

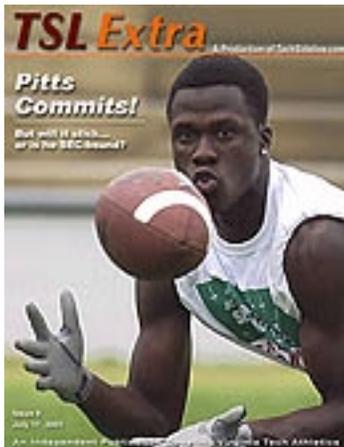
TSL Extra

Issue 9, July 17, 2001

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Post-Herald. Photography by
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TSL EXTRA

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Dear Readers:

Football season is closing in fast. As I write this, it is July 17th, and Big East Media Day is just 9 days away. That will mark the end of the Dead Zone, as Jim Alderson calls it, and it is with a mixture of anticipation and dread that I look forward to the coming season. I love football season, and the excitement, and the web site traffic, but it also means that I'll be buried in the web site from late July until late April.

During the offseason, TSL is almost like a regular job. I can get by on 40 hours a week, if need be (unless I'm in the midst of releasing a TSL Extra). But during the season, the web site is a constant companion. I check email and the message boards all day long, seven days a week, and I have to make sure to catch the sports segment on the evening news every day. Plus, there's the weekly Hokie Hotline radio show and Virginia Tech Sports Today TV show.

So for me, it's bittersweet to put the wraps on another offseason, because I have actually been able to get some projects done around the house in the last two months. It has been the calm before the storm. But like you, I'm anxious to put the 2001 version of the Hokie football team on the field to see how they perform.

This month's TSLX contains one of my favorite TSLX articles ever, a great profile of verbal commitment Montavis Pitts. The story of Montavis Pitts is one of the things that makes college football recruiting such an interesting topic, and the Hokie coaches will have to fight hard to get Pitts to stick to his verbal. Let's just say that Montavis has become *very* popular recently.

In addition to that, we have a look back at the 1990 Tech-UVa football game, one of the great games in Virginia Tech history. Time hasn't reduced its luster one iota, and Jim Alderson, who recollects the game for us, places it in its historical context to really give you a great perspective on it.

We also present a point-counterpoint series of articles on a playoff for college football. This is a complex topic, and whether or not you think it's a good idea is a matter of your point of view. You'll see what I mean when you read the two articles.

And lastly, we have a look outside the lines at Virginia Tech Licensing, one of the most misunderstood topics in existence.

All in all, it's an issue that I'm very proud of, and it's all wrapped up in a snazzy new format. If you're looking at the on-line version, you really ought to take a look at the PDF version. As always, spread the word about the TSL Extra (there's a promo page in the back of the PDF version that you can print out, make copies of, and give to your friends), and enjoy issue #9.

Will

Loachapoka's Montavis Pitts

He has rocketed from obscurity to the national top 100. But will Montavis Pitts stick with his verbal commitment to Virginia Tech?

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

The story of Montavis Pitts, a multi-talented football player from tiny Loachapoka High School in Alabama, is the stuff football recruiting legends are made of. In the short span of a few days last May, Pitts changed from a little-known player with just two scholarship offers into a Virginia Tech verbal commitment with over a dozen offers, including all the heavy-weight teams in the SEC.

How did an unknown player, a rising senior, suddenly spring from obscurity into Rivals100.com's listing of the top 100 players in the country, with SEC coaches like Tennessee's Phil Fulmer and

Florida's Steve Spurrier suddenly drooling over him? It didn't take a carefully orchestrated recruiting strategy, nor a polished highlight film, nor a boisterous coach working the phones with recruiting coordinators.

Instead, all it took was for Montavis Pitts to strap on his track shoes at a football combine and do what he does best: run like quicksilver, posting a 4.29 in the forty yard dash. Now he is one of the most highly sought-after players in the country, a young man with 21 scholarship offers whose world will turn upside down this fall when recruiters and recruiting analysts start ringing his phone off the hook.

Meanwhile, thanks to Pitts' sudden stature in the recruiting world, the Virginia Tech coaches face a months-long battle to try to hang on to Pitts, who gave the Hokies a verbal commitment in mid-May. But they face stiff competition, as Pitts will be wooed by the SEC programs he grew up watching and cheering for. For Montavis Pitts, Virginia Tech coaches, and Virginia Tech fans, the next few months will be etched in their memories and talked about for years to come.

A Few Days in May

On May 16th, under the innocuous headline "Hokies get 4th junior recruit," Roanoke Times sports-writer Doug Doughty told of a 6-1, 180-pounder named Montavis Pitts from Loachapoka High School in Alabama who had given a verbal commitment to play football for Virginia Tech. The announcement came as a complete surprise to Hokie fans who follow recruiting, and they immediately scrambled to learn more about the kid from the tiny high school just five miles from the campus of Auburn University.

The problem was, there was nothing to be found out about Pitts. He was not in the databases of SuperPrep, PrepStar, or Rivals.com, and there was little to no mention of Pitts or Loachapoka High School (pronounced LOACH-uh-POKE-uh) to be found in Internet searches. Doughty's article gave no junior-year stats for Pitts and included no mention of the most coveted piece of information of all, his forty-yard dash time. Doughty's article said only that Loachapoka's coach, Jerome Tate, did not time his players in the 40, saying only that Pitts was "pretty dadgum fast."

To make matters worse, the article had an error in it. It cited Pitts' time in the 100 meter dash as a middling 11.8 seconds, not a very impressive time. And Pitts only had two offers other than Tech:

Southern Mississippi and Middle Tennessee State.

Many Hokie fans began to question the scholarship offer to Pitts, a kid who lived in the shadow of Auburn's Jordan-Hare stadium but had drawn almost no interest from the Tigers. Others said not to worry, that Virginia Tech defensive backs coach Lorenzo "Whammy" Ward, who was recruiting Pitts, had found a classic diamond in the rough. Ward, who had solidified his reputation as a recruiter one year earlier by bringing in Pennsylvania's Kevin Jones, was certainly worthy of the benefit of the doubt.

A new piece of information seemed to bear out the diamond-in-the-rough theory: it was discovered that in early May, Pitts had set three records in the Alabama State 1A track meet: 10.97 seconds in the 100 meters, 21.95 seconds in the 200 meters, and 22 feet, 10 inches in the long jump.

His 100 meter time had beaten the old class 1A record by 0.16 seconds, his 200 meter time shaved an astounding 0.56 seconds off the previous record, and his long-jump was *nearly a full foot* longer than the old record. He also won the 300 meter intermediate hurdles in 41.01 seconds, beating the second-place finisher by over 1.2 seconds.

Doughty's reported 11.8 seconds in the 100 meter was in error of course, and he ran a correction shortly thereafter.

But the weekend of May 19th and 20th, mere days after his commitment to Virginia Tech, the previously-unheralded Montavis Pitts suddenly became a household name in college recruiting.

Accompanied by his coach, Pitts attended the Capital City Combine in Montgomery Alabama, and while there, he did something that changed his life forever: he lined up for the 40 yard dash and ran a combine-record 4.29, the fastest time recorded out of the 184 kids in attendance.

"I didn't really believe I had run a 4.29," the soft-spoken Pitts told the TSL Extra in a recent phone interview. "I had to ask 'em about two or three times."

Pitts was running on artificial turf in his track shoes, timed by two stopwatches. They lined him up for another run, and he did it again. "The second time," he said, "I ran a 4.33, because I hesitated a little bit on my start. But I was pretty consistent."

The 35 major-college scouts in attendance, from schools like Tennessee, Auburn, Alabama, and Notre Dame, were floored. Under NCAA rules, they weren't allowed to talk to Pitts, but they could certainly talk to Jerome Tate, his coach.

And talk they did. "I think I got twelve offers that day," Pitts said.

The reporters gathered around Pitts, and the superfast wide receiver from little Loachapoka wasn't a secret anymore. His stock shot up dramatically, and within weeks, he was named to the Rivals 100 list of the top one hundred recruits in the nation.

And among the Hokie faithful, the question was no longer whether Pitts was any good, but rather, whether or not Tech could hold him to his verbal commitment in the coming months. Buried with a flood of scholarship offers, Pitts expressed willingness to look elsewhere. On June 28th, he told

Alabama web site BamaOnline.com, “I’d say Tennessee is my favorite. I’m going to visit Florida in a couple of weeks. Just to look around and see the campus. I probably won’t decide where I’m going to go until a couple of days before signing day. If I do make a decision early, I’ll probably keep it to myself.”

Those aren’t exactly the words of a kid who’s not wavering.

“Blessed. Truly Blessed.”

Loachapoka is a small, impoverished town of about 250 residents, just five minutes from Auburn University. The school district has just over 400 students, including an enrollment of just over 200 at Loachapoka High School, which houses grades 7-12. The entire student body is African American.

“We’ve got decent facilities for a small school,” said Loachapoka head coach Jerome Tate. “We’ve got an updated stadium — our stadium will hold about 3,000 people. Basketball has been the mainstay here. We’ve got four boys state champions and two runner-ups. We’ve got one girls champion and three runner-ups. As a matter of fact, we just had a kid who finished at Vanderbilt, and a guy who played at Alabama named Walter Pitts (Montavis Pitts’ second cousin). That was before my time here.”

Tate knows how to evaluate talent. A 20-year high school football coaching veteran, he started coaching at Lanett High School in Lanett, Alabama and will be coaching his 7th season at Loachapoka this fall. He was an All-American defensive end at Alabama A&M in 1981. At Lanett, he coached several players who went on to play in college and the NFL, most notably Josh Evans, a defensive tackle for the Tennessee Titans, and Cliff Jackson and Tavakius Bonner, both of whom played at the University of Miami in the mid-late 90’s.

“I’m not bragging, but I’ve got a little gift: I can spot good athletes,” Tate says simply.

And he spotted Montavis Pitts early. While it is popular to think that Pitts is an overnight sensation, that’s only to the outside world. Tate has known that Pitts was special for years. “In his first game he played as a ninth grader, we threw him a deep pass. He dropped it, but just to see him run with the grace and everything, I told the other coaches, when he becomes a senior, it’s going to be a long line out there waiting on this boy. He was about 6 feet tall then, and he was dunking a basketball backwards in the ninth grade.”

