLX: What 40 time did he run down at the Florida State camp?

Thomas Jones: It was a 4.26 forty. I want to clarify that, because a lot of people want to know what all these 40 times are that are flying around, and how they're timed.

Basically, what they do — what everybody does — is hand-time 40's. So a 4.26 equivalent is like a 4.4. At that time, that was good for Kevin, because he was coming off a hamstring injury and sitting down the whole track season. And he didn't do anything for rehab. So that time there was a monster time, as far as I was concerned, that he ran a 4.26 hand-timed at Florida State, which tied Randy Moss's record.

TSLX: Was that with multiple coaches timing him at the same time and averaging it?

Thomas Jones: Yes. What they do is, they have two lines, and they run two players at the same time. They have about eight coaches, four guys taking each runner. They go off your movement. So a guy says, "Ready, set go," but when you move is when they start their stopwatches.

TSLX: So, if they said go, and Kevin stood there for three seconds and then started running, they would start timing when he started moving?

Thomas Jones: Right. When I say that 4.26 is equivalent to a 4.4, that's almost like an FAT time when you do it that way, when you go off the movement. If you're at a track meet, and you're timing a guy, and they've got FAT, which is Fully Automatic Timing, when the gun goes off, there's a guy at the finish line, and he's got a device that he points at the starter's gun. And when the flash goes, the computer automatically starts counting.

So what they say is that the human being cannot pick that up that fast, so they say you add two tenths of a second (when you use FAT versus hand timing). Kevin right now can go sub-4.1 hand timed in a forty, which is like a 4.2 or 4.3 (FAT forty). He can run 4.2 forties (FAT timed).

TSLX: Then when he came up to the Virginia Tech camp, what did he run there?

Thomas Jones: He and DeAngelo (Hall from Deep Creek HS in Chesapeake, Virginia) both had the fastest times. The first time, Kevin had a 4.8-something (laughs). Everybody was like, "What the hell is this?" But they understood that we had just drove about 12 hours, sitting in the van, and he got out and he wanted to compete.

So I said, "Look, instead of making a fool out of yourself, sit down and relax." He said, "No, I want to run." So him and DeAngelo hooked up a couple of times and lined up. First run, he ran about a 4.30 or 4.31, and DeAngelo ran a 4.32 or 4.33. Then the next time, he ran a 4.29, and DeAngelo ran a 4.31.

TSLX: And how does Virginia Tech do it? Did they do it in a similar fashion as FSU, with two lines

Interview

Kevin Jones

and multiple coaches timing the players?

Thomas Jones: Yes.

TSLX: What VT coaches were there?

Thomas Jones: They had the whole staff there, even Coach Beamer.

As the 2000 football season got underway, many recruiting publications, college coaches, and college football fans started to regard Kevin Jones as the top running back and top prospect in the country. His recruitment started to heat up. Throughout the fall, Kevin drew much attention, and his proclaimed “favorite school” changed often. The attention being paid to Kevin mounted to a fever pitch, much of it stirred by the open, honest, and frequent comments made by the Joneses — both Kevin and his father — to the many recruiting publications and services that covered Kevin from August through signing day.

TSLX: I remember reading some reports in the summer of 2000 that you and Kevin wanted to have his decision made by the end of last summer, the summer of 2000. Was that an accurate quote at the time, and if so, what made you guys change your mind and continue to drag the process out to February?

Thomas Jones: This being the first time that either one of us experienced this, we thought it would be easy. We thought that you find a school you like, and you run with it. But things just kept happening, and you have second thoughts. You want to check out this school, you want to check out that school, and it dragged on and dragged on, but eventually it did get down to Virginia Tech and Penn State.

TSLX: Overall, what did you think of the recruiting process, given that it was your first time through it? When all is said and done, was it something that you thought was an overall positive, or a negative? What kind of taste was left in your mouth at the end?

Thomas Jones: I still got a good taste in my mouth about it. It can get hectic at times, basically with the recruiting services. I mean, those guys are the ones who really hound you to get information. They run with things, they take things out of context, like the quote I made about the Big East and the Big Ten. I didn't mean it that way, but the way it came out, it was like I was dogging the Big East. And that wasn't the case.

So basically, the whole process is all right, but if it happened again, I wouldn't let the recruiting gurus take over like they did. I would pull that in a little bit more.

Note: when he speaks of his “quote about the Big East,” Thomas Jones is referring to a comment he made about playing in the Big Ten versus the Big East. Here is the quote he is referring to:

Interview

Kevin Jones

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Date: Sunday, January 14, 2001, Commentary by: Jeremy Crabtree of Rivals100.com: Wednesday might be decision day for Chester (Pa.) Cardinal O'Hara running back and the nation's top player Kevin Jones. "Coach Paterno is coming by the house that night, and you might just have something to report," Jones' father said. "Kevin is going to talk to coach Beamer tomorrow night. But coach Paterno is coming by the house on Wednesday, and I think Kevin might be ready to get this over with by then." Jones visited Penn State this weekend for the 11th time, and this time it was for an official visit. Jones said the Lions rolled out the red carpet for him. "It was about as perfect visit as it could be," Jones' father said. "I think the big difference in my mind is that Penn State plays in the Big Ten, and that's the big-time competition. Virginia Tech plays in the Big East, and Kevin could go there and pad his numbers against Rutgers and Syracuse. I think he wants to challenge himself every day he's in college, instead of being too easy."

TSLX: What did you mean by your comments about the Big Ten and the Big East?

Thomas Jones: When I say big time competition, I mean every week no matter how bad a team is, there is a lot of history and built-in rivalries in the Big Ten, and get ready for a war. Then I said you have that in the Big East, but not at the same level as the Big Ten, since the league (the Big East) is young. Just my opinion.

Now for the "pad his numbers" comment, I said that people would say that's the only reason he would pick the Big East. And I did mention those two schools, but Temple is the one I meant to say along with Rutgers, not Syracuse. That was my fault and I didn't mean that. That is just my opinion, but some fans would say that's why he picked the Big East over the Big Ten.

TSLX: How many calls a night were you getting at the height of recruiting?

Thomas Jones: We'd probably get twenty calls a night.

TSLX: I've seen the improvement in Kevin's SAT score (from an 820 to a 1080). How in the world did he concentrate on his school work while all this was going on?

Thomas Jones: Basically, before we got home, we would do everything we had to do before we hit the door (coming home). We would come in, and it would start. It was like they knew when we were coming in the door. My wife said just today, "It's like they know when you come in the door."

TSLX: What was the craziest thing you would say happened? Did the guys do anything like call at two in the morning, or anything like that?

Thomas Jones: No, but right at the end, though, there were calls from eleven to twelve. I would just tell the guys, "We're in deep thought, we're thinking this over, and you've got to call back later." It was like twelve o'clock, and they would still call to find out what school he was going to pick.

TSLX: Throughout the fall, quotes from you and Kevin were all over the map as far as what schools he preferred. Penn State and Virginia Tech always seemed to be on his list, but I remember Notre

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Kevin Jones

Dame and Tennessee popping in and out there. How much of that was serious? Did Kevin have a clear-cut favorite early on?

Thomas Jones: You just feel comfortable with a couple of schools. I felt Penn State probably was his, and Virginia Tech. And the other schools ... Notre Dame, they were somewhat in the picture. A lot of our coaching staff at Cardinal O'Hara wanted him to go there, because the head coach (at O'Hara) went to Notre Dame, and being a Catholic school, they really pushed it.

But that wasn't going to sway Kevin. He had to go to school where he was going to be happy, not to please anybody else, and even if he did want to please somebody else, it was going to be me and my wife.

TSLX: There was some conjecture that you and Kevin were getting so many calls from the recruiting analysts, that at some point you just decided to have fun and just kind of jerk them around a little bit. Is there any truth to that, or were you both open and honest the whole time?

Thomas Jones: Yes, we were open and honest. The thing with Kevin is, he would take a trip, and he would always put them on top. I would say to him ... we gave him a lot of free space, me and my wife. We never really questioned him about what he said to a recruiting guru when he got off the phone. We just let him handle it.

But before I knew it, when I started reading the quotes, he was always putting these teams (that he had just visited) in his top spot. And I told him, I said, "Look, I know you liked the schools, and I know you liked the visit, but don't always tell them now they're your number one school. Just say, 'Yeah, they're up there with the rest of them.'"

I like the way Eric Shelton handled it (Shelton is a running back from Lexington, Kentucky who signed with Florida State). He would always say, "This school is pretty much up there with the rest of them," but he would never say who was the leader. Kevin would always do that (name a leader). It's innocence. At the time, the last impression, that's the school he wanted to go to.

But I would always tell him, me and my wife, to wait and take the rest of his visits. Because when he went to Tennessee, he was going to commit right there on the spot.

While it is true that Kevin's favorite school changed frequently, the two constants on his list seemed to be Penn State and Virginia Tech, and indeed, as signing day approached, Jones narrowed it down to PSU and VT. Kevin took his official visit to Virginia Tech in mid-December. In the month of January, things intensified:

Thursday, January 11th: Michael Vick announces he is going pro.

Friday, January 12th : Jones makes his official visit to Penn State

Monday, January 15th: VT defensive backs coach Lorenzo Ward visits Jones at Cardinal O'Hara. Frank Beamer calls from the Hula Bowl (an all-star game in Hawaii that he is coaching).

Wednesday, January 17th: Joe Paterno visits Jones in his home.

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Kevin Jones

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Thursday, January 18th: Ward, Beamer, and VT running backs coach Billy Hite visit with Jones in his home.

TSLX: It was reported by Bill Roth that Kevin gave a verbal commitment to Coach Ward in early January right there at Cardinal O'Hara. Later that week, Coach Beamer paid a visit with Coach Ward and Coach Hite, and Roth wrote that Kevin reiterated his commitment then. But you guys kept it quiet until the press conference on January 24th. So that would place Kevin's original commitment somewhere around January 15th. Which means that you and Kevin continued to talk to Penn State coaches and even had an in-home visit with Joe Paterno (after Kevin had verbally committed to Ward). My question for that is, why would you do that if he had already made up his mind? Was there still some doubt there? What was the thinking there? That was when Coach Beamer was out at the Hula Bowl, correct?

Thomas Jones: Right. So I called Coach Ward up wanting to know what was going on, because we didn't hear from him. And did they know that we just got back from Penn State? So he said, no, not really, so I said, "I think you guys better get moving here and move some things up. If you plan on coming to see us, you better do it now, because I think Kevin might be leaning towards Penn State."

He came up to school, I think I called him on Saturday (the 13th), and he came to school on Monday (the 15th). And him and Kevin talked. I don't know what they talked about — I was giving him space — and that's when Coach Paterno's guys came that Tuesday or Wednesday...

TSLX: And that would be Wednesday the 17th, I believe.

Thomas Jones: Right. At the time, I didn't know if he had committed to Whammy (Ward) or not. But he kept saying he knew what school he was going to go to. After that meeting at the school with Whammy, he just kept telling me and my wife that. Paterno and those guys, when they came in, they wanted a commitment, and he said he wasn't ready to commit at that time.

That's when Coach Beamer and the guys came up the next day (Thursday the 18th), and he told them that he was committing to Virginia Tech. That's my understanding.

TSLX: So it sounds like Kevin did tell Coach Ward on that Monday at Cardinal O'Hara that he was going to come to Tech, but he still took the visit from Paterno.

Was your interest at that point in time just being fair to Virginia Tech and just making sure that they got their say, or did you really want to push him in that direction?

