TSL Extra

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The TSL Extra

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On the Cover
Photo of Brandon Gore courtesy of the Fauquier Citizen. Photography by Karl Pittelkau.

Dear Readers:

One of the great advantages of being a webmaster is that the season sneaks up on you. It's really kind of funny: every year, I tell myself in May about all the great things I'm going to do during the summer, when the web site is relatively slow. I'm going to dress up the site, improve its organization and navigation, etc., etc.

And the next thing I know, it's August, and the non-stop routine that is Tech Sideline is in full gear, and will be until the following May.

I remember back before the Internet, and back before HokieCentral.com and TechSideline.com, the wait between the last game of the football season and the first game of the following season was interminable. Back then, I had no clue about recruiting (other than what the Hokie Huddler told me) and never went to the spring game, so it was a really long wait, with no information or Hokie football-related entertainment.

But these days … well, it seems like just yesterday that Michael Vick hit Jarrett Ferguson with that pass down the middle in Jacksonville, and the Gator Bowl rout was on.

This season promises to be one full of many questions, and possibly much tumult. If the Hokies, in particular their quarterback, do not perform up to snuff and — gasp! — lose to someone other than the mighty Hurricanes, it could get a little ugly. Think 1998, when some Hokie fans were howling for Frank Beamer to put Michael Vick in the game.

To prep you for the season, we've got our Big East preview — along with a prediction you won't like, but hey, I was right last year — and Big East team capsules. As is customary, we offer up an in-depth recruiting profile, this month's subject being offensive lineman Brandon Gore, and it's an interesting one. I love interviewing offensive linemen, because it reminds me of playing the o-line in my peewee football days. Yes, I'm only 5-8, 160 now, but I used to be big enough when I was a kid to play the offensive line. Truth is stranger than fiction.

We've got not just one, but two "Inside TSL" features this month. Since so many of you are fascinated by the business side of Tech Sideline, one of the "Inside TSL's" is a very frank discussion of the future of the web site, plus a call to arms, of sorts. The other one is a smattering of TSL-related topics.

When we meet here again, it will be two games deep into the season. I'm sure ya'll are dying to get started. Enjoy issue #10.

Will

Liberty High's Brandon Gore

Brandon Gore is a huge offensive lineman who doesn't sweat it when it comes time to sweat.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Brandon Gore, a massive offensive lineman who stands 6-6 and weighs 315 pounds, is no late bloomer. He has *always* been big. And from the time he was in fourth grade, he was on the radar screen of Coach Joe Trabucco of Liberty High School in Bealeton, Virginia, where Gore will be a senior this fall.

"My older brother played for Coach Trabucco as a freshman," Gore remembers, "and I was at a game, and I was at the snack bar, and he (Trabucco) came up to me and asked me if I was going to Liberty the next year. I had to tell him I was still in elementary school."

Because he's so big, and because of his quick feet — at 17 years old, Gore runs a 5.2 40-yard dash, which he hopes to eventually squeeze down to 5.0 — Gore counts schools such as Florida, Florida State, Michigan, Notre Dame, Georgia, Tennessee, and Ohio State among those who have offered him scholarships. But on July 23rd, he committed to play football for Virginia Tech.

At this point, Gore, who is rated the 15th best lineman in the country in SuperPrep's preseason issue, is by far the Hokies' most highly touted verbal commitment for the 2002 recruiting class (with the exception of Montavis Pitts, who has decommitted since verbaling to Tech in May).

Gore is a classic offensive lineman, a player who works hard without considering it to be work, and who loves to play smash-mouth football. He has known for a long time, perhaps since Trabucco approached him that day at the snack bar, that he was going to play college football. And he has been preparing himself for it ever since.

From Fat Kid to Football Player

Gore grew up so big, so fast, that as a ninth-grader at Liberty, his back was constantly in pain. "I was about 6-3, 320," he says. "I had back problems, so the doctor wouldn't clear me to play. He said, 'You can play, but you'll end up in a wheelchair by the end of the season.' It was just too painful for me to play. Also, I wasn't really into it, because I was a freshman. I wanted to play varsity, but as a freshman, you can't really do that."

"I had bulging disks in my back. The doctor said I had the body of an adult, and I was doing the activities of a child, and it was really a strain on my back. It's okay now, though. I haven't had any pain in my back since my sophomore year."

As big as he is, Gore has *lost* about 50 or 60 pounds from a high of 370 or 380 as a sophomore, when he first stepped on the field for Liberty's varsity team. By then, he had grown to "about 6-5. I started on offense and got a little bit of playing time on defense. We were 2-8, we weren't very good, but I played every game, the whole game."

But at the end of the year, Coach Trabucco delivered a message to Gore: shape up. It was time to quit messing around and start working. Gore took it to heart, and step one was getting into the weight room, working on his weight, and getting it down.