When asked to describe Pitts as an athlete, Tate says, “Blessed. Truly blessed. He is truly a special athlete. He’s got a lot of God-given natural ability. He’s fast, fast, fast, with great jumping ability. I don’t want to put my foot in my mouth, but I think if he continues to work hard like he’s been working here lately, I think he should be put in one of those categories like a Deion (Sanders).

“I’m looking at the kid, once he gets a little older and gets into a better weight and nutrition program, I really think he’s going to pop a 4.1 (in the forty-yard dash). I honestly think that. He reminds me so much of John Stallworth (a former Pittsburgh Steelers receiving great) when he runs. I got a chance to look at John Stallworth work out while I was at Alabama A&M, and he’s just so graceful.”

Pitts played sparingly for Tate as a ninth-grader, returning a kickoff for a touchdown. As a tenth-grader, he was used primarily at receiver, where Tate says he had “29 or 30 catches for 7 touch-

downs and close to 600 yards.” (BamaOnline.com reported that Pitts caught 21 passes for 571 yards and 7 touchdowns as a sophomore).

As a junior, Pitts played a wide variety of positions (the school only turns out about 30 kids for football, and most play both ways), but his primary responsibility was on offense, where he played quarterback. He had 1,090 passing yards, 300 rushing yards, and 23 touchdowns. As the starting cornerback, he intercepted 5 passes, returning one for a 75-yard touchdown. Pitts also returned four kickoffs and two punts for touchdowns.

“Last year he got thrown into a position that he didn’t want to play (quarterback),” said Tate. “He wanted to play receiver, and I wanted him to play receiver, but we had nobody else (to play quarterback).” In the coming season, Tate hopes to get Pitts back to the wide receiver position, which he sees him playing in college. That’s fine with Pitts, who says that receiver is his favorite position.

But still Pitts remained an unknown, although he was receiving attention from some colleges. “Alabama and Ole Miss, they were writing me since tenth grade,” Pitts said. “UAB and Southern Miss, Jacksonville State, Middle Tennessee State — schools like that.”

Knowing that he had a great player on his hands, Tate sent a highlight film of Pitts to Virginia Tech assistant coach Lorenzo “Whammy” Ward. An Alabama native, Ward had met Tate while Ward was coaching at UT Chattanooga and recruiting players that Tate coached at Lanett. “I trust Whammy, and that’s why I went to him first, because I know he’s going to shoot straight with me, and he knows I’m going to shoot straight with him,” Tate said. “Whammy’s a good friend of mine, and I was just sending a film to Whammy, and I knew Whammy would give me a good assessment on his (Pitts’) abilities.”

Tate got more than an assessment of Pitts’ abilities. “Two weeks later, he called me back, and he told me they (Virginia Tech) wanted to sign him.”

Pitts jumped on the offer right away. “I talked to him (Ward) on the phone and he came to visit me at school. I committed before he came to school.”

The Capital City Combine

But things were about to take an interesting twist for Pitts. Anxious to unleash the talent Pitts has, Tate took his star player to the Capital City Combine the weekend of May 19 and 20 in Montgomery Alabama (Pitts had paid for the combine prior to his VT commitment). There, 184 high school players from throughout the state of Alabama were put through a series of drills in front of the watchful eyes of several dozen college scouts.

Tate had high hopes for Pitts at the combine. “I told him, ‘Son, you’re going to go down to the combine and blow it up.’ To tell the truth, I honestly thought he was going to run a 4.25.”

Pitts got close enough with his 4.29, dipping below the magical 4.30 in a controlled environment, in front of dozens of people, and sending the college recruiting world into a frenzy that will peak this fall when recruiters really start to hit him hard. “I had one coach tell me,” Tate relates, “that once school starts back, he’s probably going to get hit by every school in the nation.”

For Pitts, the combine was an eye-opener in other ways. Thrown into the mix with the best players in the state, he felt good about how he stacked up against them. "I'm better than most of them, probably all of them. I don't want to brag, but that's my opinion. Most of them were pretty good, but that made me work even harder on the drills, because I was trying to beat them out. And I beat 'em.

"Can't too many people shut me down. I can stop myself. At receiver, I try to be like Peter Warrick. I have pretty good hands. I can dodge people, shake 'em down. I'm pretty versatile — I can be used in many ways. I'm an extraordinary athlete, just explosive when I have the ball in my hands."

So he doesn't lack for confidence. Pitts is alternately boastful and reserved, vacillating back and forth between supreme assurance and wide-eyed wonder at the world that has suddenly opened up in front of him. On suddenly finding himself ranked among the top players in Alabama and in the top 100 in the country, he expresses a resolve to prove his new advocates right: "I have to go out and perform this year and show them that I'm one of the tops in the country. I'm going to live up to it."

He ran track for the first time last year at Tate's urging, and he feels that it improved his speed. "Since the middle of last season, I started hitting the weights pretty hard. I probably have about another inch or an inch and a half (to grow). Last season I weighed about 173 pounds, so I've gained about 7 pounds in the offseason."

Thankfully, there is one area that is not a concern for Pitts: qualifying academically. He is already a full qualifier, having scored a 17 on the ACT ("I didn't study for it," he admits, "I just went in and took it. I wasn't really worried about it"), with a GPA of 3.5. Pitts actually underestimates his GPA at 3.0 or 3.2, until Tate corrects him and says it is 3.5.

Pitts lives with his grandmother. His mother lives close by — she moved to a nearby town, and Pitts wanted to stay with his grandmother in Loachapoka. His mother and grandmother emphasize academics, but Pitts says, "I stay on myself about my grades, and I try to do the best I can."

What a package. Speed, confidence, and academics. Things will get crazy starting this fall.

Recruiting ... and the VT Commitment

Tate knows that he's going to have his hands full guiding the recruitment of Pitts. "The good thing about it, I've been in this situation before," the coach says, "with some of the other kids I've coached, and they'll tell me this and that, and what to look out for. So I guess I'm equipping him real well to deal with this.

"I told him your life is going to change here in the next couple of months. A lot of things are going to be coming at him. I just try to keep it real with him." Tate pauses. "Girls (laughs), agents — you know, there's some agent right now working the Internet, seeing this kid who runs a 4.29, and they're not stupid. And they're going to say well hell, if this kid can prosper in college, you may be talking about a kid who can be a top 5 NFL draft pick.

"The only thing I'm going to try to do is just keep it kind of sane for me, more or less him, because I'm probably going to be the one they're talking to. The only request I'm going to have for schools is that they not bother him on Thursday night, the night before a game.

“We will sit down and talk, and I’ll just try to tell him, make sure you choose well where you want to go, because that will stick with you the rest of your life. When they throw dirt over his face, wherever he chooses, that’s where he’s going to be for life.”

Pitts is currently up to 21 scholarship offers, and Tate can’t begin to remember them all at this point. “Florida, LSU, Bama, Auburn, VT ... “ He pauses, sighs, and utters a mild expletive before continuing, “Tennessee, Southern Miss, UAB, Middle Tennessee, Ole Miss ... did I say Southern Miss yet?” They’re obviously all starting to run together for Tate, who says that no ACC schools or Big East schools (other than VT) have offered Pitts.

With regards to the all-important question of whether or not Pitts’ commitment to Virginia Tech will stick, Tate doesn’t know. “To be honest with you, that’s one I can’t answer for you. I think his main thing is, he wants to go somewhere where they’re going to utilize his talents (as a receiver). If I can name a school — one thing I’ve been telling him is that he’d be crazy to go to a school like Nebraska. That’s not to say that they’re not a great school, but they’re not going to throw the ball.

“Coming from a small school, we didn’t think he was going to get all the hits that he’s been getting. But who’s to say he still won’t go to that commitment? I don’t know. He’s not telling me, and he says he’s not going to say anything until about a day or two before signing day.”

Pitts himself is very guarded on the subject, not answering questions directly. When asked if his commitment to Virginia Tech is firm, and what he plans on doing from here on out, he says, “Now I’m just going to wait. All these offers came so quick. I didn’t expect them. I’m just going to wait it out.”

And then he goes quiet, not offering up any more information.

Pitts says that so far, he has decided who three of his five official visits will be. He says that he will visit Virginia Tech, among others. “I have Virginia Tech, Florida, and Tennessee. Those are my top three visits. I still have to figure out my last two.” (This conflicts with earlier published reports that said Pitts was going to visit Auburn and Alabama this season, but the other reports did not note if those would be official visits.)

Pitts has camped at Tennessee and Auburn this summer, but he’s not likely to go to any other camps. Coach Tate notes, “Those dadgum camps can get expensive.”

As for his childhood favorites, including the nearby Auburn Tigers, Pitts says, “I live right near Auburn, so I liked Auburn growing up. But Florida was probably my favorite. And Florida State. I have been to over 20, maybe over 30 Auburn games.”

Regardless of whether Pitts stands by his commitment to Virginia Tech or decides to go elsewhere, he is an extraordinary story in the fascinating world of college football recruiting. Working on his game and taking care of his academics in a small school under the watchful eye of a coach who knew he was special, Pitts has suddenly had the world laid at his doorstep. Like most young men who aren’t quite sure what’s in store for them, his goals for the immediate future are simple and direct. Of the recruiting whirlwind that faces him, Pitts says:

“I’ll try to have some fun with it. I know it can get on your nerves after a while. But it will be pretty exciting.”

A Look Back: the 1990 Tech-UVa Game

Eleven seasons ago, the Hokies recorded a 38-13 win over their powerful in-state rivals. It was a landmark victory in more ways than one.

by Jim Alderson

Recently, a miserable selection of television programming choices, even by Dead Zone standards, sent me rummaging through the farthest reaches of my videotape collection. I was pleasantly surprised to discover a tape I had not viewed in a long time, that of the 1990 Virginia Tech-Virginia football game, a 38-13 Tech victory. Needless to say, it made for great television.

The 1990 season was Frank Beamer's fourth at Tech. His first two had been spent dealing with the effects of the Dooley probation, and had resulted in a cumulative 5-17

record. His third season, 1989, breathed life back into the program, and a record of 6-4-1 was turned in.

1990 had started with a lot of optimism among Hokies, but a lack of depth brought on by the NCAA-mandated scholarship reductions of the late 80's took its toll. Tech had opened losing 20-13 at Maryland in a game that many Hokies in attendance, including this one, thought would be won right up until the point the Terps hung a late touchdown on the board to snatch the victory.