Thomas Jones: I didn't want that communication to fail and kill something that probably would be good for each side - Kevin and Virginia Tech. After the Michael Vick press conference (on Thursday, Jan. 11th, the day before Jones's PSU visit), I was hoping to hear from Coach Beamer, or somebody from Virginia Tech to see what was going on, and what direction they were going in.

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Kevin Jones

We were going up to visit Penn State for a visit that weekend, and I didn't hear anything from them (Virginia Tech). I was telling my wife, "I should be hearing something from these guys, they should be calling here or something like that." And she said, "Give them a call." And that's what I did.

I was just looking out for Kevin's best interests. I didn't want to eliminate Virginia Tech like that.

TSLX: So it sounds like it's fair to say that you just wanted both parties — Virginia Tech and Penn State — to be able to communicate clearly with Kevin, and not have one of the schools left out just because they were not communicating with him.

Thomas Jones: I kept them abreast and I kept the Penn State guys abreast on how their school was doing, to try to keep them competitive. It was something I probably shouldn't have done. I should have just let each school recruit him the way they did. I helped out Penn State and Virginia Tech, really, myself, by communicating with them — I don't know how other people handle it — probably a little bit more than I should have.

But I just wanted to look out for my son. I looked at both schools, and if one of them was slipping, I would help them out, on little things, by saying, "You're doing this, when you should be asking Kevin *this* instead," and seeing how his reaction was. If he didn't take to it, then really he didn't want to go to that school.

And that's what I did. Because he's a little shy, sometimes he won't say anything, and I would tell the person, like Kenny Jackson (who was recruiting him for Penn State), I would tell him certain things, and I would tell Whammy certain things, he should be doing, to help in their recruitment of Kevin. And it just came out that Virginia Tech was the one he wanted to go to.

Kevin verbally committed to Virginia Tech at a press conference on Wednesday, January 24th. But this didn't stop Penn State from turning up the heat on the tailback and recruiting him even harder. In an article written by Bill Roth for the February 16th, 2001 edition of "hokiesports.com the newspaper," Ward is quoted as saying, "Penn State hammered us on our black graduation rate and brought up the class of 1995 when only Cornell Brown graduated."

Meanwhile, on Penn State Internet message boards, bitter Penn State fans started a rumor that Thomas Jones had been offered a strength and conditioning job with Virginia Tech. Roth quoted Thomas Jones as saying, "They (PSU coaches) said they had heard that Virginia Tech had offered me a job, and I told them that's crazy."

TSLX: I'm looking for clarification on something, specifically something that was written by Bill Roth. Let me read a quote of yours from an article by Bill Roth that ran in the official Virginia Tech sports newspaper:

"Penn State kept calling after that (the press conference). They said they had heard that Tech had offered me a job and I told them that's crazy. I told them their own people were making that stuff up and that Kevin wanted to go to Tech ... Paterno couldn't believe it. He

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Kevin Jones

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told me he had to be the stupidest guy on earth or that Virginia Tech had to be the crookedest program in the nation.”

First of all, were you fully aware that those comments were on the record, and that was going to be printed?

Thomas Jones: Yes.

TSLX: That statement is hard to interpret, because people read it, and they can interpret it two ways. I want to give you both ways and ask you which one is correct.

When you say that Paterno said that he had to be the stupidest guy on earth or that Virginia Tech had to be the crookedest program in the nation, either Paterno is saying, “I would have to be dumb to think Virginia Tech offered you a job, or they’d have to be really crooked to actually do that.”

Or, Paterno was saying, “I’ve got to be the dumbest guy on earth to lose Kevin Jones, or Virginia Tech has to be the crookedest program in the nation to out-recruit me for Kevin Jones.”

Thomas Jones: More of that (the second interpretation). Really he was saying, he (Kevin) has got to be dumb and naïve to believe that he would like to go to Blacksburg over State College. That’s more of what he was really trying to say. That’s what he was saying, really. And I’m trying to think if he said “crooked.” He said something in terms of, something about “things not being on the up-and-up,” or something like that.

TSLX: Do you think Paterno was very upset and was saying some things he would regret?

Thomas Jones: Yeah, he was pretty upset, because they put a lot of time into Kevin, trying to get him there. And then to lose him to Tech, he was probably saying, he just can’t believe he’s losing him to Tech.

Basically, a lot of people just don’t believe that he’s going to Virginia Tech. It’s not an upper-echelon program, is what they’re saying. They don’t think Tech is a top-tier program where they feel Kevin should be. A lot of people think he should be at Notre Dame, Michigan, Ohio State, these Big Ten schools. They cannot get over that he’s going to Virginia Tech.

TSLX: During the recruiting process, did Virginia Tech ever say anything negative about other schools while they were recruiting Kevin?

Thomas Jones: Never. Virginia Tech was straight up. I really felt at home with those guys. They never had a bad word to say about any school at all.

TSLX: Was that true of the other schools that were recruiting Kevin?

Interview

Kevin Jones

Thomas Jones: Yes. Virginia Tech was the butt of a lot of jokes from other schools. “The Hokies — so you want to be a ‘Hokie’?” A lot of stuff like that. But nothing really negative.

TSLX: Since the press conference, and since signing day, what has been the reaction of people there in Pennsylvania? Have they moved on, or do you think that some of the people and fans of Penn State specifically are bitter about what happened? Have you had anything ugly happen, like phone calls, nasty voice mails, or anything like that?

Thomas Jones: Nothing as far as that, but we’ve gotten mail. You go to the Blue and White page, the Internet site (www.bluewhite.net, an independent Penn State web site), there’s some nasty stuff there. Some of the people that I was corresponding with on there in the past are saying, “Well, that’s only 2% of 100,000 fans,” but it still leaves a bad taste in your mouth.

TSLX: So he actually got a few pieces of mail that were not pleasant?

Thomas Jones: Yes.

TSLX: About how many items would you say that he got?

Thomas Jones: About five or six pieces.

TSLX: If you’re comfortable answering, what kind of things did they say? Were they just venting?

Thomas Jones: Venting. Racial comments, the whole thing. He’s no good, he’s a punk. You know, stuff like that.

TSLX: What was the reaction from the Penn State coaching staff after Kevin verbally committed to Tech? Did you get a chance to talk to them much afterwards?

Thomas Jones: I talked to Franny Ganter (a Penn State assistant coach), and he was gracious, he was cool with it. I didn’t talk to anybody but Paterno after that. He really took over. He was the one who was calling, and doing everything, and trying to get Kevin to change his mind.

TSLX: Once Kevin did verbal to Tech, Coach Paterno did everything he could in the last week or two there?

Thomas Jones: Yes.

TSLX: When was the last time you guys talked to Coach Paterno?

Thomas Jones: Tuesday night before signing day.

TSLX: How did that conversation end?

Interview

Kevin Jones

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Thomas Jones: He wished us well, and he said he hoped he could play Virginia Tech down the road.

TSLX: What would have had to be different for Kevin to go to Penn State instead of Virginia Tech?

Thomas Jones: I don't know. I felt basically Kevin trusted Virginia Tech's coaching staff over the Penn State guys, I guess. That's probably what it came down to.

TSLX: A lot was made of the strength and conditioning programs. How big of a factor was that? Was that overblown, or was there truth to it?

Thomas Jones: That's big. You look at Kevin, Kevin's 216 pounds. He just won the state championship in the 60. He got the fastest time in the country in the 60-dash, and he's 216 pounds. He's run up against guys 150, 160 pounds, and he's blown them away off the start to the finish. Basically, it's from Olympic lifts, and a lot of overspeed training, and "fast squats," we call them, and Virginia Tech, they do these things. Penn State doesn't. To keep that edge, he's got to continue to do that.

He's going to be a big guy. I'm not stupid enough to believe he can continue to run these super-fast times at 225 pounds. He came up fast, he can continue to run times like he's doing now, that's what I'm looking forward to. But doing the weight training at Penn State, I don't think he's going to be able to accomplish that.

TSLX: How big do you see Kevin getting?

Thomas Jones: He'll be over 220. I don't push him to eat, he's doing that on his own now. He went from 205 (during football season) to 216 now.

TSLX: Was Tech's two-back system a positive thing when you were looking at Tech?

Thomas Jones: As far as I'm concerned. As a freshman, granted a lot of guys are saying he's the #1 back, but you don't throw a guy in the fire like that. He can work his way in. As for as I'm concerned, he's coming in for playing time, he's going to battle for playing time. Andre's (Kendrick's) spot is Kevin's to lose, as far as I'm concerned. He's in there to win that second-string spot and get some carries.

Thomas Jones was very active on the Internet while Kevin was being recruited. He was a frequent poster on Blue and White Illustrated (bluwhite.net), an independent Penn State web site that is part of the Rivals.com network of sites. It is often referred to as BWI. Jones only recently appeared on the TechSideline.com message boards, shortly after Kevin signed with Virginia Tech.

The BWI posters were very cordial with Thomas Jones until Kevin committed to Virginia Tech on January 24th. Many of the BWI posters reacted bitterly, in particular taking exception to the manner in which Kevin conducted his press conference. He showed up with a gym bag, removed a Penn

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Kevin Jones

State jersey from it, but then pulled off his sweatshirt to reveal a #7 Virginia Tech jersey. He committed to Virginia Tech, drawing many groans from the large crowd that had assembled at Cardinal O'Hara for the press conference.

TSLX: Let's talk about the Internet a little bit. You've been a long-time poster on BWI, as "Football Coach." And you recently registered on the TSL message boards as "Football Coach 2." What was it like to participate with and observe the posters on the BWI board both before and then after Kevin's signing with Virginia Tech?

Thomas Jones: It's like night and day. I got taken aback by some of the guys who I thought were sincere, but they were the biggest frauds to ever walk the earth. You cannot be one way and then totally be the opposite. Yes, there's some playing in-between, but you cannot go way on the other side like that. I don't care, you know, what took place.

A lot was made of Kevin dissin' the Penn State jersey. The reason why he did that was for the kids at his school, because a lot of the kids were betting on what school he was going to pick. And a couple of guys on the football team were saying, "Fake everybody out with the jersey like you was gonna go to Penn State, and then you pick Virginia Tech."

He did not throw the jersey down like a lot of people say. He picked the jersey up out of the bag, laid it on the table, said, "Not Penn State," and pulled off his sweater (to reveal a Tech jersey).

And that's something that everybody's crawling all over on that page (BWI). They're taking that and running with it. They don't want to see it the other way. They want to continue to use that to vent their anger. They can, as far as I'm concerned. I don't care anymore. I tried to smooth things over with some of those guys over there, but they don't want to. They want to vent, because they're bitter that he didn't go to Penn State.

TSLX: Has that reaction changed your opinion of Penn State and the Penn State fan base?

Thomas Jones: Yeah. I'm trying to lock it all together and put them all in the same boat. I hope it's not really that way, but I've got a lot of friends who ride around and come in contact with Penn State fans. And they're all mad. So it can't just be the 2% that everybody's trying to tell me. It's not everyone, but it's a lot of people with that same attitude, like he committed sacrilege with the jersey. And it wasn't what they thought it was, that he was dissing Penn State with the jersey.

TSLX: Sounds like he was just having fun.

Thomas Jones: Yeah, that's totally what it was, for the school. At the press conference, there had to be close to 200, 300 students in the crowd. And that's what it was for.

TSLX: So he was putting on a little bit of a show for them.

Thomas Jones: Yeah.

Interview

Kevin Jones

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TSLX: You didn't start posting on TechSideline.com until recently. Two questions about that. I had seen you over on the BWI board — at the same time you were on the BWI board participating, were you watching the TechSideline.com board without posting?