"I lost about 50 pounds (after the sophomore season). I played basketball in the winter and track and field in the spring. I went from 370 or 380, and after basketball season ended, I was 330."

With the resculpting of his body well underway, Gore worked on his game the summer before his junior year. "My sophomore year to my junior year, I improved a hundred percent. My blocking and technique got ten times better, because I went to a lot of camps in the summer. I went to UVa's camp. I worked hard on my technique."

The result was a junior year that not only saw personal success for Gore on the field, but team success as well. Liberty turned their fortunes around and went 10-2 Gore's junior year, making it to the state AA regional finals (the state final 8) before falling to Park View.

For Gore, the table was set. He and his team had had a good season. The recruiters would follow. And follow they did.

Doing What it Takes

Joe Trabucco has been the head coach at Liberty High School for eight years, and he has been coaching at the high school level for 29 years. The first thing that stands out when Trabucco talks about Gore, versus when Gore talks about himself, is one word: *work*.

Whereas Gore discusses his development matter-of-factly, never once talking about how hard he works, Trabucco says with admiration, "His biggest strength is that he's a hard worker. He has developed himself into what he has become. He has done everything that we've asked him to do. During the season, out of the season, he has never once stepped back and said, 'Whoa, I need to take a break.' He has done it all. I'm real proud of the kid. He plays hard, he's aggressive. I think they (Virginia Tech) got a good player."

Trabucco saw the potential in Gore early on, and decided at the end of Gore's sophomore season to give him a push and see what he was made of.

"The first time we had him (spring of Gore's freshman year), he came in about 370. He had a tough time. So we sort of just laid back and waited until (Gore's sophomore) season was over, and then spring time came, and we started to get on him to get into the weight room.

"I remember him telling me his back was sore. My assistant coach said, 'How do you want me to handle this?' I said, 'You just get on his butt. You tell him to get his ass in there, and we're going to get it done. If he doesn't want to take it, then we ain't gonna worry about him.'

"And I tell you what, he just took it. Took everything. He got himself down to 325, 330, 340 (by the end of sophomore year), and last year he played about 320. And then in the spring time, he said he wanted to get down to 280." Trabucco laughs at that. "I said, 'Well, let's get down to 300, and we'll see what happens.' I'll be darned if he didn't get down to 300. And I think right now, he's about 317."

Gore concurs. "Right now, I'm probably around 315. I'd like to be maybe ten pounds lighter. I'd like to be around 305 or 310. That would be perfect for me. The lightest I've ever been, since my fresh-man year, is 300. I was 300 right before school ended last year, and then I put on some weight this

summer lifting. I can gain 20 pounds or lose 30 pounds in one day. It really fluctuates. One day I'll be 320, the next I'll be 305. I lost 50 pounds in two months once, just by playing basketball and watching what I was eating."

About Gore's work habits, Trabucco says, "I think he anticipates it's going to happen, he knows it's going to happen, so there's no sense talking about it. I remember him sitting in here one day this summer, and he said, 'I *know* you guys are going to stay on top of me.' I said, 'Well, Brandon, we sure are.' He knows that. He realizes it's going to happen, and he just goes with the flow.

"He played all last season with a stress fracture, probably starting in our fifth game," Trabucco notes, another little nugget that Gore left out during his portion of the interview. "I remember he never missed a practice. We were coming down the stretch, we were going after the district title, and we needed some big games out of him. I went up to him — it was the first game we were going to start him both ways — and I said to him, 'You need to turn it on tonight.' That was in the Potomac Falls game. And I thought he just played a super game. He just answered the bell, and from that game on, he played tough."

Gore talks like a born offensive lineman, and he has a true "hogs" mentality. It's him and his four buddies against the world. "The offensive line is like a family," he says "I really like that. There's no other part of the team that's as close-knit. I like knowing that we have the most pride on the team. We don't get a lot of recognition, but everyone else on the team knows that we are the reason why we win. That's the best part about it — without us, we wouldn't have (as good) a team."

And like all offensive linemen, he sometimes wonders what it would like to carry the pill. "I guess the only thing I dislike about it (playing the line) is not getting the ball." He laughs. "I wish I could get the ball every once in a while. But it doesn't bother me. I enjoy seeing a running back run 80 yards because of a block I threw as much as I would enjoy running 80 yards myself."

Getting Attention from the Big Boys

As an AA-class school situated between Charlottesville and Washington DC, Liberty and the schools they usually play don't exactly draw a lot of recruiters. So how did Gore get so many offers from so many top-notch schools in such a short period of time?

It must be the old highlight-tape trick, right? Put together a good highlight tape, mail it out to major Division 1-A schools along with a handy-dandy data sheet that includes his 3.5 GPA and 1190 SAT, and watch the offers roll in, right?

That's a common tactic that high school players and coaches use all the time, and it works well. But Gore's story is a little more interesting.