A lackadaisical 21-7 home win over Bowling Green came next, then a thrilling 24-23 win at East Carolina. Next up at South Carolina, a blown fourth quarter lead, which was to start a pattern for this depth-shy team, cost Tech as the Gamecocks rallied to win 35-24 at Lane Stadium.

Tech then journeyed to Florida State and jumped to a 21-3 early lead, only to see FSU use their superior depth and talent to go ahead 32-28, and a late Tech drive ended with quarterback Will Furrer throwing an interception on the Seminole goal line that was returned for a touchdown and the final 39-28 margin.

A home win over West Virginia preceded yet another blown fourth quarter lead, this one at Temple, where the Owls rallied to win 31-28. Consecutive 20-16 home victories over Southern Miss (which featured Brett Favre at quarterback) and NC State pushed Tech's record to 5-4, before a late Georgia Tech field goal in game 10 enabled the Yellow Jackets, who would go on to win the MNC, to escape with a 6-3 win.

Tech came into the UVa game 5-5, but had led in every game, and it was not an unrealistic assumption to think that with just a little more depth, the Hokies could have been undefeated. It was to take almost a decade to amass the necessary depth.

For the Hoos, it was the best of times. George Welsh was in his ninth season and had used a concentration on in state recruiting, aided by Tech's probation and North Carolina's late-80's swoon, to assemble a powerhouse. Virginia had gone 10-3 in 1989, and had on hand for 1990 the best collection of talent George was ever to assemble, including Herman Moore, Terry Kirby, Chris Slade and Heisman candidate Shawn Moore.

They had also scheduled for success. Virginia opened by pounding Kansas 59-10, then got the late Clemson coach Frank Howard's 'white meat' monkey off of their back, beating the Tigers for the first time ever, 20-7. The Hoos cruised through easy wins over Navy (56-14), Duke (59-0) and William and Mary (63-35), before thrashing a good NC State team 31-0. They again trolled along the bottom of the ACC, beating Wake Forest 49-14, and found themselves holding the Number One ranking in the country going into a Scott Stadium clash with also-undefeated Georgia Tech in arguably the biggest ACC football game ever played.

In a wild and exciting game, the Jackets prevailed, 41-38. Number One was history. The Hoos bounced back to beat North Carolina 24-10 before disaster struck at Maryland, where not only were they upset, 35-30, but they also lost Sawn Moore to a thumb injury that would cause him to miss the Tech game.

Virginia stumbled into Lane Stadium with an 8-2 record that Tech would have killed for, and still ranked #17, although they were reeling and the wheels had come off what could have been an outstanding year. They had already received a Sugar Bowl invitation, and anxious scouts from that bowl were on hand in Blacksburg nervously crossing their fingers and hoping they would not suffer the embarrassment of being stuck with an 8-3 team that was in full collapse. Those scouts would do much better with trips to Tech twice in the ensuing decade.

Both Frank Beamer and George Welsh had visited Danville to address the faithful during the previous off-season, and I had been fortunate enough to attend both meetings. George Welsh had been asked during a Q&A where he saw his Virginia program at the end of the next decade, and had responded that he hoped to be competing for a National Championship. Frank Beamer had told Danville-area Tech alumni, "We WILL beat Virginia." Both goals were to be accomplished, and both by Frank.

Frank Beamer's record against Virginia his first three years was not good. He was 0-3, having lost 14-13 in 1987 when, after a late Tech score, he elected (in those days before overtime) to go for two and the win, an effort that came up short. One-time Tech commitment Herman Moore had been the difference in 1988 as the Hoos won 16-10, and 1989 had seen a donnybrook in Scott Stadium with Virginia bolting to a 24-0 lead, only to see Tech rally behind third-string quarterback Ron Wooten, before Virginia got away with a 32-25 win that cost Beamer a tooth knocked out (by Tech tackle Jimmy Witten, a Danville native who is now S&C coach at East Carolina) during an on-field post-game melee. Tech fans had become accustomed to dominating the Hoos under Bill Dooley, and lusted for a win. As Frank had promised, it was coming.

The game was held, as it was this past year, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. It marked the first time since 1983 the Hokies and Hoos had squared off at the end of the season. Ticket demand had been heavy, resulting in new temporary bleachers appearing in the North end zone, occupied by students foregoing their Thanksgiving holiday. While some (such as me), lamented the loss of what was a fixture in that end of the stadium, a barbecue stand whose enticing aromas wafting around Lane often proved to irresistible to resist (again, by me), the extra seating enabled over fifty-four thousand fans to pack into Lane, at the time the largest crowd to attend a football game in the state. Most would be in for a treat.

There was another first at Lane Stadium that day. ESPN had shown up to televise the game. A love affair has since been established between Tech and the cable network that continues to this day,

but you always remember your first time, and that was it. ESPN was there primarily because of the ranked Hoos and their collection of Heisman and All-America candidates; just as a decade later they would televise the very same game due mostly to Tech's collection of marquee talent.

Tech wasn't complaining that day, however, as television opportunities for the Hokies were few and hard to come by. That year, only the opening game at Maryland, on the ACC regional network, and the home game against South Carolina, televised on a few cable systems around the state, had showcased Tech on the tube. This would be the first national exposure of Tech since another Tech-Virginia game, this one on a Thanksgiving night in 1982 in a miserably frigid and mostly empty Lane Stadium, had been televised by TBS.

The telecast opened to what has since become a staple of ESPN prime time, a jam-packed and highly enthusiastic Lane Stadium. It was a blustery day in Lane, but the cold and windy conditions did not deter the crowd a bit, as the late-afternoon 4 p.m. kickoff had enabled many fans to engage in what has become another staple of Tech football, the day-long tailgate. It had been put to good use by many. The place was rocking; ESPN sideline reporter Kevin Kiley remarked about the crowd, on the air, "They are loud." Yes we were, and would get louder.

The rosters of both teams were dotted with players who would later spend time in the NFL. Tech boasted running back Vaughn Hebron, quarterback Will Furrer, defensive backs Damien Russell and Tyrone Drakeford, and offensive linemen Eugene Chung and Jim Pyne among its future pros, while Virginia countered with, among others, the Moores, running back Terry Kirby, and lineman Chris Slade.

It was a significant sign of the times that the Hoo stars were from the state of Virginia, and indeed, Kirby had once been the nation's top recruit. The majority of Tech's better players were from outside the Old Dominion: Furrer was from the state of Washington, Hebron from Baltimore, Russell from DC, Drakeford from South Carolina, and Pyne from New England, with only Chung a local product, hailing from Northern Virginia. George Welsh dominated in-state recruiting at the time. Frank Beamer was, however, beginning to show what would become a hallmark of his program, recruiting lesser lights and turning them into top-flight players.

The game opened with Virginia receiving the ball. One thing that immediately jumps out at the viewer is that Tech was running the Wide Tackle Six defense, which Beamer had learned under his coach at Tech, Jerry Claiborne. It was primarily designed to stop the run, placing six men on the line of scrimmage, but was vulnerable to a strong passing game, with only three defensive backs. Its primary mission was accomplished, as Virginia, even with Kirby, was to gain only 95 yards on the ground. It left Tech, however, quite vulnerable to the sophisticated passing attacks springing up all over college football at the time, and had been seriously exposed earlier that season by Florida State as the outmoded defense it was. Tech would run that defense for two more seasons, and would continue to struggle against passing teams, until both the defensive scheme and Defensive Coordinator Steve Clark were sent packing after the 1992 season.

Welsh and Virginia Offensive Coordinator Tom O'Brien, now head coach at Boston College, came out looking to establish the run with Kirby, but, after one first down, were stymied and went to the air. Quarterback Matt Blundin, subbing for the injured Shawn Moore, hit receiver Derek Dooley, nephew of former Tech coach Bill, in the hands, but it was dropped — the first of five dropped Blundin passes, most in critical situations that would plague the Hoos.

Tech took the field on offense, and what becomes quickly noticeable is how small Tech was, along the line and especially at the skill positions, where receivers Marcus Mickel and Bo Campbell, along with running backs Hebron and Tony Kennedy, were all in the 5'8"- 5"9" range. The days of Lee Suggs and Andre Davis were still a ways off. Tech gained very little on its first possession and punted back to Virginia, who was quickly punting back after another Dooley dropped pass. Things then got interesting.

On the first play of Tech's second possession, Furrer hit Campbell for a forty-nine-yard bomb. It is interesting to note that although Campbell was wide open when he caught the ball, he lacked the speed to out-run the Virginia secondary for the score. Again, the days of Davis were a decade away. Tech scored on a three-yard run by fullback Mark Poindexter and took a 7-0 lead.

Virginia again could not move the ball, and Tech began a drive that stalled at the Hoo 29. Facing a fourth and eleven, Frank Beamer called timeout. It would have been a forty-six-yard field goal effort, but Tech kicker Mickey Thomas was notoriously scattershot from beyond forty yards and, even with a strong wind, would have been dicey.

Beamer sent his offense back onto the field. Everybody, including the Virginia defense, figured Tech would try to gain five yards for the kick by attempting to draw the Hoos offside, which is exactly what I commented at the time. Both the defenders and I were quite surprised when Furrer dropped back and hit a sliding Nick Cullen at the goal line for a touchdown. Tech was up 14-0. The play was poetic; back in 1984, seeking his first victory over Tech after two losses, George Welsh had gambled on a fourth and inches with a long pass completion that enabled Virginia to upset Tech. The tables had been turned.

Thomas did hit a twenty-one yard field goal a third of the way into the second quarter to push Tech's lead to 17-0, and later Lane Stadium erupted when Furrer, who would have a terrific passing day of 16-23 for 254 yards, 3 touchdowns and 0 interceptions, hit tight end Greg Daniels for a spectacular thirty-three-yard diving touchdown that pushed the lead to 24-0. It seemed the rout was on.

In 1986, Tech had blasted Virginia 42-10 in Dooley's last Tech-UVa game, a lopsided result that led to players on both teams claiming that the Virginia players simply quit, which in turn led to the famous 'Hoo Quit Again' bumper sticker. These Hoos were made of sterner stuff, however, and any thoughts held by Hokies that Virginia would roll over and die evaporated as Virginia put together what would be its only sustained drive of the game. Tech had apparently stopped the drive on a fourth down inside its own ten, but an obliging and terrible defensive holding called by ACC officials that had ESPN analyst Mike Gottfried scratching his head and an enraged Beamer on the field griping, gave the Hoos a fresh first and goal.