Thomas Jones: Yeah, I went there (TechSideline.com) every day. The reason I couldn't post there was my Internet wasn't working at home. I was using my computer at work. I didn't want to use that email address, so I couldn't register until I got back on my line at home. BWI had no registration, and you could just sign on and go, so that's the reason I corresponded with those guys. If yours was the same way, I would have posted on your board a long time ago.

TSLX: So, the mystery is finally solved.

Thomas Jones: Yeah, I didn't get back on line myself until recently.

TSLX: Let's settle a question that often gets asked on recruiting message boards. It's very rare for either a recruit or a member of a recruit's family to be active on a message board like you were. So there's a constant debate on these boards about, "Oh, be careful what you say, because it really affects what the recruits and their families think." Is that true? As you watched the two boards, did what the fans were saying and doing sway your thinking and Kevin's decision at all? First of all, did Kevin actually look at the Internet, or was it just you?

Thomas Jones: Basically it was just me. Kevin — (laughs) — he just recently started looking at your board. He laughs about the negative stuff they said about me on BWI. But basically, it was always me, he never really got into it.

TSLX: Seeing various posts on the two boards, did it ever sway you in either direction, or were you able to separate yourself from what the fans were saying and just listen to what the coaches were saying?

Thomas Jones: Not really. If any board was going to sway me, it would have been the Penn State board, because they were putting up open letters begging us to send him to Penn State. And now, you know, it's the complete opposite. But on the Tech board, it was more like, "If we get him we get him, but so what? He's a Pennsylvania guy, he's supposed to go to Penn State." Which is logical.

You can't get mad when you see somebody write that, because it's the truth. They were trying to come into Pennsylvania and trying to steal the number one player in the country away. If they get him, it's all gravy. If they don't, well they tried. Penn State are the guys who have everything to lose. And I see posts like that on the Tech board, and I agree with them.

TSLX: Do you feel comfortable with how things worked out? Do you think Kevin made the right decision in choosing Virginia Tech?

Interview

Kevin Jones

Thomas Jones: Yeah, I do. Now it's up to him. Me and my wife, we did our job of getting him this far. Now it's up to him to get in there, hit the books, and battle it out. Take it to the next level.

I'm happy he made his decision, and I'm behind him a hundred percent.

TSLX: Any other comments, Coach?

Thomas Jones: (pauses off the line) Yeah, my wife wanted me to say that she was against Penn State from the start, from the standpoint that it's too big of a school, and too many parties. (laughs) She wanted me to say that.

She had a lot of input into this. A lot of people always try to leave her out, because everybody always called and wanted to talk to me or Kevin. But believe me, she had a lot of input with him going to Virginia Tech more than anybody.

She liked it down there. On our way back from Florida State (football camp in the summer of 2000), I was going to stop off at the University of Georgia, and she said, "Is Kevin really interested in Georgia?" I said, "No, we were just going to check it out." And she said, "Well, let me see Virginia Tech." I took her there, and she fell in love with the place.

TSLX: Coach, I appreciate your time.

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Kevin Jones Portion of the Interview

TSLX: Kevin, I don't want to take up a lot of your time. Your dad was very helpful, but there are a few things I wanted to get your thoughts on.

First of all, a lot has been made about you supposedly hitting it off with DeAngelo Hall when you stopped by Tech for the summer football camp last year, and then again when you made your official visit in December. Did you guys really strike up a friendship? Have you been in contact with DeAngelo, and would you say you guys are friends?

KJ: Yeah, I met him last year before the camp. We met at a track meet. We talked at the track meet. We run the same events, and we were talking about track. And after that, we just kept talking. And I got his number and kept in contact.

TSLX: How often would you say you guys talk?

KJ: About once a month.

TSLX: What about Michael Vick? Did you get a chance to meet him?

KJ: Yeah, I met him a couple times. Three or four times, I think.

Interview

Kevin Jones

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TSLX: There was some conjecture that you wanted to go to Virginia Tech because you wanted to play on the same team as Vick. Was there any truth to that? Did his announcements that first he was going to stay, and then he was going to go, have any bearing on your decision? Did that affect you at all?

KJ: I wasn't basing my decision off that. It would have been nice to play with him, though. (laughs)

TSLX: About a week before you committed, some time around January 17th, Coach Paterno paid his last in-home visit to you. I think at the time, Coach Beamer was out at the Hula Bowl and really wasn't available. I think a lot of people thought you were going to commit to Penn State during that visit. Yet you didn't. Tell me about that visit — what went on that night? What kinds of things did Coach Paterno say, and what did you and your dad say?

KJ: Coach (Paterno) was just trying to sell the school and the program. We wanted to wait because Coach Beamer called (from the Hula Bowl) and asked could we wait for him to visit. So we waited for him to come and visit first.

TSLX: Was Coach Paterno trying to get a commitment out of you that night?

KJ: Yeah, he was trying, but I just told him I wasn't ready yet.

TSLX: Shortly thereafter, Coach Beamer came back from Hawaii, and he and Coach Hite and Coach Ward came to visit you. Now what happened during that visit? Did you verbally commit to Tech that night?

KJ: Yes.

TSLX: Had you committed to Coach Ward before, at school?

KJ: Yes. I told him I might be (coming to Virginia Tech).

TSLX: Did your dad know what you were going to do?

KJ: Not really.

TSLX: You were keeping it a secret from him?

KJ: No. I didn't know, really.

TSLX: So right up there until the end, before your press conference, you really weren't sure?

KJ: Yep.

Interview

Kevin Jones

TSLX: What kinds of things were looking good to you about Penn State at that time?

KJ: I had been there so many times, and had gotten comfortable there, and it was close to home.

TSLX: What kinds of things did you like about Virginia Tech at that time?

KJ: I was comfortable with the coaches. I had been there a lot of times too, and I just liked the program, overall.

TSLX: What finally swung you over to Virginia Tech? What made the decision for you?

KJ: I came home from my Penn State visit, and me and my parents were talking about it, and that's when I decided.

TSLX: How big of a factor did the track facilities at Virginia Tech play in your decision? Do you plan on running track when you're there?

KJ: Yeah, I plan on running track when I'm there.

TSLX: What is the latest on your qualifying status? From what I understand, you've got the GPA and the SAT score, correct?

KJ: Yep.

TSLX: Is it true that you raised your SAT score from 820 to 1080?

KJ: Yeah.

TSLX: How did you go about that? Did you take some courses and get some tutoring?

KJ: I had two prep courses and two tutors. I had a regular math teacher as a tutor.

TSLX: Have you cleared the NCAA clearing house yet?

KJ: I'm waiting for the papers to come.

TSLX: Lastly, the question that all Tech fans are dying to know the answer to: do you think you're going to wear the #7 jersey, or pick a different number?

KJ: It's between that and 30 right now.

TSLX: What's special about 30?

Interview

Kevin Jones

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KJ: That was my first high school number, and then I wore 2. And Ronyell's got 2. (laughs)

TSLX: Thank you, Kevin.

KJ: No problem.

Feature

Ox in the XFL

by Scott Veith

The big decision is to either become a poet or go back to school to pursue a Master's degree in Business Administration. Not exactly the choices one would expect to hear from a 230-pound man with 4.5-second 40-yard dash speed and an NFC Championship ring. But these are the issues most pressing these days to former Tech tailback Ken Oxendine.

Ox, a 1998 Virginia Tech grad, said he plans on milking every drop out of the pro football career he embarked on three years ago. Then, he'll move on to either writing poetry or being a big cog in running a small business.

Drafted by the Atlanta Falcons in the 7th round of the '98 draft, Ox spent two seasons with the Falcons and played in the Super Bowl in his first year in the league.

"(Playing in the Super Bowl) is a feeling like no other," Oxendine said. "It's the pinnacle of your sport – what you dream of from the time you're a kid. It was crazy because (Atlanta teammates Morton) Anderson and (Steve) DeBerg had been playing for like 16 years and they had never been to a Super Bowl. I was fortunate enough to get the chance early."

Ox spent two years with the NFC West club but found himself in a back-by-committee situation that eventually fell in favor of Pro Bowler Jamal Anderson. In two years with the Falcons, Ox rushed for 502 yards and scored two touchdowns – one rushing and one receiving.

Atlanta didn't work out, Ox said, because his role was never spelled out for him. "Atlanta was more or less a situation where I wasn't getting it done," he said. "They wanted to go another route. Really it was an odd situation. It's difficult to explain."

The Falcons released Oxendine during training camp of the 2000 season. Ox signed on with the Detroit Lions, but his stint in the NFC Central was cut short when James Stewart emerged as a satisfactory replacement for retired Lion tailback and future Hall of Famer Barry Sanders. Ox was released by the Lions just days before the 2000 season opener against the New Orleans Saints.

Now Ox has a new gig. He's a tailback for the Los Angeles Xtreme of the XFL. Ox said he had every intention of spending this off-season preparing for a shot at making an NFL roster for the 2001 season, but when he heard about the rebel league, he jumped at the chance.

"My agent, Tony Patriak, told me there was going to be a new football league coming out," Oxendine said. "(Xtreme) Coach (Al) Lugenbill actually was down in Atlanta and had a few guys he wanted to work out – like a little combine. So I worked out with him and he told me all about (the XFL)."

Oxendine said the new league has given him many new opportunities. He's had the chance to stay involved in the game of football, have some fun, play some special teams and make a few bucks while he's at it.

"(The XFL schedule lasts) 2 months and we get \$45,000 (for the season) or something like that,"

Ox in the XFL

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said Oxendine. “Plus, there’s two playoff games and we get paid each time we win, so there’s a possibility for \$120,000 a year.

“There are 38 guys (on each XFL active roster). It’s a chance for me to work on my skills. It’s like high school or college all over again. I play on three or four special teams and we don’t have guys who just specialize in one thing. My favorite thing about this league is that I’ve had more fun. I know what my role is and I go out and get it done. In the NFL, unless you’re a first-rounder or a second-rounder or something, you really don’t know what’s expected of you. Here, I’ve had the chance to know my role and have fun.”

Now comes the hard part for Ox. He’s a 25-year old graduate of one of the most prestigious technical universities in the country and he hasn’t worked a single day at a nine-to-five job since he graduated. His NFL career is likely to be over some time in the next year. He realizes he can’t keep playing football forever and is thankful for the opportunities with which the game has presented him, but life after football is creeping up faster than an NFL defensive back on a safety blitz.

Most of his ties are in Atlanta, despite growing up in Chester, Virginia. He now makes his home in Georgia with his fiancée, Beth, a television producer for Atlanta’s Fox News affiliate. He hasn’t ruled out staying in football as a coach, but says that’s a hefty commitment for a guy looking to start a family with the woman he loves.

“Coaching, even in high school, is a big time commitment,” he said. “They put in so much time. If Beth said she didn’t want me to do that, I wouldn’t, but actually, she said she’d like that. She also said I should go into politics, so I don’t know.”

The Heart of a Poet

But Ox’s greatest career ambitions lie in business and poetry. He said graduate school for business is most likely his next adventure. He plans on attending a school somewhere in the Atlanta area, probably Georgia State University.

“It’ll all depend on how this (XFL) season turns out,” Ox said. “I might retire and go back to school. I’m thinking about getting my MBA. Or I could go into coaching. When you play pro sports, so many roads open up for you when you’re done playing and I just need to figure out which one to take.”

Ox has also been writing since high school. He’s not interested in the “this is my life” tell-all biography stuff that has come from so many athletes in recent memory, and the Shaquille O’Neal/Deion Sanders music acts are not for him. Instead, he’s an introspective poet who cares only that the words that appear on paper match the ones coming out of his heart.