Gore, you see, is the beneficiary of a friendship between Coach Trabucco and Coach Bill Brown at C.D. Hylton High School in Woodbridge, Virginia. Those of you who follow recruiting will instantly recognize that Hylton High School is the stomping ground of Ahmad Brooks, one of the most highly-recruited linebackers in the country. Brooks draws personal visits from the top programs in the country, including Florida State, Penn State, Florida, you name it.

And while the recruiters are at Hylton, Coach Brown has been giving them a tip: head down to

Bealeton to see the big offensive lineman at Liberty High School. The result is a parade of recruiters from college football's best programs through Coach Trabucco's office, and they're there to see film of Brandon Gore.

"We got a lot of stuff (recruiters) that was coming through Hylton," Trabucco notes. "Coach Brown is a friend of mine, and he told coaches that came there that we had an offensive lineman they should go see. We don't usually get a lot of people. William and Mary comes through here, Virginia Tech, Virginia, but we don't ever get them outside people. But they came down.

Gore tells the same story. "That's how I got most of my offers (because of Brooks). That's how I got Notre Dame, Michigan, and Tennessee to see me. Florida State heard about me because I got an offer from Florida, because the Florida coaches stopped by the school. Florida State called my coach and asked if they could get a tape, and we sent them a tape. They called back two days later and offered me."

"One time Tennessee came down here," Trabucco remembers, "and sat and watched the film of Brandon, and when it was over, he said, 'If I could offer, I'd offer him now.' I remember Tech coming in, and they hadn't seen him for two years. They said, 'Did anybody offer?' and I said, 'North Carolina State offered' — at that time, North Carolina State was the first school that had offered -- and I told Tech what Tennessee had said, and they said, 'We can offer. I can tell you that right now. I don't have to wait for approval.' That was (VT defensive backs) Coach (Lorenzo) Ward, and Coach Ward watched about ten minutes of the tape and said, 'We'll offer.'"

The Hokie coaches would have known about Gore and would have offered him anyway, but the Brooks trickle-down effect, through Trabucco and Brown's friendship, has certainly made Gore a more high-profile recruit. Trabucco and Gore probably would have circulated his tape, but with the recruiters coming down after their C.D Hylton visits, they didn't need to.

So in an odd way, even if Brooks doesn't sign with Virginia Tech, he is indirectly responsible for boosting the Hokies' recruiting ranking via his influence on Gore's visibility. It's yet another interesting story in the world of college football recruiting.

Why Virginia Tech?

Given that Gore's father is a Tech alumnus, many fans were not surprised when he committed to Virginia Tech. They figured Gore had probably been a life-long Hokie fan, and he was just following through on a long allegiance.

But that's not as strong an influence as you might think. "My dad followed them (Virginia Tech) a lot, so we followed them. But I've never been to a Virginia Tech game," he says. And Gore has never attended a Virginia Tech football camp, either. In fact, after his sophomore season, he attended UVa's football camp, and this summer, he skipped camps entirely.

But he knows how frenetic Hokie games can get. "My older brother has a lot of friends who go to Tech, so I've been there with him to visit. I was down two years ago (1999) for the Miami game, but I didn't go to the game. I was down there in the town the day of the game. It was exciting. I know what they're talking about when they say Tech games are crazy. Every car that drove by had a Tech flag or Tech decal on it."

When three Virginia Tech coaches, including Coach Beamer, stopped by Liberty High School to see him in late May, it made a big impression on Gore and put the Hokies over the top. Gore had been visited by Ward before, but when Beamer showed up with Ward and another coach in tow, it sealed the deal. "I thought, 'If they care enough to send three coaches, they must really want me to come there.' I really didn't have to think about it any more."

Gore is completely sold on the Hokies' status as a program capable of competing for the national championship. "As far as I'm concerned, I don't see an end to them being a top-tier program. With last year's recruiting class and maybe this year's recruiting class, there's no limit to what we can do in the future. If we get three of the top 5 in the state, like Brooks, or (running back Michael) Johnson, any of those guys, we're going to be ready to go for the next four or five years."

He will take his official visit to Tech this fall, probably in December, but Gore won't be taking any other visits to any other schools. "I'm not going to do anything to sway my decision. All that would do is confuse me more, and I don't want that. I'm a man of my word, and what I said the first time is what goes."

Preparing for the Next Level

But before he makes his sojourn to Tech, Gore and his teammates have a goal: win the state championship. It sounds like a lofty target, just two years removed from going 2-8, but Liberty returns about fifteen or sixteen starters from last year's state quarterfinalists … including the entire offensive line.

"The type of team we have, a state championship is my goal all the way. Win a state championship, do the best I can, and be in the best shape in my life when I go to Tech next fall. Be ready."