Blundin hit Kirby to put Virginia on the board. Confusion then reigned on their sideline, resulting in Welsh burning a timeout trying to decide whether to go for two and pull within two scores. After wasting the timeout, Welsh in the end decided to kick the PAT, which was promptly blocked by Tech's Bernard Basham (even then Beamer's Hokies were blocking kicks). The teams went to their locker rooms with Tech ahead 24-6.

Tech did nothing offensively to start the second half. When Virginia got the ball, Herman Moore,

who had been held in check by a double-teaming Tech secondary, beat that same double coverage and hauled in a Blundin pass, taking it sixty-six yards for a score. The PAT was good and the Hoos had closed to within 24-13.

The once-jubilant crowd began to stir with a bit of unease as the Tech offense again foundered and the Hoos took back over. Tech had blown leads before that season, including another 24-13 lead on the same field against South Carolina. Momentum was definitely on the side of an excited Virginia team, and they began another drive that made it to the Tech 14. That was where it ended, in what Frank Beamer would tell the Hokie Huddler "might have been the biggest play of the game," as UVa running back Gary Steele fumbled and Tech linebacker Rusty Pendleton recovered.

Hoo momentum had been broken, punctuated by George Welsh throwing his cap to the ground. Tech, which had run only seventeen plays in its three second half possessions against the wind, ran the ball and the third quarter clock, and had the wind at their backs when they punted back to Virginia. While Virginia had used much of their third quarter with the wind running the ball, they now went to the air against it, and Blundin promptly threw a long pass that was picked off by Drakeford near midfield.

The game then became the Vaughn Hebron road show. The punishing ground game that Tech fans have come to expect was on display for the remainder of the game, as Hebron carried the ball on 19 of Tech's final 26 plays. Hebron, who would gain 142 yards for the day on 31 carries, took on the bulk of the offense, running behind an offensive line that was now pushing the Hoo defenders all over the field. He scored on a nine-yard run and Tech jumped to a 31-13 lead.

The Hoos continued to decline to pack it in and showed fight in driving inside the Tech 30 on their next possession before Blundin threw his third and last interception, also the final in a five-turnover Hoo parade, this one a remarkable grab by defensive lineman Jerome Preston (Blundin was uncharacteristically generous that day; beginning with his last 7 passes in this game, and extending deep into the 1991 season, Blundin would throw 231 straight passes without an interception, an NCAA record). Beamer was letting the air out of the ball and the game until Virginia's Jason Wallace fumbled a late Tech punt inside the Virginia five. Frank could not resist a little RUTS, and the scoring ended with Furrer hitting Poindexter for the final 38-13 score.

It was very interesting to note that with the game winding down and decided, the ESPN announcers, who had been commenting all game about the difficulties Tech faced as a football independent, began discussing the proposed Big East Football Conference. Miami, Pittsburgh, Syracuse and Boston College were all confirmed members, while a graphic labeled 'Possibilities' listed Virginia Tech, Louisville, West Virginia, Rutgers, Temple and East Carolina. Tech, of course, made the cut, and over the next decade used that Big East affiliation to take the program to unprecedented and previously unimagined heights.

The game ended with Tech students storming the field, engaging in what has become another familiar end-of-season ritual, the tearing down of the goal posts. It was a very happy Frank Beamer who headed across the field, telling ESPN, "This was a nice one, I'll tell you that right now." Indeed it was.

While Tech's year ended at 6-5 with the win, Virginia was not done. They played in the Sugar Bowl, losing a tough 23-22 game to Tennessee. The Virginia program continued winning, going 8-3-1 the

next year, losing in the Gator Bowl, and finishing out the decade by winning 7, 7, 9, 9, 7, 7, 9 and 7. Virginia's dream of becoming a Top Ten program was over, however; the Hoos never again achieved the lofty heights they enjoyed during the 1990 campaign. Welsh's program instead stagnated around the seven-win level, before slipping to 6-5 in 2000, the year Welsh was prodded into retirement.

Despite the landmark victory, the tribulations of Frank Beamer were not over. What was expected to be a very good 1991 Tech team collapsed under the weight of a demanding schedule that included five straight road games early, and a late-season injury to Furrer, finishing 5-6. The 1992 season was a disaster, as Tech blew six second half leads en route to a miserable 2-8-1 record that almost cost Beamer his job, and did signal the end of the outdated Wide Tackle Six.

New defensive coaches, including Coordinator Phil Elmassian, were brought on board, and, as Big East play began in 1993, Tech exploded onto the scene with a 9-3 record culminating in an Independence Bowl win, Tech's first bowl trip since Dooley's 1986 Peach Bowl. Tech has been going to bowl games ever since, including some very big ones, and despite the slight regression in 1997, has generally been getting better ever since.

What began to change the fortunes of both programs following that 1990 game was recruiting. Throughout the 90's, Beamer gradually turned the in-state tide away from Welsh. Where top running back prospect Terry Kirby and defensive one Chris Slade had chosen Virginia, future quality recruits at the same positions, Ken Oxendine and Cornell Brown, chose Tech after bruising recruiting battles, paving the way for current Hokies Lee Suggs and Nathaniel Adibi.

Frank had already bested George for a critical recruit, quarterback Maurice DeShazo, who was completing his red-shirt year in that 1990 game (DeShazo, wearing #14, rode the South end zone goal post after the game as Hokie fans tore it down). Welsh had wanted Maurice to replace Shawn Moore, but instead DeShazo led Tech to bowl games in 1993 and 1994. Many more quality players began choosing Tech. It took a decade, but ten years later, Beamer was dominating state recruiting, and Welsh was out of a job.

Frank Beamer's problems with George Welsh also did not end that day. Virginia won three of the next four, including a humiliating 38-0 pasting of Tech in 1991 in Scott Stadium and an equally humiliating 42-23 smackdown in Lane Stadium in 1994. It was not until 1995 that Frank began to achieve the upper hand, winning four of the next six. In the ten games played since the 1990 game, each team has won five.

The game was not the rout so many Hokies like to remember these days. Tech scored early, and then late, to compile a 38-13 win that seemed closer during the game, especially when Virginia dominated the middle portion, closing to 24-13 and launching a drive that threatened to make it entirely too interesting. It was an opportunistic Tech team, a phrase that has often been used to describe succeeding Hokie squads, which carried the day. I do suspect that Frank Beamer looks back on it as one of his most satisfying wins, because, while he has now beaten the Hoos six times, that was the first.

Point: College Football Needs a Playoff

It's time to chuck the bowls and let the 16 best teams tee it up in a playoff.

by John Galinsky, special to the Sabre Newsletter

Editor's Note: no, the notation to the left that says "special to the Sabre Newsletter" is not a misprint. Our good friends at the Sabre.com were nice enough to let us reprint one of the articles from the last edition of their newsletter here in the TSL Extra. Why would we want to do that? To run a rebuttal, of course. Bruce McKinley's counterpoint follows this Galinsky article.

Just imagine... The date: Jan. 14, 2007. The place: Miami's new BioClone.com Stadium.

The event: The college football national championship game, pitting Nebraska against Virginia (hey, it's a fantasy sequence).

The scene: 100,000 fans at the stadium, millions more watching on UPN, the nation's No. 1 network, which shelled out \$4 trillion for the TV rights. Revenue records are expected to be shattered for the game. And why not? Fan interest has been mounting for weeks during the first Division I-A college football playoff. The Cornhuskers and Cavaliers have advanced through three rounds to get this far. Now, finally, after decades of bowls and polls and BCS nonsense, the first true, undisputed national champion will at last be crowned.

Is this the future? Who knows? The appeal is obvious to any fan. In just about every other sport, college and pro, the champion is determined as it should be - on the court or field or rink through a playoff format. College football's champ, meanwhile, is determined in large part by the opinions of sportswriters and coaches, and recently by the formulations of computers. Anyone who loves the BCS, raise your hand. Now leave the room, both of you.

The truth is, the current bowl system is antiquated and, let's face it, boring. While basketball junkies get the passion and drama of March Madness, football fans get nothing comparable to stir their emotions. Instead, they get sorry spectacles — like, for instance, the Oahu Bowl, with its nearly-empty stadium - and dozens of irrelevant contests. They get only one big game. And only two teams get a shot at the title. (Whether those are the two most deserving teams is a whole other controversy.) This is fun? This is fair? This is the best possible thing for college football and those who love it?

We say no. A thousand times no. College football deserves better. And who better than us to offer the sport what it needs? The assignment from Boardhost was to design a workable playoff proposal that breathes a little more life into a bloated and tedious postseason. So with the help of two experts, former UVa football coach George Welsh and ex-UVa athletic director Terry Holland, who support a playoff but recognize its potential pitfalls, this is what we propose:

- A 16-team Division I-A football tournament running from early December to mid-January. Why 16? "Anything fewer, you're going to eliminate some deserving teams," Welsh said. "Any more and that's too many games." A group similar to the NCAA basketball tournament selection committee would pick and seed the teams. Holland suggests taking the champs

from the big six conferences (ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, SEC and Pac-10), plus 10 at-large bids.

- The first and second rounds would be played at the home stadium of the higher seeds. That would ensure sellouts and cut back on travel costs and missed class time. The road team would not need to arrive at the game site until Thursday or Friday, just like a regular-season game, and it would get a large allotment of tickets to help mitigate the home-field advantage. The games would be played on the second and third weekends in December (perhaps Friday and Saturday doubleheaders in the first round, to get every game on TV). And to make sure the season is not drawn out too long, no team would be allowed to play more than 11 regular-season games. Conference championship games (and preseason so-called classics) would be eliminated and each team would need to complete its regular season by Dec. 1.
- Following a Christmas Break, the semifinals would be held at a neutral, pre-determined site on the first Friday and Saturday in January. The winners would advance to the championship game, also at a pre-determined site, the Monday before the Super Bowl. Most universities would still be on break, so class time missed would be minimal, especially when compared to other NCAA tournaments. And after weeks of buildup, the excitement surrounding the title game would be enormous. Therefore, so would the TV rights fees and other revenues.

Why might this become reality? Just count the dollars. Cha-ching!

“Some of the proposals I’ve seen show that we could at least double our income by having a play-off,” Welsh said. “A lot of [university] presidents are against it. But if they keep seeing red ink in their athletic budgets, that will help them see the light.”