“I write poetry about feelings, nature, love – stuff like that,” he said. “I’ve been writing poetry since high school, so I’m looking for somebody to work with and maybe putting out a book. Maybe a little paperback or something.”

Ox in the XFL

Not a million-dollar deal for a book with his face on the cover. Not a “look at me. I can play football *and* I have a brain” type of book. Just a little paperback.

And much like his views on just about everything he speaks about, that’s realistic. He doesn’t expect to crank out a best seller the first time around. He’s more interested in sharing his poetry with those interested in reading it.

Ox is realistic about everything. Even his Super Bowl experience as an NFL rookie. He looks back at a few moments in the game that will stand out in his memory forever and talks about them as if it were himself and a bunch of friends playing in a sandlot game against the kids from the other side of the tracks.

He remembers when teammate Tim Dwight returned a kick for a touchdown that put Atlanta right back in the game. He said, “You know, it’s like any other game. We were behind, then it’s like ‘we can do this.’ The last time I had a feeling like that was my sophomore year against UVA when we were down, and then Jim (Druckenmiller) hit Jermaine Holmes for a touchdown. It’s great to feel like the game isn’t over yet.”

Then, just seconds later, he mentions a high school game when a similar situation occurred. He spoke of the Super Bowl, a college rivalry and a high school game all in the same breath. As fans, we can’t fathom the mention of the three levels of football without the traditional hierarchy we attach to them. We’re the same people who laugh at the guy sitting next to us who compares a play he sees on television to a play he made in his last Pop Warner game.

But Ox doesn’t do that. He’s thankful for all the opportunities football has afforded him and the hundreds of different places it has taken him, but to him, games are games and football is football. Still, he gets a little kick out of mentioning that his average yards-per-carry was the same as Jamal Anderson’s in 1999.

Ox said his experiences at Tech are ones he’ll never forget. He said there were dozens and dozens of players at Tech he enjoyed working with, but he singled out offensive lineman Derek Smith and coach’s son Shane Beamer as two of his favorites.

“Derek Smith – Big D,” he said. “He’s a guy I always liked and had fun with. We came in the same year as freshmen.”

He said Shane Beamer was a fun guy to be around and the two still talk. Ox said Beamer also is settled in Atlanta now (he is a graduate assistant on the Georgia Tech coaching staff), so they get a chance to see each other often.

Ox said Coach Frank Beamer was an easy man to play for. “Coach Beamer reminded me of my high school coach,” said Ox. “You knew what he wanted from you from day one, and you just gave it to him. I still talk to him, and some of the other coaches.”

Ox in the XFL

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Looking Down the Road

And despite his stellar Hokie career, Ox said if he could do it again, but better, he would. “If I could play one game again,” he said, “it would be when we went down to the Sugar Bowl against Texas. We won the game and everything, but I didn’t play that well.”

Ox didn’t say how long it will be before Kenneth Qwavaris Oxendine, Jr. is the newest baby in the maternity ward of an Atlanta hospital, but he speaks of life with his fiancée and their future like it’s the greatest thing in the world. He already talks like a married man, saying he’ll only go into coaching if it’s O.K. with his wife.

He realizes that his glory days on the gridiron may be over before he’s ready to hang up the spikes, but he’s not worried about that. He’s got dreams of a family, a business and of poetry. He enjoys Atlanta and said there’s a good chance that’s where he’ll be for the rest of his life.

But don’t rule out seeing Ox on the sidelines of a Tech game in the near future. Football is his first love, and it’s what got him to where he is today.

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Catching Up With Corey

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

When asked about his impressions of the NFL after one year of playing as a rookie for the Buffalo Bills, Corey Moore doesn't hesitate.

"It's a business, and you have to approach it that way," he said in a recent interview with the TSL Extra. "I learned a lot in my first year, and I went through some tough times and some good times, not just personally, but also with the team. It's definitely a business, and you have to approach it that way."

In just three sentences (two of which are nearly identical), he has summed up his entire first year of life in the NFL. There have been some ups and downs, but all in all, he made progress in switching from the defensive end position that he played so well at Virginia Tech to the linebacker position he now occupies for the Bills.

Even with the bumps in the road, you'll have to forgive Moore if it all seems a little too good to be true. You're talking about a guy who never even planned on being here.

"I was one of those guys that never really thought about playing in the NFL," Moore said, "and it was never really a dream of mine. Even last year, I was set to go to law school, I had applied to law school and had taken the LSAT's (Law School Admission Test)."

Never really thought about it? We're talking about a guy who led the Big East with 13.5 sacks as a redshirt junior in 1998, making All-Big East first team defense. He followed that up with a stellar senior season, racking up 17 sacks and numerous awards, including national trophies like the Lombardi Award (top defensive lineman) and the Nagurski Award (top defensive player).

"I think the summer before my senior year, that's when I really thought that the opportunity would be there for me, but I never banked on it," Moore admits when pressed. "My goal was to go out and have a great senior year and help the team get where it wanted to be. So I never really thought about it, but it occurred to me during that summer that it might be a possibility."

With his senior year performance, he made the most of his "possibility," and the next thing he knew, the young man from Brownsville, Tennessee was being drafted in the third round (89th overall) by the Bills and was being touted by many as the "steal of the draft."

He was also facing the same tough transition that former Tech defensive end and current Baltimore Ravens linebacker Cornell Brown faced just three years before: making the change from down lineman in college to linebacker in the NFL. Much like Brown, Moore seems to have made the transition.

"It was kind of an adjustment where I was used to playing down, and rushing up the field all the time. So I had to get in a mode of standing up, expanding my vision, being able to see the whole field, then being able to understand the pass defense aspects of it, like dropping into different zones.

Catching Up With Corey

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“It was rough at first, because I had so much thrown at me at the beginning of training camp, but I think as we got into the preseason ball games, and I actually played a significant amount of time, it became more comfortable to me. Going into the season, the coaches gained a lot of confidence in me. I ended up starting the third game of the season, because the guy in front of me got injured, and that’s when I went down with my injury.”

Ah, the injury. Shortly into his first start, Moore suffered a dreaded “high ankle sprain,” and it was a vicious one, keeping him out for seven games, just when he was starting to get rolling. That’s when the “business” aspect of pro football made him a little uncomfortable.

“You never know when your head could be on the chopping block or whatever,” he says succinctly. “Going through the injury, and not being able to play, not really feeling like you’re contributing to the team, that can really get you down. Especially being a rookie, being away from home, and being single. Plus, I had never been injured where I had to miss a lot of time, so that was tough. That was real tough for me.”

But Moore weathered the injury, and after he returned, he started three more games before the season ended. He started four games for the year and had 12 tackles on the season, plus a sack and a fumble recovery.

“I still think I have a lot of work to do,” he adds, “and a lot to learn. Being able to start and get some significant playing time coming back off the injury helped a lot, but I’ve still got a lot to learn. I think I can play better.”

So far, so good. He is learning the position, and he enjoys his teammates (the Bills roster includes former Hokies Keion Carpenter and Billy Conaty). “Obviously, you hear things about other places where the veteran guys aren’t so cool with the rookies, but that was never the case in Buffalo. We had a good group of veteran guys. I met a lot of people, enjoyed being around my teammates, and had fun doing what I was doing.”

The Hokie Connection

It’s obvious that a large part of Corey Moore’s heart still resides in Blacksburg, Virginia. He arrived at Virginia Tech in the fall of 1996 as a smallish defensive end (6-0, 215), and it was there that the coaches, including strength and conditioning coach Mike Gentry, molded him into the force he would become.

At Haywood High School in Brownsville, Moore played fullback, tight end, and linebacker. He was a finalist for the “Mr. Football” title in Tennessee as a senior. He signed a letter of intent to attend Mississippi and was looking forward to playing in the SEC. But the Rebels went through a coaching change, and Moore backed out of his letter of intent and attended Holmes Junior College in Mississippi instead.

After one year at Holmes (where he carried a 3.9 GPA), Moore was offered a scholarship to Virginia

Catching Up With Corey

Tech. Tech defensive line Coach Charlie Wiles, who had known Moore since Moore was in high school, convinced Tech head coach Frank Beamer to give Moore a shot. Moore made the most of that opportunity.

“Coach Wiles and I, along with Coach Gentry, as well as some other guys in the program helped develop me into a player, and we made believers out of not only Coach Beamer and Coach Foster, but everybody,” Moore recalls of his time at Tech.

It was at Virginia Tech where the small defensive end with no pro aspirations was developed into an NFL player. “Our style of play at Tech, the way the coaches attack practice, the way Coach Gentry prepared you mentally and physically in the weight room ... no professional football team gets after it like we did at Virginia Tech,” he marvels. “You’re pushed to the limit at Tech. The coaches do a good job of getting the most out of the players who are there.”

And if you want Corey Moore to open up, just ask him about the Hokies. Moore still calls Blacksburg “home” and refers to the Virginia Tech football team as “we.” He would much rather talk about the Hokies than himself.

A simple question about whether or not he followed the Hokies during the 2000 season leads to the following speech:

“I followed them all the way through. Ronyell Whitaker and Larry Austin are two of my best friends at Tech. I have a great relationship with the coaches, too, so I kept up with them.

“I’ve got to admit, I thought they did better than I expected, especially with them being so young on defense. But that goes back to what I said about the coaches getting the most out of the players. It also says a lot for the type of people who are in the program.

“You look at guys like Chad Beasley and David Pugh, those guys have played with myself, and the Engelbergers, and the Carl Bradleys and Ike Charltons and Jamel Smiths, and some of those guys that knew how to win. So those guys being able to play with us and seeing and understanding how we worked our butts off to be where we wanted to be. They pass that on to some of those young guys.

“Lamar Cobb and Cols Colas, I thought as the year went on, those guys got better. I think you add Derrius Monroe to the mix this year and then (Nathaniel) Adibi, it’s going to be scary. You’ve got Larry Austin back at corner, and Ronyell who I thought had an *outstanding* year last year, and then Ben Taylor speaks for himself. He just makes plays, and then you get a healthy (Jake) Houseright back. Those guys are scary. All of those guys are athletic, and they can play.

“The guys were flying around, making plays, and having fun doing it. That’s important. And offensively, you’ve got Lee Suggs back, and everybody’s talking about the losses on the offensive line, but that’s happened before. Guys are just going to have to step up, and I think they will.

Catching Up With Corey

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“And then you look at a senior like Andre Davis, who’s been here, and Emmett Johnson, a senior who has played a lot. Those guys know there’s no Vick to carry the team this year, so somebody’s going to have to step up. It will be interesting to see what happens at the quarterback position, but we’ve had to overcome that.

“One player on defense that I was thoroughly impressed with last year was Jim Davis. He reminded me of watching Cornell Brown play, and he’s got that Courtney Brown (former defensive lineman at Penn State) build to him. You’ve got to throw him into the mix, too. I was down at the Gator Bowl and watched this kid play, and he took over when he was in the game, in my opinion.”

Whew! Anybody else on the Virginia Tech roster that you want to mention, Corey?

“The coaches have said some good things about Richard Johnson, and the players have said some good things about him, so I’m anxious to see him play, too,” Moore adds.

Looking Down the Road

Moore’s plans for applying what he learned in his first year in the NFL and continuing to improve are simple. “Basically, just to keep myself in shape year-round, and don’t worry about injuries. Take better care of my body and be prepared mentally and physically for what amounts to a 20-game season, if you include the preseason.”