Trabucco has one more year to continue molding Gore before he departs for college. "I told him, the biggest thing for him (this coming season) is that we expect him to dominate. I know there are going to be games where it's going to be tough for him, because people are going to be gunning for him and trying to make a name for themselves against him. We don't expect him to get beat. We expect that if we need a yard, we're going over top of him."

Looking down the road, Gore appraises his abilities and talks about what he needs to improve upon.

"I'm very good at drive blocking. If someone is right in front of me, they pretty much have no chance. I hate to say it like that, but I'm very good at drive blocking. I need to work on my reach block, which is moving out, hooking people, going out and getting linebackers. I'm very good at pulling, on traps, counters, and plays like that.

"I think the best way to describe the way I play is to say that I wear people down. During the course of the game, it's hard for a 200-pound or 250-pound defensive lineman to have a 320- or 330-pound guy pounding on you the whole game. One of my strengths is, by the fourth quarter, I pretty much have my way with anybody I play against."

Those sound like bold words, but Gore knows he still has a lot of developing to do. And Trabucco

knows that like most kids, Gore will learn that football at the college level takes some getting used to. "His intensity level needs to pick up," Trabucco says. "It's okay for high school, but I think it needs to get to another level. Right now, these kids are sometimes a foot shorter than him, and he's not going to see that in college. They're all men there, and they're all players. There's no slouches. If you get a scholarship, you can play. I think he'll realize that. That's where the meanness is going to come in. And he needs to work on his speed, but I'm sure that Tech will develop that much better than we did."

Once he arrives at Tech, Gore will most likely shift from guard, his current position at Liberty, to tackle. Trabucco likes him at guard, which is probably what led to an erroneous report from at least one recruiting service that Gore would remain at guard in college.

"As far as I'm concerned, I think he's a guard," says Trabucco, "but they (the Tech coaches) know more than I know. They've got time to work with people, and maybe their needs aren't the same as what we would need him for. We play a lot of defenses that play even fronts and cover up our guards, so that's why we play our big guys down at guard, and we free our tackles up. In their league, maybe they feel like they need to play bigger kids out at tackle. Whatever they decide.

"They (the Tech coaches) seem like they believe in each other, and they don't play around. They assume responsibilities, and they go. We used to go to their clinics all the time. I like them, I like the way they get along with people. I watch them coach, and I like the way they handle the kids. They're just … I tell you, Tech's very fortunate. They've got a great staff."

As with nearly all linemen, a redshirt is in Gore's future. "I want to, really," he says of taking a year to develop. "Tech, they're in a position where they don't need me to play right away. They can redshirt me and be okay."

Besides, the 6-6 man-mountain might not be done growing yet "I haven't measured myself in a while, but my doctors tell me from my MRI's and X-rays that I can probably grow to be 6-7 or 6-8."

Scary thought, that.

When asked for one last comment, Trabucco, whose constant prodding has helped Gore turn into a major Division 1-A prospect, sounds like a beaming father.

"We're proud of him," he says without hesitation.

A Momentary Lapse in Judgment

Derrius Monroe, an NFL-caliber talent, made a big mistake, and it cost him dearly.

by Neal Williams

The big day is almost here. Virginia Tech's 2001 football season kicks off Sept. 1. Connecticut, a future full-time football member of The Big East Conference, comes to Lane Stadium and the house will be packed full of Hokies fans eager to see how their favorite team looks as it goes for its ninth straight bowl bid.

Derrius Monroe may be in a Tech uniform. He may not. He may play. He may not.

If not, he's liable not to be missed anyway. The Hokies are rich with talented young defensive ends.

Monroe? The former or current Hokie (depending on how things shake out in the days leading up to the opener) has learned many lessons in the past two years. Among them is this: When your little corner of the universe comes to a screeching halt, the rest of it proceeds without you.

"It's a shame, because no matter what happens he's paid a big price," said one source inside the Virginia Tech athletic department. "I think he's a good kid. He was never in trouble before. He hasn't been in trouble since. But he made a very big mistake."

The Monroe saga is pretty well known among Hokie faithful. Here's a brief recap:

Not long after Tech's appearance in the 2000 Sugar Bowl, Monroe was arrested for selling cocaine to an undercover policeman. Under the policy outlined in the school's Comprehensive Action Plan, that meant an automatic suspension, since it was a felony charge.

The case's ultimate disposition was this: Monroe pled guilty to a lesser charge (though still a felony). Under the sentence handed down, he received probation and community service along with a bonus: If he took care of the community service (word is he is almost done with it, having just a week or so to go) and stayed out of trouble, his record would be cleared.
In other words, he'd get a clean slate.

With that, Tech Athletic Director Jim Weaver allowed Monroe to return to practice and continue to have his progress monitored by the athletic department. He was never activated during the 2000 regular season. This seemed to fly in the face of the CAP, since pleading guilty to a felony meant dismissal. Weaver's reasoning was that Monroe would have no record (eventually), therefore the CAP was not violated.