Maybe, maybe not.

Holland says money issues make a playoff unlikely in the near future. The commissioners of the top six conferences like the BCS, he says, because they run the system and are in charge of allocating the money. If the NCAA took over, much of the extra dough likely would be spent on funding the travel costs of small-conference teams playing in the NCAA tournaments of nonrevenue sports. For example, Holland said, sending Davidson to Hawaii for the NCAA volleyball tournament or flying VCU to California for an NCAA baseball regional. After all, that’s where a lot of the basketball money goes. For now, the big conferences have control of college football - “and they ain’t going to give it up,” Holland says.

To Holland, the logic of a playoff format is obvious. “However,” he says, “as usual when dealing with athletic folks, logic takes a back seat to egos, money and emotions.” By that, he means there are a number of factors that keep college football decision-makers wedded to the current bowl system. Besides the conference commissioners, many coaches like bowls because there is less pressure - half of them can finish the season as winners. Furthermore, as Welsh noted, university administrators often argue against a playoff based on academic concerns.

That is bogus, Holland says: “Football players would have to play 30 years to miss as much class as volleyball [players miss] in one season. Yet we allow 64 volleyball teams to travel to Hawaii and

who knows where else at our expense and we can't accept millions of dollars to have football players, who have never missed a class, possibly miss one class for the year." All of which is absurd, he says, but those are the political realities.

Given those obstacles, Holland says the most practical solution is to keep the current system, but add an eight-team playoff after all of the bowl games are completed. Under that format, the two teams in the BCS championship game, plus the winners of the other three BCS bowls, would get automatic bids to the playoff. A committee would then pick three more at-large teams and seed them all, with all three rounds taking place in January.

One benefit of that arrangement, as Holland points out, is that it would make more bowl games relevant, since conceivably the Peach Bowl winner, for example, could get an at-large bid to the playoff. The BCS championship game would be diminished, of course, but the rest of the bowls would be enhanced. More importantly, such a proposal would not involve fighting all of the forces who support the bowls. Trying to eliminate the bowls once the BCS agreement expires in 2006 may prove politically impossible. Adding the playoff on top of the bowls, Holland believes, is "the only thing that might work right now."

Fortunately, our task is to create the best proposal for college football, not the most feasible or likely scenario. And when it comes to a playoff system, there is no useful role for bowl games. The 16 teams would be better off taking part in an NCAA tournament similar to that of any other sport, rather than tying them into corporate-sponsored, week-long extravaganzas. Bowls could continue to exist as a sort of NIT - a nice trip and a reward to winning teams who did not qualify for the NCAA field. Our preference: Blow up the bowls. Who needs 'em?

Holland and Welsh both agree that a 16-team playoff for college football, in Holland's words, "would make very good sense." Welsh says he knows players would love it, especially if some of the extra revenue went toward providing small stipends to the athletes who help generate the money. More important than the economics, however, is the principle of fairness. Is there a more just way to determine a champion than by having a playoff? Would anyone question the validity of a team that survived four rounds of stiff competition to earn the title? "Right now a lot of teams with one loss say they didn't get a chance," Welsh says. With a 16-team playoff, every deserving team (plus a Cinderella or two) would get a shot at the ultimate prize. What is more fair than that?

So forget all of the politics and money and old men. This is college football, played by college kids. Shouldn't it be fun? Shouldn't it be exciting? Shouldn't it be more interesting than, say, the Motor City Bowl? Is that asking too much? Just imagine the upsets, the drama, the hype and hoopla between games of a month-long tournament. Even March Madness might not compare. Surveys consistently show that fans favor a playoff. As long as the integrity of collegiate athletics is unaffected, what's wrong with giving fans what they want? Sure, there are minor drawbacks to a playoff, but those pale in comparison to the overwhelming advantages. So this may be a polite proposal on our part, but college football fans can turn it into a demand: Give us justice! Give us excitement! Give us a playoff!

Either that, or we'll boycott the bowls. (Oh, yeah, we already do.)

Counterpoint: College Football Doesn't Need a Playoff

All playoff proposals forget one thing: the fans who are wholly dedicated to their favorite team.

by Bruce McKinley, VT Class of 1986

Editor's Note: this article is a rebuttal to "College Football Needs a Playoff," which appears elsewhere in this issue.

I was recently sent a copy of John Galinsky's article, "College Football Needs a Playoff" and was asked to provide my opinion on the topic of a playoff for Division 1A football. Considering the fame and notoriety that might result from the widespread publication of my thoughts, I gladly accepted.

Furthermore, just five years ago I had railed against such an idea in the written medium, so I figured I could plagiarize myself and complete the task with minimal effort.

Then I actually read "College Football Needs a Playoff." This wasn't just any ol' playoff proposal. What do you know, it was written for The Sabre, drawing from some of the foremost football experts of our time (those would be Terry Holland and George Welsh). I could tell it was going to take all of my considerable analytical skills and then some to untangle the logical web woven therein.

Rather than get bogged down in a word-by-word analysis, let me begin by categorizing the issues for the interested reader. Then we will examine the issues one at a time and you can make up your own mind, free from the irrational and obfuscating methods (those that intentionally mislead or confuse in order to persuade) used by many who argue this issue. It's something that us folks who like to reason based on systematic, logical methods insist upon.

These are six main issues brought up by those who advocate a playoff, and after all who could possibly be against any of them?

- Money
- Excitement
- Justice
- Because we can
- Relevance
- Everybody wants a playoff

Money: It's All About the Benjamins

One of the first items playoff pundits like to pull out is the Mo' Money argument. It goes like this:

Revenue records are expected to be shattered for the game.

There isn't an American alive that doesn't perk up and take notice when record revenues are suggested. But be careful — you are about to get the old bait-and-switch routine. Spend the first

part of the discussion pumping me up about the financial gain to be had. Then later argue the irrelevance of revenue:

So forget all of the politics and *money* and old men....

George Welsh thinks it would be grand

especially if some of the extra revenue went toward providing small stipends to the athletes who help generate the money.

Get serious! How much are the basketball players who help generate all the money from March Madness compensated? You got it. Zilch. The athletes will *never* see any of that money. Because once everyone has gotten their take, there will not be enough to provide any meaningful compensation.

Let's try to ignore the logical breakdowns and the multiple bait-and-switch temptations to dream of jackpots that will never materialize, and concentrate on the issue. Which is it? Should the all-consuming, ever-increasing bottom line be the end-all of college athletics, and should we do whatever it takes to bring in more revenue? Or should we attempt to streamline the operation and protect the values which separate college football from the rest of the sporting world?

It must be admitted that reasonable people can differ as to what the answer to these questions *should* be. Some will prefer to pursue money at all times and all costs. Some will feel that it *must* be a good idea to try to get more money because, well, you've got to fund all those other nonrevenue sports. But consider that the profits will be used mostly to build bigger and fancier facilities, trying to generate more profits. And all this for a *non-profit* entity (think about it!).

I say that although the system as we know it is very close to that end and seemingly headed in that direction, it in no way makes the mindless quest for more money the proper goal. The real question you must consider is whether the pursuit of bigger and fancier athletic programs at the possible expense of the very identity of the institution that is major college football is worthwhile. I say no.

Excitement: Where's the Excitement?

And after weeks of buildup, the excitement surrounding the title game would be enormous. This is college football, played by college kids. Shouldn't it be fun? Shouldn't it be exciting?

Pardon me, but the excitement surrounding major college football, *as it is currently constituted*, is at an all time high. That is, except at programs in decline. Next question.

Justice: A True Champion — Without One We Just Feel So ... Naked.

Do you ever have the nightmare where you show up for school but, whoops, where are your pants!?! Then you spend the rest of the day trying to make it home without anybody noticing. It all comes crashing down around you when you are forced to play hopscotch, naked as can be, at recess. You finally wake up in a cold sweat. I can only imagine that must be what it feels like to believe that without an *undisputed* champion, major college football is seriously missing something vital.

I've got to fall back on the facts here. If major college football is so critically broken, why is interest at an all-time high? Why have revenues not only reached an all-time high, but completely dwarfed those from the NCAA basketball tourney that playoff pundits continue to hold out as the nirvana of sports climaxes? What is so damaged about this system that it must be fixed?

Let's examine what the playoff pundits say about *true* champions. After once more parading the dollar signs before your eyes, they settle on the issue of justice.

More important than the economics, however, is the principle of fairness.

The current system is no good because it is not "fair," the champion is not "valid," and "deserving" teams say they didn't get a chance. But don't worry. The playoff pundit is there to present a system under which everyone is treated fairly, equally, and justice is served.

Which leads us to...

Because We Can: Therefore We Should

The issues are totally clouded when the proposals of possible playoff formats begin to fly. Every playoff pundit worth his weight in office pool bracket sheets has a proposal for the best (or more precisely, *least bad*) format and rules for major college football playoffs. In fact, the challenge of devising such a system in itself holds plenty of appeal. I suspect that even at UVa's esteemed Darden School of Business, though, they teach management and planning methods that are superior to "let's brain-storm and implement the best idea we come up with."

The system proposed in "College Football Needs a Playoff" says the first two rounds will be held at the home stadium of the higher seed.

That would ensure sellouts and cut back on travel costs and missed class time. The road team would not need to arrive at the game site until Thursday or Friday, just like a regular-season game, and it would get a large allotment of tickets to help mitigate the home-field advantage.... Following a Christmas Break, the semifinals would be held at a neutral, pre-determined site on the first Friday and Saturday in January. The winners would advance to the championship game, also at a pre-determined site, the Monday before the Super Bowl.

Let's look at this supposedly "fair" system. What it would ensure is that:

- The lower seeds stand an extremely low chance of advancing. As it is, with an entire offseason to prepare for road games, home field advantage is worth 2.5 to 6 points. In other words, teams that might be evenly matched in a neutral site can be expected to lose by up to 6 points when dealing with the away game and hostile crowd. Now, the team which is already an *underdog* is forced to travel. This detracts from their preparation time and their schedule is disrupted. But they are expected to play a team they have just come to find out about a week or two earlier! Guess what? All those "deserving" teams saying they were left out are now "included," only to be summarily sent packing due to the overwhelmingly inequitable situation. And if they survive Round 1, they get to try to buck insurmountable odds again the very next week! Unlike the movie, gladiators put at such a disadvantage cannot

continue to survive.