Moore says that being able to play and continue his career is a blessing, and after his time in the NFL is over, he still plans on going back to law school and practicing law (his undergraduate degree from Tech is in Finance.) If he can play six years in the NFL, he says, he will be ready to move on.

He is making enough money to easily pay for law school when the time comes. According to Moore, his original contract, which still has two years left on it, was a three-year contract at \$1.7 million. He says that it varies every year, due to the NFL’s minimum salary going up, “So after three years, it could be worth \$2.59 million, I think.”

In any event, it’s more than enough. “I’m not a big spender, and I save and invest a lot of money, being a Finance guy.”

He has family spread throughout Tennessee. His mother still lives in Brownsville, and he has family in Nashville and Memphis, as well. Recently, he bought his mother a new house.

Of his young NFL career, Moore says, “It makes me proud because I’m a family-oriented guy. I saw my mom work to raise four kids by herself. I was always motivated by that. I was motivated by not having a father figure in the house. And having a mom who instilled discipline and made sure that I was on the right track. Those are the things that motivated me.”

His days at Holmes Junior College seem like a long time ago now, but life in the NFL has not caused Corey Moore to lose his perspective.

Catching Up With Corey

“Looking back, and seeing where I have come from, and knowing that I made my mom proud, and made my family proud, it makes me feel good. Having people come into my life like Coach Beamer, and especially Coach Wiles, whom I’ve known since tenth grade, sometimes it brings tears to my eyes to see where I’ve come from. I always thought that I would be a positive person and do good things in the community.”

He pauses.

“I never really thought about playing professional football. With me, I’ve always said it’s not about the amount of money that I make, but it’s about making a difference in people’s lives. And to be in a position to do that makes me feel good.”

Feature

Building a Better QB

by Gary Criswell, VirginiaPreps.com

In the 1903 Clemson yearbook, John Heisman wrote, "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the scientific development of the game of football is only beginning to be realized."

Those words always cause me to recall a visit that I made to a well-known college program a couple of years ago. During my visit the school's Offensive Coordinator gave me a tour of the new state of the art football meeting and film rooms. All of the opponents' game tapes were prepared in digital format and retrieved via a bank of PCs in each position room.

It was here that the OC could leave scouting assignments in each quarterback's "locker" where he could later look at the next opponent's defensive schemes broken down by field position, hash, and down and distance. The game has indeed changed greatly.

Even a visionary like Heisman could take solace in the fact that the basic truths of football prevail. Players still have to make plays. The game is still won in the trenches. However, unlike Heisman's era where quarterbacks as we know them didn't really exist, today's coaches are looking for that special athlete that can erase mistakes and shorten the field. Every successful program in the country is constantly defining and re-defining itself to match their system to the availability of the type of athlete that will lead their offense on Saturday.

Sure, luck means a lot in football. Not having a good quarterback is bad luck- Don Shula

It is often said that a quarterback gets way too much credit when things go right and too much blame when an offense goes south. I truly understand that line of thinking; after all it is a team game. However, I don't subscribe to that theory. The quarterback touches the ball on every play. The offense should be tapered or expanded to amplify his talent. The responsibility is his; he should know it and his coaches should be preparing him daily for that responsibility. Successful offenses begin with a marriage of the athlete's talent and his offensive system.

All successful college programs have offensive systems that adjust to their talents. If a program has a guy that is all-world, many programs won't hesitate to push the envelope with those talents to torment defenses. As simple and logical as that sounds, there are some major programs that by nature hold back their quarterbacks to fit into a mold (or recruit only to that mold), basically not asking them to do too much.

This not only promotes consistency both in individual performances as the names change from class to class, it cuts down on preparation time and serves as an insurance policy if the number two guy has to take over. Penn State and Michigan come to mind immediately. They both have recent quarterbacks who have done well in the NFL despite college careers that were not breathtaking; all while their team was continuing to finish in the Top Ten. I believe that their NFL success was due in part to the fact that they not only got solid coaching, but more importantly they were kept on a tight leash in college. They never acquired the habit of getting away with things in college that they couldn't do at the next level. The great "athlete" quarterbacks in Division I football have to become Quarterbacks (capital Q) "again" when they reach the NFL.

Building a Better QB

Of course recruiting a quarterback is always on the front burner in college programs. Several programs have completely rethought their strategy in evaluating future field generals. We all know the theory; bring in the mobile guy that can make plays happen on his own with his feet, while still having an arm that will keep a secondary in check and supply big plays with the pass.

I love the spread shotgun offenses that teams like Clemson have deployed in recent years. They are entertaining and bedeviling to defenses. I do not, however, favor them as the system that will consistently put together championship seasons. I just don't believe that you should run an offense that limits you to recruiting only one type of quarterback. Florida State, for example, has managed to incorporate a system that has all the elements of the spread but that is equally at home with a Chris Weinke as it is with a Charlie Ward.

When the boundaries are widened in your quarterback search, you can seek out the best leaders (within the standards of physical abilities of course) and the versatile bigger or faster athletes that can be later moved to other positions if they find the quarterback position too crowded. Even the big programs realize that "their exact type of guy" is not always available. With only 85 scholarships available they don't feel they have the luxury of making a mistake. Great college quarterbacks do not exist as one prototype, and the successful college offensive schemes account for that fact.

My coaching philosophy? Determine your players' talents and then give them every weapon to get the most from those talents- Don Shula

The waiting is the hardest part- Tom Petty

Now that we have looked at how the offensive system works in the development of a quarterback, let's look at the second component: the succession and seasoning process.

I love the process of bringing players "up through the ranks". As a college coach I got to work with three quarterbacks in various stages of their careers that were four-year starters. It is truly gratifying when a plan for each position that takes shape around the February signing day starts to pan out a couple of years later.

Projecting starting lineups two or three years in advance is standard operating procedure in scholarship football. Of course, like in most other aspects of the game the position of quarterback is central to everyone's thinking. Alumni are always projecting which quarterbacks will emerge from the shadows.

As we see with rookie quarterbacks in the NFL, a young quarterback (unlike other positions) can actually learn a lot by watching. This is true mostly because of the slower (relatively speaking) reads that a quarterback has to make can be simulated somewhat by watching film. There is no substitute for live reps, but film and daily preparation can truly build the proper foundation that lets a player "hit the ground running" when his turn comes.

Building a Better QB

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The four to five year preparation of the college quarterback differs greatly from that of other position players. In many programs freshman quarterbacks meet every day with their position coach and sometimes the Head Coach at extra times not required of other positions. The young guys see first hand what it is like to prepare from week to week, and the mental side of the game really starts to hit home. Building a college quarterback is really more than mere position development; the goal is to develop leaders that set the tone in practice, lead by example off the field, and generally see the big picture. It's not just the fans that expect this from a quarterback; his teammates expect it also.

Which bring us to the young guns; the kids that come in and compete for a starting job immediately. I think all major programs recruit a majority of quarterbacks that arrive on campus after their senior high school year physically ready to play. They just lack the mental aspects, but Head Coaches are taking the tradeoffs. With this in mind, several key factors have materialized resulting in more first and second year players taking the reigns of major college offenses.

First of all, high school offenses and defenses are more complicated. The step up between high school and college has been shortened in recent years. I subscribe to the belief that football can only be but so complicated and the high school game has gained on the college game if for no other reason than the NCAA has limited the college preparation time while the high schools are prepping year-round with no such restraints.

The second reason is that defenses are now so athletic that the physical prowess of a quarterback can overcome the need for him to be cerebral. More offensive coordinators are shortening the game plan and just letting his athlete beat their athlete. The days of quarterback that sits back in the pocket, reads the blitz and throws to the hot receiver for a little five-yard gain as he is hit by the linebacker are becoming fewer and fewer. Defenses today will often gladly trade a hit on the quarterback for that five-yard gain.

Thirdly, starting a freshman is the only way to have a four-year starter. The early playing time is an investment; there are very few poor teams with four-year starters at quarterback. The last pressure to play quarterbacks early is a very good problem to have; you might lose him early to the NFL.

Spectacular achievements are always preceded by unspectacular preparation-Roger Staubach

We all know the price that has to be paid to really get it done on Saturdays. Even the great natural athletes undergo physical and mental preparations that few of us will ever endure. All this is necessary because of the game they play and the intense level at which they play it. It is a beautiful thing when an athlete becomes a great college quarterback. There is no exact science as to how to achieve this, but I want to offer a short list of elements that I have found to be evident in programs that consistently turn out winning quarterbacks.

1. Competition is seen as a natural course of events, not as a zero-sum game.
2. The older quarterbacks actually teach almost as much to the younger quarterbacks as the coaches do.

Building a Better QB

3. Offensive Coordinators understand their players' limitations and game plan accordingly each week.
4. Head Coaches find a way to get their most confident players in a position to make a play.
5. They have a great deal of fun!

When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you are having fun, you can do amazing things- Joe Namath

I wish each of you success as your alma mater reloads at quarterback. I will take a few months off from this column to be an assistant coach with the Richmond Speed in Arena2 football. (We have both of our quarterbacks returning and a Division II 8,000 yard producer entering the developing stage.) I want to thank Will for the chance to write for the TSL Extra and for all the kind comments that I have received from subscribers. I also want to thank a little known sage of Southern Football; Criswell Freeman (a coincidence) for the collection of quotations used in this article.

Legendary Tennessee State Coach Big John Merritt spoke of the joy of preparation that let you know that the "hay was in the barn" on game day. I wish each one of you that peace of mind on and off the field.

Enjoy the game!

Gary Criswell has had 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 Hampton University. Gary now works as a Sales Manager for Network Business Furniture, serves as an analyst for WRNL's High School and College sports broadcasting, and continues to work as an advisor to college coaches on recruiting. Gary runs Rivals' VirginiaPreps.com web site.

Commentary

The Mountain Ahead

by Jim Alderson

It has been the dreariest of seasons for the Tech men's basketball program. It began with some embarrassing losses to lower-tier programs that Tech simply has no business losing to, then moved into our inaugural Big East schedule and saw a couple of surprising wins and a few good efforts, but mostly consisted of the Hokies being overmatched against a caliber of competition we haven't seen in a good long time. And, quite frankly, the future does not appear especially bright.

For all of the talk about our freshmen, none got within hailing distance of the BE rookie team. In what can charitably be described as a down year in the BE, that can be excused as a cyclical phenomena due to the fact that it was a very young league, with an abundance of young talent that will only get better, and our frosh are not at the level of that the BE teems with. And it is hard to see how it will get better. Bryant Matthews and Carlos Dixon will improve, but so will Omar Cook (St. John's), Eddie Griffin (Seton Hall), Marcus Toney-El (Seton Hall), Andre Barrett (Seton Hall), Taliek Brown (UConn) and the others. Precious little in BE-quality help is on the way.

Despite the optimism voiced by head coach Ricky Stokes, recruiting has not gone well, and it appears that the talent gap is widening between us and the top of the conference, where they are most definitely not engaged in pitched recruiting battles with George Mason for JUCO point guards (there are reasons players go to junior colleges, few of them good). This basketball program has serious problems and the task of fielding even a decent team seems monumental.

The most pressing problem is one of money. We don't have enough. We have done fairly well with our 'Football First' athletic priority, to say the least, and given our situation, it was the only sensible course to follow, but it has left us with an under-funded basketball program now residing in a power conference. The results in this, our first season, were predictable.

This will be at least partially solved in time as we will eventually pay the exorbitant entrance fee extorted by the basketball schools and get our cut of the huge conference television package. I definitely have some issues with jimmy, but one of them is not his budgetary oversight. He is an excellent bookkeeper, and we can assume that as more funds become available for men's basketball, they will be invested wisely and not used merely to provide a Temple-football-style bare-bones basketball existence.