During all that, nothing was ever said about the 2001 season.

Monroe entered Tech in the fall of 1997 as a partial qualifier, meaning he lost a year of eligibility. Under new NCAA rules, athletes can now get that year back if they graduate in four years. Monroe had until the end of summer session 2001 to do so.

At "press" time, it was unclear whether Monroe had passed the classes he needed to pass to

graduate. Several sources said he had. No one in the football program is talking about Monroe. He didn't take part in spring drills, he's not listed in the media guide, he's not on the depth chart.

But, sources said, he'll likely be added to the roster, *if* he has indeed graduated.

"I think they're looking at it as trying to do something to help a kid who has worked pretty hard since his trouble. It would be a positive thing for the kid," a source said.

Monroe has been unavailable. He didn't respond to emails. His listed phone number in the Blacksburg directory has been disconnected, and there is no new listing in Blacksburg or surrounding areas under his name. The phone number listed for Monroe on the Virginia Tech web site at his home in Tallahassee, Fla., is no longer in service.

One day, perhaps, he'll just join the Hokies for practice as if nothing ever happened.

"And I think his teammates will welcome him back with open arms," a source said.

Or perhaps he won't see the field again at Tech. Either way, the whole situation leaves many questions:

1.) Is Monroe paying for sins of others?

The CAP was put in place in 1997, a positive reaction to a disturbing series of incidents involving Tech players. Tech players were showing up way too often on police blotters. Since then, incidents have been very few.

What Monroe did deserved punishment. No one questions that. But is a total banishment too severe? If Tech hadn't had problems earlier, would Monroe already be playing again?

The issue has divided Tech fans – check the TechSideline.com message board any time the topic of Derrius Monroe comes up – and Tech officials. Some want the door shut in his face, no questions asked. Others want to let him back. Coaches, too, are said to be divided on whether Monroe deserves another chance on the team.

2.) What purpose would it serve to have him back now anyway?

If he returned in 2001, Monroe would only have one season left, and Tech doesn't have a senior in its two-deep rotation at defensive end. Nathaniel Adibi, Cols Colas, Jim Davis and Lamar Cobb have solidified themselves at the position. Where would Monroe fit in? As of August 16th, he hadn't practiced at all, with the opener just fifteen days away. So the chance of him being ready for the first couple of games is remote.

"There might be some things he could to do help, some things he could show the young guys," one source said.

Said Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster, "We have a good chemistry, we have a good group. We would not allow him to be disruptive. I know this: If he does come back, he can help this team in some capacity. I would hope for him that it does work out."

3.) Just how good could Monroe have been?

This is the question that causes the most pain. He apparently could have been very good.

He was a backup his first two years, one who performed fairly well and showed plenty of potential. One play that stands out occurred against Syracuse in 1999, when Monroe zoomed across the field from his defensive end position and tackled a running back 20 yards downfield.

Monroe is 6-4 and reportedly up to 270 pounds. He also is said to have covered 40 yards in less than 4.4 seconds in a timed session last winter. That, in a word, is spectacular.

Had he not lost so much time, he probably would have been a pro. "He's that talented," Foster said. "But, from a football standpoint, he has missed a lot of time."

The situation troubles Foster, because he's among those who think Monroe is a good kid who made a whopper of a mistake. With so many kids in their program, coaches understand that they won't reach all of them. It doesn't make it easier to take when one goes astray.

"It does bother you," Foster said. "We really emphasize with these guys that everything they do, they're going to be scrutinized. You talk to them about making the right decision. You feel like a parent when something like this comes up. You're disappointed. It's frustrating because you feel like you didn't get through to this guy.

"There are some kids who are bad kids. That's not the case with this kid. He's worked hard to graduate, to get that degree, to have that extra year. He's lost a lot, too, including the trust factor among his peers and people like us."

Even if he never suits up at Tech, there may be some football in the future for Monroe. If he ran that fast at his size in February, he's obviously stayed in some kind of shape.

Monroe showed up on NFL draft lists last April. He didn't declare for the draft (and therefore forfeit his eligibility) — he didn't have to, since his original class was eligible.

He had no takers.

Perhaps next season, someone will give him a look. It would help if he were able to play this season at Tech. Even without that, there may be a spot. Or not. Perhaps the football world has spun too far away from him. Perhaps NFL teams will shy away, given his previous trouble.

With the Monroe story, there's only one definitive truth:

A momentary lapse in judgment is all it takes.

Big East Preview 2001

Wherein our fearless webmaster takes a look at the Big East Football Conference ... and pretty much sees what everyone else sees. Yes, the Canes will be hard to knock off.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Last year, the Big East had a pretty good season on the football field. Miami and Virginia Tech finished in the top 5 in the BCS Rankings, a feat tainted by the Canes narrowly missing a chance to play for the national championship and the Hokies being robbed of a much-deserved BCS bowl bid when the Fiesta matched Notre Dame up with Oregon State.