- Fans of the lower seeds will not be able to attend, unless the opposing team is within easy driving distance. The proposal was obviously written by someone unfamiliar with making football travel arrangements in December and January, even when a four week lead-time is provided. Those who have done so know that it is very difficult and expensive, even when 21-day advanced airfares are available, to travel during this time. Now take away advance airfare discounts because you only have 6 days' notice on who the next opponent is. You got it – that “large allotment of tickets for visiting fans” is going to be returned to the home team wholesale. And even if the game is driveable, it is very difficult to get hotel space at many small-town college campus locations on such short notice.
- Should you be so fortunate as to have your team advance to the semifinals, you now have only two weeks to book your trip. Again, the naiveté about booking short-notice travel arrangements around Jan. 1 shines right through. It can be assumed that the author of the proposal was someone with either an unlimited budget or no serious interest in attending anyway.
- The championship game? Forget it. You are not going. Under this scheme (and almost every other playoff proposal as well), the championship game is the Super Bowl, Jr. It's already hard enough to get a ticket to the BCS championship game. But this one? You have less time to prepare. And if you were stupid enough to travel to the any of the earlier rounds, you don't have any money left anyway. Therefore the people attending the championship game will be corporate and NCAA-affiliated fat cats, not the fans of the participating schools.

And finally, after describing such a fair and just system, another attempt to sidetrack you with more dollar signs is offered:

And after weeks of buildup, the excitement surrounding the title game would be enormous. Therefore, so would the TV rights fees and other revenues.

Sigh.

Relevance: Those Irrelevant Bowls — Who Needs 'Em?

Now that we have established that a playoff tournament cannot be attended by the fans of the participants except during the first two rounds, and then only by the higher seed's fans, where does that leave the average supporter of each program? And what about fans of teams that didn't make the playoffs?

At least there was *some* intellectual honesty found in “College Football Needs a Playoff”:

And when it comes to a playoff system, there is no useful role for bowl games.... Our preference: Blow up the bowls. Who needs 'em?

If a playoff were instituted (other than a 4-team post-bowl tourney, and probably even then), the bowls would die, and with it the ability of most fans to bask in post-season glory. There is no hope of a different outcome. The similarity to basketball's NIT is only apropos in that all national interest

would wilt. However the NIT is sustained by revenues generated by hosting all but the final four at home courts of the contestants. This is completely contrary to what the bowl system is about. With no national interest and no revenue, the bowl system will die.

The “irrelevant and boring bowls” argument is usually proffered by those who a) do not have a particular team they are affiliated with, b) are affiliated with a team which has absolutely no chance to receive a bowl invitation, or c) have absolutely no interest in attending even if their team is invited to one (hello, Wahoos!).

Either that, or we’ll boycott the bowls. (Oh, yeah, we already do.)

I’ve got news for you. These same “fans” would boycott the playoffs, too, unless perchance they were to be held in Atlanta (for those not in the know, Atlanta is the only bowl destination Wahoos will patronize).

The bowls are only irrelevant to those who don’t attend them. For those who attend them, bowls are an exciting, fun-filled end to another great college football season. One last chance to prove your team is better than the other guy’s. A rewarding experience for the financial and emotional effort you’ve put into the team you sponsor. An excuse to head south (or west), break out the golf clubs & bathing suits, and experience a different city with 20,000 of your closest Hokie friends.

Yes I know it was cold in Jacksonville last January, but I played golf in the barely above-freezing weather anyway. The game temperature was actually quite moderate. Nashville '98 was downright brutal. It can also be cold in Memphis and Dallas (not to mention Boise – now that’s a bowl that should be dropped!) But who cares – the games and trips were fun anyway.

The folks who attend bowl games are, by and large, the very same financial backers of the football programs who make them competitive. The same people who pour major amounts of donated money into the programs. The same people who travel hundreds of miles to provide that home field advantage on game weeks. The same people who buy season tickets year-in and year-out despite the steady offering of creampuffs their coach may seem to prefer playing and their AD may seem to prefer scheduling.

Everybody Wants a Playoff

Hey, everybody wants a playoff, don’t they? It’s just those greedy bowl committees and pesky university presidents preventing it. The point is, the fans who financially support the programs at each school – the sponsors of those programs – are the ones who will lose out under a playoff system.

Some readers may claim to be a) a diehard fan of a particular school, which b) has an excellent chance of going bowling in which case c) they would be in attendance. And they may insist that they have considered all the issues presented above, with clarity of thought and without bias. And they would still like to see a playoff because they think it would be great. That’s fine. It’s dandy.

But you need to realize that there are many more like me who meet all three criteria, plus they believe the following suggestion from “College Football Needs a Playoff” to be founded on an improper assumption and thus logically invalid at best and deceptive at worst:

As long as the integrity of collegiate athletics is unaffected, what's wrong with giving fans what they want?

A playoff would irretrievably change the institution of major college football. It would change the do-or-die atmosphere now found on Fall Saturdays to the ho-hum of a Major League Baseball regular season replete with wild-card watches. It would eliminate the tradition of bowl games that many fans hold sacred and dear. It would go directly against what many fans who embody the financial foundation of the football programs want. These things represent the very identity of major college football. They make it special. They make it unique.

Unfortunately for those fans like me, the people who are most shrill will most often be appeased. In this case those shrill voices probably represent the numerical majority of casual "fans." What's more, to the networks, it *is* all about the Benjamins. Their talking heads continue to demand a playoff because it would likely generate more revenue for them. They obscure their motives by bandying about such phrases as "fairness" and "validity." The majority of casual fans also bandy about these terms, partly from a lack of understanding about the meaning of such terms, but also because they have been convinced by such faulty reasoning and misleading arguments as imparted in "College Football Needs a Playoff" and other proposals like it.

Outside the Lines: Licensed to Sell

As Virginia Tech's Licensing Director, Locke White gets to collect some neat Hokie stuff.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Locke White's office is a Hokie fan's dream, full of the most interesting and varied Virginia Tech-related items you can imagine.

On one bookshelf is propped a wrecked piece of the bumper from NASCAR driver Elliot Sadler's Virginia Tech race car, which Sadler drove once, at the Richmond International Speedway last September. On the

same bookshelf is Sadler's helmet from that race, decked out in a VT paint scheme, and a copy of the die-cast collectible model that was distributed to commemorate the car.

White owns a plethora of die-cast models from the Danbury Mint, all with Virginia Tech paint schemes: an airplane, a bus, and a tractor trailer. His walls are adorned with various Virginia Tech framed prints, and he even has a couple of Virginia Tech food items: Hokie barbecue sauce and a box of Hokie Toasties.

And then there are the clothes. Locke White's office has a closet flowing over with Virginia Tech apparel, everything from shirts to coats to jackets, and of course, hats.

What is this man doing with an office overflowing with thousands of dollars of Virginia Tech merchandise? Even the most ardent Hokie fans don't fill their workspaces to the brim with Tech "stuff." Not only can most of us not afford it, but you have to leave room in your office for work-related items, too.

Therein lies the key: Virginia Tech merchandise — all the orange and maroon goodies that you can imagine — *is* Locke White's line of work. He's the Licensing Director at Virginia Tech, and no Virginia Tech-related merchandise gets produced without his stamp of approval. So a lot of Tech stuff goes across his desk, and he often gets freebies, allowing him to amass one of the most impressive collections of Tech paraphernalia in existence — at no cost. It's enough to make any diehard Hokie fan green with envy.

"Grab a hat," White told me when I visited his office recently to interview him. He waived a hand at his closet full of apparel, saying, "Take whichever one you want." I balked, not used to taking such things for free, and he picked out a sharp-looking maroon cap with a Velcro closure and the number 7 embroidered in a white circle on it. Sitting down for the interview, I pondered my gift, looked around the office full of Virginia Tech gear, and thought with wry humor, *I visited Locke White's office, and all I got was this lousy hat.*

White is a trim, mustachioed man with an appearance that is best described as casually professional. He measures his words carefully as he speaks, often choosing not to give away information that might be the least bit sensitive. And he's the boss of a rapidly growing business: Virginia Tech Licensing.

White holds an undergraduate degree in Psychology from Davidson University, with a Masters in Industrial Psychology from Radford University. While in his final year at Radford, he had a unique

idea: selling pre-manufactured furniture for use in dorm rooms on college campuses.

That's right: lofts. White finished up his degree at Radford and immediately went into business with a partner to pursue his idea. "I owned a business out in the Pulaski Industrial Park called Collegiate Designs. We manufactured ready-to-assemble furniture for college kids — loft beds, futons. We had about 500 university bookstores we were selling to, plus Barnes and Noble.

"Tech didn't allow lofts until we pitched the idea to them, and then they changed the policy. If you were sleeping on a loft, from about the mid-80's on, it was probably one of ours."

After a while, he burned out on the business. "I did that for about 12 years. It was a good business, but a lot of pressure. We would do 2 million dollars worth of business — all of our sales for a year — in about a five-month period. For six months out of the year, it was absolutely insane. So I sold out to my partner and took a little time off."

He became the Licensing Director at Tech about two years ago, on a bit of a lark. "I saw the position in the newspaper. I looked at it, found out more about it, and thought it was a neat opportunity.

"I knew almost nothing about Licensing. I had some experience licensing intellectual properties, but as far as this type of position, it was new territory for me. They were looking for someone who was geared towards marketing and promotions, and that fell into line with my strengths."

What Licensing Does ... In Thirty Paragraphs or Less

When asked to describe what he does for a living and what the function of a Licensing Department is, White says, "I think you could sum it up as the keeper of Virginia Tech's intellectual properties, with the intellectual properties being the VT, the shield, the name 'Virginia Tech,' — all of them are now federally registered trademarks. The VT is primarily the athletic mark, and then you have the shield, which would be the university trademark.

"We pretty much oversee that part of the intellectual property, not only protecting them and enforcing them, but also to generate as much income as possible from them. That involves licensing the trademarks to companies that can then reproduce them on different products."

In layman's terms, Virginia Tech has a number of trademarked images and terms, and any product that utilizes those trademarked images and terms must first be approved for production by Locke White. When a product is approved for manufacture, it is said to be "licensed," and only "licensees" — manufacturers who have been approved by the VT Licensing Department — can produce licensed products.