Increased funding will provide Ricky with the cash necessary to widen his recruiting net beyond the limited area from which he is now drawing players (I get the feeling that the ready cash Frank Beamer had on hand to keep a chartered jet idling at the Roanoke airport to hop to Pennsylvania and New Jersey to corral top talent is not currently available to Ricky). But even with the widened recruiting scope offered by Big East visibility, recruiting generally begins at home.

Exactly what do we want from our basketball program? The short answer is obvious: better than this. The next, trickier question becomes: How do we do it, and, more importantly, can we?

It is interesting to take a look around at what I like to regard as our athletic peers, land-grant universities in locations as remote and far from the bright lights as Blacksburg. There are a number around with, like us, pretty darn good football programs. How are they doing in basketball?

The Mountain Ahead

We can start with Clemson. Since the founding of the ACC five decades ago, the Tigers main basketball role seems to be to provide a foundation in the standings for the rest of the conference to rest. A quick look at Clemson's ACC history shows pretty much fifty years of futility, with losing season piled upon losing season, only occasionally broken by a decent run, which then usually leads to the coach immediately bolting for greener pastures. It is a matter of faith in ACC circles that the easiest way to obtain prized ACC Tournament tickets is to stand outside the arena at the conclusion of Clemson's first game. There's not much inspiration for Hokie fans there.

Also in the ACC is Florida State. They left association with us in the old Metro and hit the ACC running with a roster slam full of Prop 48's, and did achieve some early success. They then began dealing with the ACC's academic requirements, which take a dim view of such recruits, and the Seminoles quickly dropped to the bottom of the conference and have been there ever since. Basketball is little more than an afterthought in Tallahassee (while Clemson fans have had virtually no reason to attend the ACC Tournament, they do buy the tickets, if only for speculative purposes. Not so at FSU, where their share not given to alumni friends of other schools are often given away to anybody that will take them), and it often seems the only reason FSU even fields a team is because the ACC requires it in order for the Noles to annually plunder the conference in football and provide quick and easy access to the BCS.

The basketball situation is slightly better at Penn State, but not much. Nine years of Big 11 residency have done little for Lions basketball (and it can be argued that, considering the number of Rose Bowl appearances copped by JoePa, it hasn't done an awful lot for their football team, either. Welcome to Blacksburg, Kevin). The last decade or so of Penn State basketball has seen a couple of NIT visits and the rare achievement, such as this year, of becoming an NCAA bubble team, and while we would kill to even be considered for March Madness, I doubt grinding basketball mediocrity was what the Lions had in mind when they moved to the Midwest.

One cannot overlook Texas A&M, and while I freely admit I am not well-versed in Big XII basketball, it does seem that studying that conference's standings year after year shows that the Aggies have turned the twenty-loss season into an art form.

There certainly is not a lot of hope to be found in those examples of teams that have been in power conferences a lot longer than we.

There is, however, a school whose situation is fairly similar to ours that is doing pretty well in basketball. That school is defending NCAA champion Michigan State. To say they have prospered is to engage in some serious understatement. They have also done it, as we have in football, with a heavy reliance on in-state players. Their current roster has seven of their fourteen listed players as hailing from Michigan.

Most successful programs in most any sport are built on a foundation of solid in-state recruiting. Our recent in-state recruiting has not been good, to say the least. At the moment we have nobody. I have seen and heard the expectation that the same prowess can be obtained at Tech in basketball

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using the same method as it was in football, relying heavily on players from Virginia. Can it? Granted, we have not been in a conference position to appeal to the state's top talent, but was the talent available to move us up the BE standings had we not been stabbed in the back in 95 and had spent the last few years in the conference, and assuming we were able to recruit some local kids?

It is interesting and illuminating to take a look at where the local kids went (I would point out that they didn't go to Virginia, either, as few in-state products have contributed to their recent up tick in fortunes - only Travis Watson, not home-grown but whose family, luckily for the Hoos, dropped anchor in the Lynchburg area just in time for him to be scooped up by Pete Gillen). Looking at the big men, there are seniors Josh Shoemaker from coal country, Damon Thornton and Kenny Inge from Tidewater, and junior Chris Moss from Richmond.

Shoemaker considered Tech before heading to Wake Forest, where he has turned in a solid if unspectacular career. His playing time increased from year to year until he finally cracked the starting lineup this year. His primary asset was rebounding prowess, something sorely missing from this year's Tech team, but he had serious problems every time he went up against one of the ACC's premier big men, such as Brendan Haywood, Lonny Baxter or Carlos Boozer.

Thornton and Inge both cast their lot with NC State. Thornton was a fairly solid player, but never achieved stardom, and provided perhaps the most overt example of Herb Sendek's rank inability to develop players. He was basically the same player at the conclusion of his Wolfpack career as he was at its beginning, with an arrest and suspension thrown in for good measure. The last thing we would have needed at Tech was further additions to our athletic rap sheet. Inge was the more talented of the two, but, like Thornton, never blossomed into a high-quality contributor. He also was often cited for attitude problems, and his on-court demeanor was at times positively Dennis Mims-like.

West Virginia's Moss is the best of this bunch, having turned into a solid inside presence for Gale Catlett, but there has also been much emotional and academic baggage attached to his career. There was also Tidewater's Brian Bersticker at North Carolina, but he rarely plays, observing most Tar Heel games from the end of the bench.

While any of these guys would have been an upgrade over what Stokes had on the floor, none have demonstrated the ability to have consistently held their own with Jake Voskul, Troy Murphy or Michael Bradley. I would point out that Rolan Roberts was recruited at Tech, and while he was a solid player in the A-10, we never got to see how he would have performed at the BE level. My guess is that his 6'6 size would have made it difficult to effectively compete with larger and more physical Big East frontcourt players.

Moving to the wings, about the only good ones I can find are Roanoke's Brooks Berry and Tony Stanley from NOVA. The junior Berry has been a solid player at West Virginia, but hardly a star. Stanley, who once committed to Bobby Hussey before landing in Dayton, is a very good player, but the suspicion remains if he could have achieved the same quality play against tougher BE competition.

The Mountain Ahead

And that is about it. What is noticeably missing from this group of state players is a point guard, also Tech's principal weakness. I suppose Ronald Curry could be counted, but so far his indulging in both football and basketball has guaranteed that he would not realize his full potential in either.

There don't seem to be any basketball equivalents to the Vicks and Suggs and Engelbergers that have propelled us to the football heights we enjoy. Even if we dominated in-state basketball recruiting like we have football over the last few years, there appear to be players that would only raise us to the middle of the BE pack, at best. There are, of course, the academies, Hargrave, Fork Union and the mother ship at Oak Hill. This has to be an integral part of any recruiting strategy, but we are going to have to do better than getting players who rarely play.

If Ricky Stokes is going to recruit the players necessary to make us competitive, or at least qualifying for the Big East Tournament, which would be a step in the right direction, where are the players going to come from? The obvious answer would seem to be the Washington to New York corridor, since what few television opportunities we received this year did get us into those households. The area abounds with quality high school basketball players and competition.

The Big East has five schools in that corridor, and they are mining it heavily. They are luring recruits with the advantageous offering of playing in front of their friends and family. That is going to be tough to combat. While they didn't exactly jell, Seton Hall's Tommy Amaker rounded up what was considered the nation's top recruiting class last year without having to drive much further than an hour from campus. With seven players from the New York City area, the recruiting budget for St. John's Mike Jarvis consists mostly of subway tokens.

I would point out that while Will allows me to submit regular TSL columns basically whenever I feel like it, the Xtra ones do carry a deadline (March 12 in this case) and, in keeping with a lifelong habit begun in elementary school with the very first book report I ever had to compose and turn in, I have waited to just about the last possible minute and much of this is being written following that terrific Duke-Maryland ACC semifinal, with occasional glances at the television displaying the annual Temple-UMass A-10 final, which is doing little more than adding to the joy felt by most Hokies when we finally got out of that miserable league. Even more is being written following Duke's ACC championship game dismantling of North Carolina. It occurs to me that there are two and perhaps three ACC teams better than any I saw in the ten of the eleven Big East Tournament games I watched on the tube. Most of these BE teams were routinely beating us by twenty, and the youth of the conference means that our competition is going to be tougher.

If we are going to do anything in basketball other than serve as the league's punching bag, better players will be the first requirement, and it seems to me a legitimate question as to where they will come from. Ricky Stokes has a very tough task ahead of him.

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Defensive Performance

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

For a while now, I've had an idea in the back of my mind for doing a defensive performance calculation based on the defensive stats for the 2000 Hokie football team.

The idea of a defensive performance index is simple: award points for certain defensive plays (tackles, sacks, interceptions, etc.), multiply a player's stats by those point awards, and total them up.

You can then rank the defensive players by total points, and for a different twist, you can divide their total points by the number of plays they were on the field to get a "points per play" statistic that truly measures a player's productivity.

I set out to do just this using the defensive statistics posted on hokiesportsinfo.com at the following address:

<http://www.hokiesportsinfo.com/football/stats/teamcume.html>

Statistics for plays from scrimmage and special teams plays were taken from the season-ending depth chart found on page 8 of the December 8, 2000 edition of "hokiesports.com the newspaper" (Vol, 18, No. 15).

Note that the calculations are for the regular season only and do not include the Gator Bowl. A Gator Bowl depth chart was not available, and Gator Bowl statistics also seem to have disappeared from Tech's web site.

Players Included in the Calculation

First, a caveat: the defensive statistics posted on the hokiesportsinfo.com web site also include special teams plays and tackles, and that complicates things. I took the list of 41 players that are included in the "defensive stats" and eliminated all of the players who are not on the defensive two-deep roster. This got rid of the special-teamers like Wayne Ward who appear in the defensive statistics because they have made plays on special teams.

This knocked it down to 22 players, and then I deleted Benny Wolfe, who did not play more than 100 plays on defense and in fact played more on special teams than he did on defense (78 plays from scrimmage and 108 special teams plays).

I wound up with the following 21 players, all of whom played more than 100 plays on defense in the 2000 season:

DT: David Pugh, Chad Beasley, Kevin Lewis, Channing Reed, Dan Wilkinson

DE: Nathaniel Adibi, Jim Davis, Colas Colas, Lamar Cobb

LB: Jake Houseright, Ben Taylor, Philip Summers, Nick Sorensen, Brian Welch

CB: Eric Green, Billy Hardee, Larry Austin, Ronyell Whitaker

S: Cory Bird, Willie Pile, Kevin McCadam

Analysis

Inside the Numbers

Defensive Plays and the Points Awarded

Here are the points awarded for the defensive plays included in the statistics:

Play	Points Awarded
UT (unassisted tackle)	2
AT (assisted tackle)	1
TFL (tackle for loss)	2 (in addition to UT or AT points)
TFL yards lost	0.2 pts per yard lost
Sacks	2 (in addition to UT/AT and TFL points)
INT (interceptions)	10
INT return yards	0.1 pts per return yard
PD (pass defensed)	3
QBH (QB hurry)	2
FmRec (fumble recovery)	5
Fumble return yards	0.2 pts per return yard
FF (forced fumble)	10
TD (defensive touchdown)	20

Notes:

1.) Tackles are complicated, and are calculated like this: when a player makes a tackle, he gets 1 point (assisted tackle) or 2 points (unassisted tackle). If it's a tackle for loss (TFL), he gets an additional 2 points, plus 0.2 points for every yard lost on the play. If the tackle for loss is a quarter-back sack, it is calculated just like a TFL, but the player also gets 2 bonus points for the sack.