Six of the league's eight teams finished above .500, and five of those teams went bowling, a first for the conference (among the teams with winning records, only 6-5 Syracuse stayed home). And when the teams went on their holiday bowl trips, they did the league proud. The league went 4-1 in the bowls, with only Pittsburgh failing to win, falling to Iowa State in the Insight.com Bowl.

In addition, the conference had a 28-9 out of conference record, best among the six BCS conferences. Even when non-Division-1A opponents are subtracted, the league was still 26-9 out of conference, still tops among the BCS conferences.

Entering the 2001 season, many of the league's marquee players return, and the Big East defenses in particular are primed for success. Last year, 5 Big East teams finished in the top 34 nationally in total defense, and this year, six teams return at least 8 defensive starters. Read that again: three-quarters of the league teams return at least 8 defensive starters.

The top returning players on defense are headlined by DL's Dwight Freeney of Syracuse, David Pugh and Chad Beasley of Virginia Tech, and Bryan Knight of Pittsburgh; LB's Ben Taylor of Virginia Tech, Clifton Smith of Syracuse, and Gerald Hayes of Pittsburgh; and DB's Mike Rumph and Edward Reed of Miami and Ronyell Whitaker of Virginia Tech.

Returning to do battle with those defenses are two players who were among the three co-Offensive Players of the Year in the Big East last year: RB Lee Suggs of Virginia Tech (last year's national scoring leader in TD's and points, with 28 and 168 respectively) and WR Antonio Bryant of Pittsburgh (the winner of the Biletnikoff Award, which goes to the nation's best receiver).

In addition to Suggs, the league-leader in rushing, the #2 rusher (William Green of BC) and the #3 rusher (Avon Cobourne of WVU) in the league last year return. And down in Miami, they bring back quarterback Ken Dorsey, #5 in the nation in passing efficiency last year, and he is fronted by a Hurricane offensive line that is possibly the best in the country.

There should be plenty of fireworks around the league this year, both offensively and defensively.

This year, the league welcomes three new coaches, two of whom are already shaking the very foundations of their programs:

·   Former Miami Offensive Coordinator Larry Coker takes over the Hurricanes as their new head coach. All Canes fans are asking him to do is not screw up the Miami resurgence.

- Meanwhile, former Clemson Offensive Coordinator Rich Rodriguez has taken over the reigns at WVU, and he has immediately trashed WVU's old ball-control offense in favor of a wide-open attack similar to what he architected at Clemson. Rodriguez has turned the defense over to the well-traveled Phil Elmassian, who installed Virginia Tech's attack defense in 1993.
- Lastly, at Rutgers, New Jersey native Greg Schiano, who was the defensive coordinator at Miami last year, has taken over the moribund Scarlet Knights program and has electrified the Rutgers fan base with recruiting successes that are extending from the 2001 recruiting season into the 2002 recruiting season.

For the most part, optimism abounds in the Big East. The Hurricanes and Hokies are poised for good seasons, Pittsburgh is on the rise, WVU and Rutgers have new coaches, and Boston College is coming off of two straight bowl appearances and 15 wins in the last two seasons.

But at Syracuse, the luster is off of a proud program that has finished 7-5 and 6-5 the last two years, and which may be facing a losing record in 2001. The Orangemen, who play a brutal non-conference schedule, could lose coach Paul Pasqualoni if they don't perform well this year.

Meanwhile, Temple has been summarily dismissed by the Big East Football Conference, effective at the end of this season (although that may change — stay tuned). The Owls, who are poised to have their best team in a decade, are vowing to play well enough, on the field and at the box office, to force the league to reconsider. It's not likely that will happen, so this season could be Temple's swan song in the Big East.

My Big East Predictions

It used to be easy to predict the Big East finish. Just name Miami and Virginia Tech 1 and 2 (in any order), West Virginia and Syracuse 3-4, Boston College and Pittsburgh 5-6, and Rutgers and Temple 7-8.

But this year, with so many coaching unknowns in the league, and with the middle teams in the league gradually changing their status (Pittsburgh is up, Syracuse is down, and no one knows where WVU is going), the picture becomes murkier.

Last year, I correctly predicted Miami and VT at 1-2 and Temple and Rutgers at 7-8, but I botched the middle four teams (that's a success rate of 50%, and if you read this month's "Inside the Numbers," you'll see that that whips the Big East media's average of 28% of teams picked correctly). I predicted BC-WVU-Syracuse-Pitt for the middle four, and it ended up Pitt-Syracuse-BC-WVU. I will not make the same mistake again of underrating Pittsburgh and overrating Boston College.