Licensing generates revenue through royalties. This means that manufacturers who produce licensed products must pay a fee to Virginia Tech that is a percentage of the wholesale cost of the item produced. So, if company X makes 500 T-shirts and sells them to the Tech Bookstore for \$5,000, company X must take a percentage of that \$5,000 and pay it to the Virginia Tech Licensing Department.

The percentage varies widely but typically runs in the range of 4% to 15%. Apparel is usually in the 8% range, so in the example given above, Company X would owe VT Licensing \$400 after selling

\$5,000 of wholesale goods to Tech Bookstore.

A Licensing royalty fee is only charged once, so when you buy that T-shirt off the rack for \$15 or \$20, Tech Bookstore doesn't have to pay a royalty fee — it has already been paid by Company X, the manufacturer.

In addition to approving or denying products, White's department must track down unlicensed products that are using VT trademarks and force the manufacturer to either halt production or pay royalties. On the surface, it sounds like a simple job, but trademark law can get very complicated.

Why protect the trademark by approving designs and charging royalties? Because if Virginia Tech doesn't enforce protection of their trademarks, the trademarks enter "public domain," and Tech legally can't charge royalties anymore. Not only that, but something that is public domain can be used in any manner, including on items that are obscene or misrepresent the university.

So White's job is not just to generate revenue. It's to protect the image and representation of the university, as well. "We have a legal obligation to protect our trademarks," White says. "People can lose trademarks by not enforcing ownership. But there's also the issue of confusion of being a part of the university, so we have to take care of that as well.

"Let me put it this way: Coca-Cola for example, if you even thought about using that name, you wouldn't get very far. Our trademarks represent the university, and we have a responsibility to protect them."

So those are the ins and outs of Licensing. But what in the world does this have to do with sports — in other words, why is there an article in the TSL Extra about this? On the subject of what licensing has to do with sports, the answer seems to be "everything and nothing."

Where the Money Goes, and How Much There Is

The relationship between college athletic departments and licensing departments is often a strange one. The large majority of revenue generated from licensed items comes from the sale of athletic apparel and athletic items. There are some exceptions — for example, you can buy a licensed print of Burruss Hall that has nothing to do with athletics — but White and his fellow licensing directors around the country readily agree that the bulk of their departments' incomes is generated by sports fans buying licensed sports apparel and sports-related items.

"Believe me, I give a lot of credit (for the generation of licensing royalties) to Coach Beamer for having a good football team," White says.

So, the Licensing department is a part of the athletic department, correct?

Well ... no. Licensing falls under the umbrella of the University Relations department, which is headed at Virginia Tech by Larry Hincker.

Ah. Well then, the majority of licensing revenue goes to athletics, right?

Well ... no. The majority of licensing revenue goes to the university's general scholarship fund. As a

matter of fact, until the 1999-2000 academic year, the Virginia Tech athletic department received *none* of the royalties generated by licensed products. Starting in the '99-'00 year, the athletic department finally started getting a chunk of licensing royalties, though White will not give out the percentage of how much licensing royalty goes to athletics. "They're getting a decent chunk of money," he says cryptically.

But he does give a clue: "At North Carolina, they have a very similar financial deal to what we do. Ohio State is another one who has almost the exact same financial arrangement as we do. There are other universities that receive 100% of the revenue and other places that receive none."

Ohio State's licensing department didn't respond to emails from TechSideline, and they don't post the information on their web site, but UNC's licensing department does. At North Carolina, 75 percent of licensing revenue is used to fund university scholarships, and the remaining 25 percent funds athletics.

There is only one other person in Tech's licensing department with White — his assistant, Rebecca Lolli, who has worked in Licensing for four years. Together, the two of them oversee a department with revenue that has exploded in recent years. "We have gone from \$350,000 in revenue to close to \$800,000 in revenue in just a couple years time," White says. "In '99 we did approx. \$350K, 2000 approx. \$550K, and in 2001 it will be approx. \$800K. Next year, we're shooting for a million."

Placing Tech's licensing revenue in perspective with other NCAA schools is a difficult task, because licensing departments are protective of their revenue figures, and Internet searches turn up very little data. But the top-ranked schools in licensing revenue generate several million dollars a year, anywhere in the range of \$2.0 to \$3.0 million.

Lately, Virginia Tech has been somewhat unusual in their growth in licensing revenue. "As far as collegiate apparel elsewhere, they're going the opposite way of us," White reports. "I think there was a time there when collegiate apparel was really hot with kids and groups that spend a lot of money on clothes, but it's cyclical, and it's down right now. It's all involved with fads and fashion. There are years that it's in, and years where it isn't in."

Pet Projects

White recently pulled one of his biggest licensing coups ever, signing a deal with Michael Vick and Octagon Sports, the agency that represents Vick. The deal was to produce a line of Vick-related products, with all revenue from sales going into Tech's general scholarship fund.

The flagship product of the line was a series of limited edition prints signed by Vick, which retail for \$125. Only 700 prints were made available to the public, creating a possible licensing revenue stream of \$87,500. Overall, White hopes to make \$100,000 from all of the Vick-related products.

"A lot of my responsibilities are to create a lot of promotions," White explains. "The Hokie Toasties (breakfast cereal) was one, the Elliot Sadler Winston Cup car was another one, the Michael Vick products are another one. So it's just a matter of we have a good solid base, and having a great football team, and having notoriety throughout the U.S., has allowed me to knock on a lot of doors, and people open them up and listen to my pitch."

The Sadler Winston Cup car was a project that fell into White's lap. "A Busch team came in and made a pitch to us for a Virginia Tech car. They told us how the University of Tennessee had a Busch car, and they made a heck of a lot of money off of it. Our normal royalty rate is 8%, and on that it was 15%. We had to share some of that revenue with other folks, though, so we didn't get to keep all of it."

One example of how Virginia Tech made money from the deal was through the sale of die-cast replicas of the car. And after Sadler wrecked the car just 55 laps into the race, some of the mangled pieces of the car, as well as some of Sadler's racing gear, were put up for auction on Ebay.

Lately, White has been working on setting up a deal with Wal-mart that will see Virginia Tech products sold in Wal-marts across the state. The inclusion of Virginia Tech merchandise in Wal-marts is nothing new, but the effort includes new displays that provide better focus to VT products. "Wal-marts in the state of Virginia, about half of them, will have a canopy and underneath the canopy will be Virginia Tech products. So I've been out on the road, meeting with district managers and setting that up."

Then there are the ideas that fall through. "I have tried to set up a couple of things with UVa," White recalls. "That fell on deaf ears for one reason or another. One of the things that I was pitching, and Hardee's was going to do it, was a rivalry-type promotion. A Hokie meal versus a Hoo meal, in building up to the (football) game. That was going to be real neat. We had a conference call, and Hardee's was saying yeah, it's great, that would be fun to do. UVa agreed to do it, but just for a week. Hardee's, if they're going to sink any money into and get a good return from it, they've got to do it for more than a week. So it fell through.

"Terry Holland is a personal friend, and I grew up a block from Terry Holland's house in Davidson. But he does not like the rivalry."

That's fine with White, because thanks to Coach Frank Beamer's Hokies, he's got plenty of ways to make money. "Licensing is definitely reflective of how well the athletics teams do. It's my responsibility to take advantage of the opportunities that are given us."

And that includes everything from breakfast cereal to bobbing-head Michael Vick dolls.

Inside TSL: Short Takes

A letter to the editor, choking on numbers,
TSL logo status, and more.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Like last month's "Inside TSL," here's a smorgasbord of topics of interest with regards to TechSideline.com. Let's start with a letter to the editor about last month's TSL Extra.

Letter to the Editor: Memories of the Coliseum

Will: When Cassell Coliseum opened in 1961 I was a sophomore at Virginia Tech and The Coliseum (it was not called Cassell

at the time) was a very big thing on campus. I was surprised to read in TSL Extra that the attendance figures were not higher (back then); I always thought the Coliseum was filled to the rafters. In thinking it through, Tech's 1961/62 enrollment was only about 5500 students or so, the faculty was smaller, and the surrounding towns less populated. Interstate highways like Route 81 were not yet completed, so I think that attendance in the 6000 - 6999 range was probably comparable to 10,000 or more today (if just half of today's students came to the games, Cassell would be sold out).

The biggest basketball game I ever attended at Tech was against West Virginia in 1962. The Mountaineers were a national power back then, just a few years removed from the Jerry West team that played California for the national title. Moreover, WVU had refused for a number of years to play at Tech due to our antiquated War Memorial Gym. WVU's top player then was Rod Thorn, now an NBA official, and I believe the 'Neers were rated in the National Top Ten.

The crowd that night arrived early and the noise level was unbelievable. By the time the warm-up drills started, the place was in a frenzy, and it remained that way the entire game. Tech trailed early and then caught fire, leading by as many as 21 points in the second half. WVU fought back with a tenacious full court press and as Tech continued to turn the ball over, the 'Neers came back. We were all hanging on the edge of our seats, but with a few seconds remaining, Tech held a lead and allowed WVU to score an uncontested lay-up that ran out the clock and preserved the Tech victory.

Bill Brill, the Roanoke Times columnist who covered Tech at the time, wrote that this was the loudest sustained noise level he had ever heard at a basketball game. We supported Tech basketball very well in that era and saw some exciting games! I can only hope the future will be brighter and that basketball will emulate the success of the football program.

Larry Forsyth, Class of 1964

Okay, so Maybe We Went Overboard

We held a company review of the TSL Extra recently, and the feedback from my compadres was clear: the TSLX, they said, was too big and too numbers-oriented. Waaaaay too much statistical analysis, and too much bloat.

In fairness, the issue that was reviewed was last issue, which was indeed rather heavy on the numbers. Each article of the "Money Makers" series was by nature large and very numbers-inten-

sive. Last issue also included a regular “Inside the Numbers” feature, and I also added in some web sites stats in “Inside TSL.”

In total, all the numbers that were thrown at you in recent months could get a little tedious and hard to wade through. Most of the overkill was the result of the ongoing “Money Makers” series. I had my choice about how in-depth I wanted to make those articles, and I decided to make them lengthy, with a lot of data included. Do I expect you to read and absorb all of the data in those articles? Not really — but if you need a good reference for finances in college athletics, you now have one. So make sure you know what’s in the articles, and if need be, you can go back to them to pull out data to amaze your friends when the subject comes up.