2.) Points for fumble return yardage are double what is awarded for interception return yardage because fumble recovery statistics typically include less return yardage than interceptions. Most fumbles are recovered on the ground, whereas most interceptions are made standing up with a chance to run. Fumble return yards should therefore be awarded points at a premium over INT return yards.

How Special Teams Skew the Numbers

The fact that special teams plays are included in the defensive statistics provided on hokiesportsinfo.com complicates things and skews the results in many ways. For one thing, there are not as many "plays" available to a special teamer as there are to a scrimmage defender — sacks, QB hurries, interceptions, etc. are not available in a special teams play, except for the rare instances where the opponent runs a trick play.

Not to mention that sometimes the special team plays are plays like kickoff returns or field goals, where making *any* type of defensive play is impossible.

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Inside the Numbers

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So this means that a defender such as Philip Summers, who played about one-fifth of his plays on special teams, is going to have his point totals dragged down by those special teams plays. On special teams, he can't make a sack or an interception, so on average, he gets fewer points from his special teams plays, no matter how good a special teams player he is.

But on the other hand, the tackles Philip makes on special teams go into his point totals and help him out versus a player like defensive end Jim Davis, who didn't play a single down on special teams.

You can sum up the effect of playing on special teams thus:

- 1.) It increases a player's point totals by giving him more opportunities to make plays, most notably tackles.
- 2.) It decreases a player's "points per play" figure, because special teams plays don't provide as many opportunities to score points.

I tried to compensate for item number two by dividing the number of special teams plays in half when calculating the "points per play" statistic. So $\text{points per play} = \text{total points} / (\text{scrimmage plays} + \text{special teams plays}/2)$. You can argue that I should have divided by a larger number or even thrown the special teams plays out completely, but it was hard to figure out exactly what to do, and that's the step I took.

And Now, the Results

So, given the point values outlined above, and the defensive statistics obtained from hokiesportsinfo.com, and the depth chart play totals from "hokiesport.com the newspaper" (geez, I hate that name), let's throw those 21 players and their stats into a spreadsheet and see what comes up.

Unfortunately, the table that shows each player's statistics and their resulting point totals is too lengthy and cumbersome to print here, but it can be viewed on the web at:

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue005/defensivestats.htm>

The page at the above address lists the players from first to last in terms of total number of defensive "points" scored. If you would like access to my actual MS Excel spreadsheet instead of just a web page showing the stats, see the end of this article.

Players Ranked by Total Points

Without further ado, here are the total points scored by the players:

Analysis

Inside the Numbers

Total Defensive Points			
Rank	Player	Pos.	Points
1	40 TAYLOR, Ben	LB	251.2
2	35 PILE, Willie	S	223.0
3	16 BIRD, Cory	S	217.7
4	2 WHITAKER, R.	CB	187.2
5	71 PUGH, David	DT	175.8
6	41 HOUSERIGHT, J.	LB	157.8
7	1 GREEN, Eric	CB	157.5
8	83 ADIBI, N.	DE	153.0
9	94 BEASLEY, Chad	DT	145.1
10	8 SUMMERS, P.	LB	144.9
11	28 COBB, Lamar	DE	124.0
12	14 SORENSEN, Nick	LB	96.6
13	95 DAVIS, Jim	DE	93.4
14	34 WELCH, Brian	LB	86.2
15	25 HARDEE, Billy	CB	72.0
16	54 WILKINSON, Dan	DT	56.4
17	53 REED, Channing	DT	52.0
18	24 AUSTIN, Larry	CB	47.0
19	5 McCADAM, Kevin	S	46.8
20	70 LEWIS, Kevin	DT	43.6
21	99 COLAS, Cols	DE	34.0

It's no surprise to see Ben Taylor and Cory Bird near the top of the list. Taylor is Tech's leading tackler and has taken more defensive snaps than any defender other than Ronyell Whitaker. Linebackers also have the opportunity to make every single play in the stat sheet: tackles, sacks, interceptions, it's all available to a linebacker.

Cory Bird's high point total and third place finish are a testament not only to his playing ability and team leadership, but to the versatility of the Rover (strong safety) position that he plays. Rovers get to do it all: rush the QB, defend passes, pick the ball off, provide run support, etc. The Rover really is a do-it-all position, unique among the non-linebackers in Tech's scheme. If you didn't realize how important a good Rover is in Virginia Tech's defense, I hope you do now.

Willie Pile in second place *is* a surprise. Willie made some nice plays this year, but I didn't realize that he made so many of them. But a quick look at Willie's stat line shows that he did it all: 56 tackles, 2 tackles for loss, 6 interceptions, 10 passes defended, one fumble recovery, one forced fumble, and one touchdown.

Pile was one of only two defensive players to score a TD, which contributes a hefty 20 points to his total. He did it on an 11-yard interception return for TD against Akron, a play that netted him 31.1 of his 223 points (10 for the interception, 1.1 points for the 11 return yards, and 20 points for the TD).

Nathaniel Adibi is the other Tech player to score a touchdown, with a 36-yard fumble return for a TD

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against Central Florida. With 32.2 points on the play (5 for the fumble recovery, 7.2 for the 36 return yards, and 20 for the TD), Adibi wins the award for highest-scoring play of the year.

Side note: Cory Bird is shown on Tech's stat sheet as having a touchdown, but that was a special teams play, not a defensive play, so it was thrown out of my spreadsheet.

David Pugh being near the top makes sense. Pugh was all over the field and even tied for the team lead in sacks with 5. Defensive tackles do not get to roam around the field and make many plays, so the fact that Pugh finished fifth in total points from the DT position is phenomenal, *especially* when you consider that Pugh was tenth in terms of number of plays, but fifth in terms of points scored. Very impressive.

Players Ranked by Points-Per-Play

And in the all-important points-per-play category, which is the true measure of a defender's effectiveness on the field, here's how it shakes out:

Rank	Player	Defensive Points Per Plays					Pts/ Play
		Pos.	Scr. Plys	ST Plys	Tot. Plys	Points	
1	35 PILE, Willie	S	512	36	548	223.0	0.42
2	71 PUGH, David	DT	422	45	467	175.8	0.40
3	34 WELCH, Brian	LB	205	44	249	86.2	0.38
4	1 GREEN, Eric	CB	389	66	455	157.5	0.37
5	40 TAYLOR, Ben	LB	651	92	743	251.2	0.36
6	70 LEWIS, Kevin	DT	125	3	128	43.6	0.34
7	95 DAVIS, Jim	DE	273	0	273	93.4	0.34
8	25 HARDEE, Billy	CB	186	55	241	72.0	0.34
9	16 BIRD, Cory	S	645	94	739	217.7	0.31
10	83 ADIBI, N.	DE	455	71	526	153.0	0.31
11	54 WILKINSON, D.	DT	181	0	181	56.4	0.31
12	14 SORENSEN, N.	LB	317	0	317	96.6	0.30
13	94 BEASLEY, Chad	DT	418	118	536	145.1	0.30
14	53 REED, Channing	DT	174	0	174	52.0	0.30
15	8 SUMMERS, P.	LB	431	126	557	144.9	0.29
16	41 HOUSERIGHT	LB	525	42	567	157.8	0.29
17	24 AUSTIN, Larry	CB	167	12	179	47.0	0.27
18	28 COBB, Lamar	DE	447	42	489	124.0	0.26
19	2 WHITAKER, R.	CB	670	77	747	187.2	0.26
20	5 McCADAM, Kevin	S	179	73	252	46.8	0.22
21	99 COLAS, Cols	DE	168	1	169	34.0	0.20

According to the formula I've invented here, Willie Pile makes more plays during his time on the field than any other Virginia Tech defender. Again, at first glance this is a surprise, but as I noted above, Willie made every single defensive play there is to make this year, except for a QB sack or a QB hurry. If the free safety blitzed more in Tech's scheme, he would have those, too.

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In second place is David Pugh. This numerical analysis fits what we all feel to be true from a subjective standpoint, namely that David Pugh is one hell of a football player.

Before the 2000 season, the Virginia Tech coaches remarked that in 1999, they felt that Pugh made more plays for his time on the field than Carl Bradley and Nathaniel Williams did, but they gave Bradley and Williams the starting jobs because they were seniors. I don't know if the coaches did any statistical analysis to come to their conclusion about Pugh, but I did, and I see now what they were talking about.

Pugh tied for the team lead in sacks (5) and QB hurries (10), and he even had an interception to boost his point totals.

Brian Welch is a surprise finisher at third in points per play, especially when you consider that one-fifth of his plays came on special teams. Brian scored points with high tackle totals during his time in the game, plus a sack and three QB hurries.

Right behind Welch is, of all people, Eric Green. Green was forced to play cornerback as a true freshman when injuries felled Larry Austin and Garnell Wilds, and he was eventually benched after the Miami game, so his high finish in points-per-play is a surprise.

Or maybe not. As a true freshman playing CB, Green was a lightning rod for opposing QB's and receivers. They threw at him a lot, giving him the opportunity to make plays. He had 31 tackles, including one for a loss of 22 yards, but what really boosted his point totals were his 4 interceptions (third on the team) and 12 passes defensed (first on the team).

Rankings by Position

This article is already huge, so I'll put up a few more tables without additional comments: total points sorted by position, and points per play sorted by position (see next page):

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Player	Pos.	Total Pts.	Pos.Avg.
35 PILE, Willie	S	223.0	
16 BIRD, Cory	S	217.7	
5 McCADAM, Kevin	S	46.8	162.5
40 TAYLOR, Ben	LB	251.2	
41 HOUSERIGHT, J.	LB	157.8	
8 SUMMERS, P.	LB	144.9	
14 SORENSEN, Nick	LB	96.6	
34 WELCH, Brian	LB	86.2	147.3
71 PUGH, David	DT	175.8	
94 BEASLEY, Chad	DT	145.1	
54 WILKINSON, Dan	DT	56.4	
53 REED, Channing	DT	52.0	
70 LEWIS, Kevin	DT	43.6	94.6
83 ADIBI, N.	DE	153.0	
28 COBB, Lamar	DE	124.0	
95 DAVIS, Jim	DE	93.4	
99 COLAS, Cols	DE	34.0	101.1
2 WHITAKER, R.	CB	187.2	
1 GREEN, Eric	CB	157.5	
25 HARDEE, Billy	CB	72.0	
24 AUSTIN, Larry	CB	47.0	115.9

Player	Pos.	Pts./Play	Pos. Avg.
35 PILE, Willie	S	0.42	
16 BIRD, Cory	S	0.31	
5 McCADAM, Kevin	S	0.22	0.32
34 WELCH, Brian	LB	0.38	
40 TAYLOR, Ben	LB	0.36	
14 SORENSEN, Nick	LB	0.30	
8 SUMMERS, P.	LB	0.29	
41 HOUSERIGHT, J.	LB	0.29	0.33
71 PUGH, David	DT	0.40	
70 LEWIS, Kevin	DT	0.34	
54 WILKINSON, Dan	DT	0.31	
94 BEASLEY, Chad	DT	0.30	
53 REED, Channing	DT	0.30	0.33
95 DAVIS, Jim	DE	0.34	
83 ADIBI, N.	DE	0.31	
28 COBB, Lamar	DE	0.26	
99 COLAS, Cols	DE	0.20	0.28
1 GREEN, Eric	CB	0.37	
25 HARDEE, Billy	CB	0.34	
24 AUSTIN, Larry	CB	0.27	
2 WHITAKER, R.	CB	0.26	0.31

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The Data

To download an MS Excel 97 spreadsheet containing all of the data and formulas that I have used here, go here:

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue005/defensivestats.xls>

I hope the spreadsheet has no significant errors, and I hope you enjoyed yet another brain-bruising installment of "Inside the Numbers"!