Here are this year's predictions:

Rank	Team	"Swing" Games
1	Miami	@ Pitt (9/27), @ VT (12/1)
2	VT	@ Pitt (11/3), Miami (12/1)
3	Pittsburgh	Miami (9/27), VT (11/3)
4	Syracuse	Temple (10/20), WVU (11/10), BC (11/24)
5	Boston College	WVU (9/1), Temple (10/6), @ Syracuse (11/24)
6	WVU	@ BC (9/1), @ Syracuse (11/10), Pitt (11/24)
7	Temple	@ BC (10/6), @ Syracuse (10/20), @ WVU (11/17)
8	Rutgers	Syracuse (10/6), @ Temple (10/13)

The "swing" games shown above are the important games that will determine where a team finishes in the league. They are the iffy games that could cost a team dearly (VT losing at Pitt, for example) or help a team greatly (Rutgers winning at Temple) in the league standings.

The Top Three

I'm giving the #1 nod by a slight edge to the Hurricanes, due mainly to their experience and talent at quarterback and along the offensive line, two of the most important components of a football team. That edge could very well be balanced out on Dec. 1st by Frank Beamer, Virginia Tech's special teams, and a frenzied Lane Stadium crowd.

I went back and forth about this, but the real reason I'm giving Miami the #1 slot is because I think that outside of the Tech matchup, they'll dominate every other team in the league. But on the other hand, I'm not sure the Hokies will dominate everyone other than Miami. The reason? Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh is a team that could rock the league by upsetting either Miami or Virginia Tech at home, and Tech seems the most likely candidate to fall to the Panthers, because Pittsburgh always battles the Hokies closely (17-7, 30-17, and 37-34 the last three years). By contrast, with the exception of a 21-17 loss in Pitt Stadium in 1997, the Hurricanes have dominated the Panthers, including winning the last three games by a combined score of 106-20.

So while Miami only has one "danger" game on their Big East schedule (@ Virginia Tech), the Hokies have at least two (Miami and @ Pittsburgh). The Hokies could very well win the Big East, but it's more likely that Miami will.

If Pittsburgh is unable to upset the Hokies or Canes, then of course, the December 1st battle between Miami and Tech in Blacksburg will be the only game that matters in determining the league champion, provided Tech and Miami take care of business elsewhere.

Like ABC, I'm playing it safe and predicting that the Dec. 1 game will the defacto Big East championship game. Barring unforeseen injuries, this year's Tech/Miami game should be the most competitive since 1995-1998, when the two teams staged classic battles.

The Rest

Syracuse is an unlikely pick for #4 in the league, but I put them there because of their schedule. If

you assume that the Orangemen are going to lose to VT, Miami, and Pitt, and they're going to beat Rutgers, that leaves three league games that will determine Syracuse's fate this year: WVU, Boston College, and Temple — and all three games are played in the Carrier Dome.

To finish #5, Boston College must take care of Temple and WVU at home. The Eagles can ratchet themselves up in the standings if they can win a road game at Pittsburgh or (more likely) a road game at Syracuse.

WVU's problem with finishing higher than #6 is that the Mountaineers' two big swing games, Boston College and Syracuse, are both on the road. WVU has lost their last two games at BC and their last three at Syracuse.

Temple will be much improved this year, but like WVU, their swing games are all on the road: Boston College, Syracuse, and West Virginia. If the Owls were playing two or more of those teams at home, I might pick them to be #5 or #6 in the league. One good thing for the Owls: all three road games are on familiar artificial turf.

And while Rutgers' recruiting may be improving, that doesn't provide them with immediate help, so they will still bring up the rear in the league.

Team Capsules

For more information on the Big East teams, including returning starters, schedules, and prognosis, see "Big East Team Capsules" elsewhere in this issue.

Big East Team Capsules

All the pertinent info on every Big East team, in an easily digestible format

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Here's a snapshot of each Big East football team, in order of predicted finish.

1. Miami Hurricanes

Returning Starters: 13 (5 offense, 8 defense). The Canes also bring back Najeh Davenport, Jeremy Shockey, and Clinton Portis, who are all first time starters but have significant experience.

Key Returning Players: QB Ken Dorsey, FB Najeh Davenport, RB Clinton Portis, 4 of 5 offensive linemen, CB Mike Rumph, SS Edward Reed.

Big Losses: WR's Santana Moss, Reggie Wayne, and Andre King; RB James Jackson, DT Damione Lewis, LB Dan Morgan.

Strengths: Quarterback and offensive line. Dorsey has a great grasp of the offense, and the line is deep and experienced.

Weakness: Defensive line. The Canes will be solid here, but they don't have any outstanding DL's, and the second string has no experience.

Prognosis: In addition to having great talent all the way around, the Canes are loaded at the two most important units on the team: offensive line and quarterback. If Dorsey gets hurt, all bets are off, but if he and the offensive line stay healthy, beating the Canes will be tough. New Coach Larry Coker is the wild card here. Is he going to be lousy, great, or somewhere in between?