But beyond all the numerical data and statistical analysis that goes into your typical TSLX, there lies a larger theme: the TSLX has possibly become a little bloated. In my zeal to pack as much as possible into each issue, I have created 45- and 50-page monsters that might be too large to be fully appreciated. Your typical person doesn’t necessarily have the time it takes to absorb articles that are often ten pages long or longer, particularly when there are a lot of facts and figures in the articles.

Most people prefer shorter, more compact articles that contain quotes from at least one person who is knowledgeable on the subject being covered. Readers also like personal profiles that teach them about a person involved in Tech athletics.

Therein lies the catch-22, and the reason why I think the TSLX has become numbers-heavy: without access to the Tech athletic department, it is very difficult for us to do personal profiles and interviews. A large chunk of the subject matter — current coaches, players, and administrators — has been closed off to us due to the VT athletic department policy of not allowing the TSL Extra to interview anyone associated with Tech athletics. So we tend to rely on statistical analysis a lot.

The lack of access to the VT athletic department limits us severely but doesn’t choke us off entirely. There are still large numbers of people we can interview, most notably recruits and their coaches, former Tech players, and people at Virginia Tech in departments other than the athletic department.

Hence the flavor of this month’s issue. It has a great recruiting profile on Montavis Pitts (one that I think rivals the KJ interview from issue #5 — nothing will *ever* beat *that*, but the Pitts article comes close, I think). We’ve also got an interview with Licensing Director Locke White that contains more interesting material than I would have thought possible when discussing a subject that can be dry. Jim Alderson wrote an in-depth “look back” article at the 1990 UVa game that admittedly would have been more complete with some quotes from players who played in the game; we’ll work on that in the future, if we do an article like that again. Lastly, there are two opinion pieces about the issue of a playoff in college football.

All in all, it adds up to an issue that is much less numbers-oriented than previous TSL Extras, so tell me what you think. Send me your thoughts, so we can use your opinions to guide future issues of the TSLX.

Don’t worry, though — “Inside the Numbers,” one of my favorite TSL Extra features, will be back next issue. It will be a mainstay for as long as I can continue to come up with new ideas. And this issue only has six articles (not counting the letter from the editor), instead of the usual seven. We’ll

bump the article count back up next month. We're one article low this month because everybody, including me, was on vacation at some point!

One more note: if you're reading this on-line, and you haven't downloaded the PDF version, you really ought to check out the PDF. It's got a new format that is really sharp. I'll work on updating the on-line format next month.

And yet another note: if you think that TechSideline.com ought to be granted access to the Tech athletic department (it would greatly improve your TSL Extra subscription, I assure you), I encourage you to make your thoughts known to the president of the university, Charles W. Steger. Write him a hardcopy letter (not an email) and send it to: Charles W. Steger, President Virginia Tech, 210 Burruss Hall, Blacksburg, VA 24061.

Status on Some Items of Recent Interest

Here's the latest on some things I have mentioned in previous issues of the TSL Extra:

Giving the TSL Extra as a gift — the programmers have a preliminary version of this set up in TechLocker.com. We just have to review it and get it ready for launch, which should happen in the next couple of weeks. Once it's done, you'll be able to go into TechLocker.com and give the TSLX as a gift to as many as four different people simultaneously. There is a way you can give the TSLX as a gift already, but it's really convoluted, because you have to basically execute the transaction as if you're the other person, but use your credit card info instead of theirs. That's a pain, and the new "give as gift" feature will make the process much easier.

Giving *anything* from TechLocker.com as a gift — we've got a couple of ways we're going to implement the "give as gift" functionality into our store. Number one is an electronic gift certificate: you buy the gift certificate on-line with your credit card, in any dollar amount, and specify the email address of a person to send the gift certificate to. They get an email notification of the gift with a special code that can be used to get credit for their gift certificate when they buy something at TechLocker.com.

The second way we'll implement the "give as gift" functionality is to provide you with a way to buy something from TechLocker.com, enter the recipient's shipping information, and type a note that will be packed along with the gift. This is the Amazon.com way of doing it, although we don't plan to offer gift-wrapping, like they do.

Those are projects that are not imminent but will be done in time for the Christmas shopping season. Until then, you can always send a gift to someone else by simply entering their name and shipping info when you go shopping. In that instance, it's your responsibility to let them know that a gift is on the way.

New TSL logo — in last month's TSL Extra, I told you that I would soon be presenting you with four options for new TSL logos, so you could vote on your favorite. I fully planned on doing that, but at the last minute, our company president, who had presented numerous designs that I didn't care for all that much, came through with one that I really liked.

It's simple, clean, and works well in all the applications we need it for: web page headers, T-shirts,

embroidered items, hats, etc. Am I going to show it to you? Not yet, but pretty soon, we'll have a new web page header up on TSL that utilizes the new logo.

Soon, we'll work on some T-shirt, hat, and golf shirt designs. It has been nearly two years since we offered HokieCentral.com apparel, and we have never offered TSL items, so it'll be nice to be able to offer some web site apparel. It will also be interesting to see how well it sells, to finally find out if there's pent-up demand for it, or if the emails I occasionally receive on the subject are just a very small smattering of people with interest.

Nike Football Jerseys Coming to TechLocker.com

We have finally found what appears to be a reliable source for the Nike replica jerseys, and we'll begin carrying them in TechLocker.com soon. We have placed orders for dozens of jerseys, and although our buyer is reluctant to commit to a date, we're optimistic that we'll have some jerseys available at TechLocker.com before the home opener against UConn on September 1st.

We're going to carry some #7 (Vick) jerseys and some #22 (you-know-who) jerseys. The Vick jerseys are from last year and are no longer being manufactured, so they'll be in limited supply. Our supplier just happened to have some packed away in his warehouse and was pleased that we were interested in them. Unfortunately, we'll only be able to get our hands on some XL's, but that's better than none, and XL's will work for a large percentage of people.

The #22 jerseys are what Nike is manufacturing this year, for the upcoming season. Unlike the Vick jerseys, the #22 jerseys will come in white as well as maroon, so if white is your fancy, you'll be able to get it. We are keeping the white quantities low, though — we're ordering four maroons for every white jersey. The good news on the #22 jerseys is that we'll be able to carry sizes Medium through XX-Large.

Subscription Totals

Someone asked me to bring you up to date on the number of TSLX subscribers, and as I write this on Monday, July 16, we have 914 subscribers. Subscriptions have slowed to a crawl in the last couple of months, as May and June saw only 96 new subscribers come on board (and through July 16, only 19 new subscribers have signed up in July, barely more than one per day).

I noticed that the TSLX "buzz" on the message board — and therefore sales — died down significantly the past couple of months, despite the fact that web site traffic has been steadily increasing throughout the spring and summer. The decline in sales and interest (more than the company review I talked about above) indicated to me that the content needed some reevaluation, and it also led to the revamping of the PDF format into something snazzier.

I also think that last issue's cover wasn't very eye-catching, but this issue's cover, with the photo of Montavis Pitts, is. I'll be watching this month's sales figures and message board buzz closely to see if we're headed in the right direction, but I have a feeling that things will pick up. If we can get the "send as gift" function for the TSLX launched by August 1st, as the programmers are telling me, that should give sales a little shot in the arm, too. I'd like to hit 1,000 subscribers by the time issue #10 is launched next month, so again, help spread the word.

It Depends Upon Whom You Talk To

Recently, in an article about the defensive backs out on the free area of the web site, I dropped this little nugget about one of our incoming true freshmen:

And via email comes this little tidbit: the coaches think incoming recruit DeAngelo Hall has the physical build of a Rover, and they may give him a look there this fall.

I immediately received an email from one of my best contacts that said that Bryan Stinespring, who recruited Hall, is dead-sold on Hall at cornerback. Stinespring thinks that Hall is an Ike Charlton clone, but faster, stronger, and more aggressive than Charlton was at the same point in his career. In short, the prototypical cornerback. There's *no way* he moves to Rover, said this source.

So who was my Hall-to-Rover source? It was an individual who had talked to Bud Foster. According to this source, Foster told him that he (Foster) thinks that Hall has prototypical size and speed for a Rover, and he was going to give him a two-week look at the position when camp opens.

Given all that, who knows what's going to happen with Hall? One thing is for sure, when it comes to deciding who is going to play where, Bud Foster, the defensive coordinator, has more authority over defensive players than Bryan Stinespring does. But by the same token, Virginia Tech's defense relies heavily on the cornerbacks, so if Hall is that good in coverage, I think Foster (or whoever makes the decision) will want to leave Hall at CB.

I tell this story to illustrate that the coaches very often are not on the same page. They like to blame fans (and the Internet) for spreading misinformation, but in this case, you can clearly see that the thoughts of both coaches have been relayed directly to me by the individuals they spoke with. Assuming that both sources quoted the respective coaches correctly, then both sources are right ... even though they disagree.

The next time you hear a fun rumor, remember that coaches don't always agree on things, and they can even change their minds. It makes no difference to me, because it's fun to hear this stuff, and in this case, it's harmless.

A Smattering of Topics

I love the Lounge Board — now that it has been around for a few weeks, I have to say that the "Lounge" board, which is wide-open for discussions on any topic, is an unqualified success. It's a pleasure to see people discussing goofy, irreverent, or even serious topics that have nothing to do with Virginia Tech sports, and not getting slammed for discussing non-Tech related items on a Tech sports board. In the past, there was a lot of tension behind the issue of "off-topic" posts appearing on the sports boards, and that tension has almost entirely evaporated.

TSL is looking for sponsors and advertisers — something we don't make much noise about, but that I would like to promote, is that TSL has great opportunities available for sponsors and advertisers. We've got anything from long-term sponsorship opportunities to short-term advertising opportunities available, so whether your company is large or small, drop us a line and let us know what your advertising needs are. We'll see if we can set you up with something that meets your needs and drives traffic to your business at a price you can afford. TSL's reach is large and wide, and if

you've got something Hokie fans want to buy, you couldn't pick a better place to advertise it.

Write a TSLX Letter to the Editor! — send us an email with your thoughts about anything in the TSL Extra, and we'll print it in a future edition. We've gotten a couple of good ones lately, including the one from Larry Forsyth at the beginning of this "Inside TSL" article.

Football season is right around the corner. See you next month!

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And if all that isn't enough, then you should know that a subscription to the **TSL Extra** helps support your favorite Hokie sports web site, TechSideline.com.

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<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextrapromo/>

From there, you can get more details and even download a free sample!