Feature

Inside TSL: Interviewing the Big Names

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

In the last few months, due to the launch of the TSL Extra, I have worked much harder at getting quality interviews than I ever did. Prior to the TSL Extra, my most notable interviews were with Bill Roth (1997), Jim Druckenmiller (1999), and Andre Ray (2000).

But since the launch of the TSLX, I've done more interviews. I've had the opportunity to talk to a few recruits (Justin Hamilton and Will Hunt), their high school coaches, and their pleasant and chatty moms. Plus, I have interviewed former Hokie Huddler editor and "Turn up the Wick!" author Chris Colston. I have also done an interview with former backup QB Dave Meyer that has been transcribed and is waiting to be turned into an article (or a series of articles -- that one will probably wind up out on the free area of the web site, and not in the TSLX).

In the past, I was reluctant to pursue interviews aggressively. Number one, they're very time-consuming. First you have to type up questions, then do the interview, then transcribe the interview. My hour-long interview with Dave Meyer, for example, was eleven pages when I typed it up (Dave is from New Jersey, and man, can he talk fast).

Number two, as most of you are aware, Virginia Tech does not allow TechSideline.com (i.e., me) access to Virginia Tech players and coaches for interviews. This *greatly* reduces the pool of people I can talk to.

Sure, if I wanted to interview Lee Suggs, I could do an end-run around the VT Sports Information Department (SID), look up Lee Suggs's number in the phone book, and just call him up. I would get my interview, but (1) it would anger the SID, and one day, when I do get press credentials, I'll have to work with him, so for now, I'll respect them and not do a shortcut around them; and (2) Lee Suggs himself could get chewed out by the SID for talking to someone that was not cleared by the athletic department to interview him.

The third reason I haven't done many interviews is because of the negative connotations associated with Internet journalists and the resistance to treating them as legitimate media. For example, if I was to call up the Baltimore Ravens, introduce myself as "Will Stewart of TechSideline.com" and try to set up an interview with Cornell Brown, I would probably get told to take a hike.

If, on the other hand, I was to call them up as "Will Stewart from the Roanoke Times" I would probably get treated a lot better.

I suppose that being treated as a pariah by the very athletic department whose sports programs I'm trying to cover has caused me to be a little shy about trying to set up interviews with people. That's the wrong attitude for me to take, but after years of being stonewalled and shut out by VT, I've no doubt absorbed a little bit of their "I'm not worthy" outlook with regards to TechSideline.com.

The athletic department's anti-TSL stance is a big concern for me. Whenever I'm preparing to talk to someone new, I have no idea *who* has been told *what* about me and my web site in advance, so I never know if I'm going to come up against an interview subject who has been brainwashed by the Tech athletic administration into believing that I've got horns, a tail, and a pitchfork. Laugh if you

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want, but there is a *ton* of misinformation that is spread by the athletic administration about TechSideline.com and Will Stewart. One day we'll get past all that, but for now, it's there, believe me.

But the advent of the TSL Extra has started to change my outlook. The TSLX is a subscription service for which people are laying down their hard-earned money, so I feel a responsibility to pony up good material — and that includes interviews and perspectives from the people associated with Virginia Tech athletics.

That has led to me being a little more aggressive with pursuing interviews. I've had the opportunity to talk to some great people since then, most notably recruits and their families.

But this issue took it to another level for me. I talked to one of the giants of Virginia Tech football, Corey Moore, and as far as recruiting interviews go, there's none bigger than this month's whopper with Kevin Jones and his dad (mostly his dad — more about that in a minute).

The Interview With Corey

I went about getting the interviews in similar fashion. Namely, I simply emailed them and asked. In Corey's case, I blundered upon an old email exchange I had with a woman who had done some work with him recently, getting him to sign some jerseys that were then distributed to VT Alumni Association chapters for fund-raising. She had exchanged emails with Corey, so I asked her for his email address and sent him the following email:

Corey: this is Will Stewart, the GM and Managing Editor of TechSideline.com (we used to be called HokieCentral.com, which I think you had heard of — you may not have caught the switch to TechSideline.com that we made last November). I'm interested in interviewing you, to catch up with you and see how your career is going. Are you available and interested? Let me know, and we can set up a phone interview. Thanks — Will

Corey's answer came within a couple of days:

Will, I am in Blacksburg as we speak so if you want to give me a call at 540 xxx-xxxx or 961-xxxx and I will be glad to set up a time to speak with you.

I called him, we set up the interview, and the next day, I made up my list of questions and buzzed him back on his cell phone. In my basement office, I've got a hand-held voice recorder that I patch into the office phone, and all I have to do is hit the Record button to record my phone conversations. That way, I can talk to people without having to take notes or type things up.

Later on, I slip the tape into a dictation machine with one of those foot pedals that you use to control the playback function. That's how I transcribe my interviews.

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Corey was very accommodating, as you can imagine. The Corey Moore that you have seen in the media the last few years is the genuine article. He's talkative, expresses himself well, and answers the questions asked of him. During the preparation for the 2000 Sugar Bowl, he became a bit of a raving lunatic, but other than that, he's a down-to-earth guy who is easy to talk to.

Speaking of that Sugar Bowl, I didn't ask him about that. The focus of my interview was his burgeoning career in Buffalo, not his Hokie past. And it's probably best that I didn't ask him about the national championship game, because I found out later that the memory is a sore spot for Corey, and it's best left alone.

If you remember, he was a total non-factor in that game. FSU double-teamed him and shut him down, and I believe he had a grand total of one tackle and no sacks. For a guy who ran his mouth a lot in the weeks leading up to the game, it was an embarrassing performance, and something that he would rather forget.

I was told that Corey's Sugar Bowl jersey now hangs in Greg Roberts' Sports Club in Roanoke. The person who told me that said that Corey told Greg words to the effect of, "Here, take it — I don't want the (bleep)ing thing."

That's too bad, and like I said, it's probably best that I didn't ask him about the topic of the Sugar Bowl.

I did ask him what he thought about the 2000 edition of the Hokies, and as you can tell from the article, Corey thinks a *lot* about the Hokies. The way I presented it in the story is exactly the way it happened. I asked him, "What's your take on the success that the Virginia Tech team had this past year, in the 2000 season? Did they do a little better than you expected? Did you get a chance to follow them?" And his response was seven paragraphs long and included almost every active player on the Virginia Tech roster.

Man, that guy loves the Hokies.

Kevin Jones ... er, Thomas Jones

Procuring an interview with Kevin Jones and his dad wasn't as easy. My first contact info for the Joneses came from Jeff Ouellet, an attorney/sports agent and avowed TSL fan who lives and works in Pennsylvania. Jeff contacted me via email, we got to talking, and the next thing I knew, he was offering to write an article for the TSLX, and to give me Kevin Jones's phone number. I said yes to both.

My first attempt to call the Joneses at home was strange, to say the least. I dialed the number, someone picked it up ... and said nothing. I waited, thinking maybe I had gotten a poorly-recorded message on an answering machine. When 5-10 seconds went by with no greeting, I said, "Hello? Hello?" ... and promptly got hung up on.

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Hmm, strange. I called back immediately, and this time, the phone rang eight times, and I got a voice mail message. So I left my name, number, and email address, and then hung up.

And I waited. And for days, there was no answer. I was thinking about that first phone call, and I wondered if the ultra-busy Joneses had some sort of system set up whereby they picked up the phone, and you were supposed to give some secret password or say something like, “The dried up old Lion can no longer get top recruits,” or something like that. If they didn’t hear that, they would hang up.

I called the number again and once again, I got the answering machine/voice mail.

So I contacted Gorden Blain, a high school sports reporter for PA Sports Fever, which is found on the web at pennpreps.rivals.com (PA Sports Fever’s photographer, George Zurick, provided me with this month’s great cover photo). Gorden was the first journalist to break the story of the strength and conditioning programs at VT and PSU being a major issue for the Joneses. He is very good at what he does and has talked to the Joneses a number of times.

Gorden told me that the Joneses had no such system and were in fact very media friendly. “Call them up again,” he said, “they’ll talk to you.”

But, as I told you before, I’m still a little shy, especially when it comes to the big guns like the Joneses, so I didn’t call back right away.

Fortunately, right about that time, a new poster called “Football Coach 2” showed up on the TSL Recruiting message board. Thomas Jones had spent a lot of time posting on the BWI (Penn State) board while Kevin was being recruited, under the name “Football Coach,” so when “Football Coach 2” showed up on the TSL message board, I immediately looked up his profile in our database.

“Thomas Jones” was the poster’s registered name. I dropped him an email, asked him if I could interview him and Kevin, and things happened very quickly after that.

Gorden Blain was right, the Joneses are very accommodating, despite the intense pressure that months of recruiting must have put on them. I found Thomas Jones in particular to be very talkative, as you can tell from the interview, and very open about things.

Kevin was much more reticent. Interviewing 17 and 18 year old kids, I have found out, is a hit-or-miss proposition. Some of them are relatively expressive, like Justin Hamilton and Will Hunt, but others, like Pulaski County’s Jeff King (whom I interviewed last fall) and Kevin Jones give short, one-or-two-line answers. They’re just kids, and perhaps they don’t want to “say anything stupid,” or maybe they’re just shy.

By the way, I never did find out what happened during that first phone call when no one spoke and they hung up on me. Thomas Jones said it was probably just one of the kids (they have four, I think)

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playing around.

Learning As I Go Along

In any event, I'm still a very mediocre interviewer. I'm not a trained journalist (I'm an electrical engineer by training and a software engineer by work experience), so I've never been schooled in how to approach an interview subject.

I don't know how others do it, but the way I do it — having a prepared list of questions, setting up the recorder, and then having a conversation directed by the questions — is what works for me so far. I do well with people like Corey Moore and Thomas Jones, who like to talk, but I'm still very bad at bringing people like Jeff King and Kevin Jones out of their shell.

I'm finally starting to get over the nervousness, though. I used to be just a fan, sitting in Section 15, Row WW of Lane Stadium, so calling up people who are associated with Tech athletics and talking to them still carries with it a bit of a "Should I be doing this?" feeling.

But that feeling is going away. I run a web site read by thousands of Hokie fans, and I have a paying subscriber base who deserves good coverage and good articles, so it's my job, and I've got to do it.

Oddly enough, the "thrill" of talking to a Corey Moore or a Kevin Jones is overshadowed by concerns that plague me as I do the interview. Namely, will I ask the right questions? Will I get the information that the fans and readers want to know? Does the person I'm interviewing think I'm asking dumb questions? If I ask a somewhat controversial question, will they go off on me?

(After all, Thomas Jones started our interview off by saying "I don't want to talk about Penn State," which was the subject of roughly one quarter of my questions. So when he said that, I was wondering what was going to happen later in the interview. It turned out just fine. He *did* talk about Penn State when I asked.)

So overall, I'm no longer the "giddy fan" thrilled about being able to talk to these guys. I've got a job to do, and I want to make sure that when I interview someone, the end result is something that you, the readers, will think is worth your time ... and more importantly, your money.

I'm already thinking about who I'm going to talk to next month. Corey Moore and Kevin and Thomas Jones were great subjects for this issue, and I'm proud of the way both articles turned out, but mid-April, and issue #6 of the TSL Extra, will be here before you know it. Time to get crackin'.

See you next month.