Miami Schedule
9/1 @ Penn State
9/8 Rutgers
9/15 Washington
9/27 @ Pittsburgh
10/6 Troy State
10/13 @ FSU
10/25 WVU
11/3 Temple
11/10 @ BC
11/17 Syracuse
12/1 @ VT

2. Virginia Tech Hokies

Returning Starters: 15 (6 offense, 9 defense). The Hokies also return at least six very experienced defensive backups.

Key Returning Players: C Steve DeMasi, FL Andre Davis, RB Lee Suggs, FB Jarrett Ferguson, 8 defensive linemen, LB's Jake Houseright and Ben Taylor, CB Ronyell Whitaker.

Big Losses: MV.

Strengths: The defense and running backs. After feeling its way around last year, Tech's young defense has matured and should be ready to take charge. Lee Suggs, Jarrett Ferguson, Keith Burnell, and Kevin Jones are a great group of running backs.

VT Schedule
9/1 UConn
9/8 West. Michigan
9/22 @ Rutgers
9/29 Central FL
10/6 @ WVU
10/13 BC
10/27 Syracuse
11/3 @ Pittsburgh
11/10 @ Temple
11/17 @ UVa
12/1 Miami

Weaknesses: Offensive line and quarterback. Only DeMasi returns from last year's line. The new starters have varying amounts of experience and will be good in time, but beyond the first string, it gets very thin. QB is also a big fat question mark.

Prognosis: If Vick was still on the roster, the Hokies would be a shoo-in pick to win the league, because they have Miami at home. As it is, Tech will have to rely on the defense (which should be very good) and hope that a soft early-season schedule gives them time to find a quarterback and mold an offensive line. Tech needs to be careful at Pittsburgh, at WVU, and then get (and make) some breaks at home against Miami.

3. Pittsburgh Panthers

Returning Starters: 17 (6 offense, 11 defense). The defense in particular is deep and experienced, from front to back.

Key Returning Players: QB David Priestley, WR Antonio Bryant, DE Bryan Knight, a host of linebackers, CB Shawn Robinson, FS Ramon Walker.

Big Losses: QB John Turman, WR Latef Grim, RB Kevan Barlow, C Jeff McCurley

Pitt Schedule
9/1 ETSU
9/8 South Florida
9/15 UAB
9/27 Miami
10/6 @ Notre Dame
10/13 Syracuse
10/20 @ BC
10/27 @ Temple
11/3 VT
11/10 @ Rutgers
11/24 @ WVU

Strengths: Antonio Bryant and the defense. Bryant is a known quantity whose credentials speak for themselves. But the Pitt defense, despite finishing 29th in total defense and leading the Big East with 35 sacks last year (Knight had 11.5), is still flying below the radar.

Weakness: Running back. Pittsburgh does not have a single tailback with any game experience, and the position is up for grabs among a pair of redshirt freshmen and a handful of true freshmen.

Prognosis: While the schedule favors the Panthers (Syracuse, Miami, and VT are all at home), their defense will need to step it up if they want to have a shot at the Big East title. While Bryant is stellar, the Panthers lost WR Latef Grim and their running game, both of which took pressure off of Bryant. If the QB, running backs, and Bryant's fellow receivers don't step up, he won't be able to carry the load himself, and the Panthers will not be able to knock off Miami or Tech. If they want to justify their #3 preseason rank and continue to get respect, they need to knock off either Tech or Miami, and they need to take care of business against everyone else in the league.

4. Syracuse Orangemen

Returning Starters: 12 (6 offense, 6 defense). 7 of the 12 returning starters are on the offensive line and defensive backfield.

Key Returning Players: QB Troy Nunes, WR Malik Campbell, DE Dwight Freeney, LB Clifton Smith, SS Keeon Walker, and FS Quentin Harris.

Big Losses: RB Dee Brown, DE Duke Pettijohn, LB Morlon Greenwood, CB Will Allen.

Strengths: The offensive line has 4 returning starters and is anchored by 4 seniors, three of whom started last year. The Orangemen are also experienced in the defensive backfield.

Weaknesses: Just three — quarterback, quarterback, and quarterback. And the placekicker, Mike Shafer, is pretty bad, too (7 of 20 on field goals last year, including key misses in losses to Cincinnati and Boston College).

Prognosis: Freeney is a monster and a Big East defensive player of the year candidate, but the rest of the defensive line is first-time starters and inexperienced, so he may face double-teams. And the Orange are still hunting for a quarterback to replace Donovan McNabb, who left three years ago. With a schedule that includes home games against East Carolina and Auburn, plus road games against Georgia Tech, Tennessee, Pittsburgh, Miami, and Virginia Tech, the Orangemen will have difficulty extending their streak of 14 straight winning records. But with home Big East games against Temple, WVU, and BC, they've got the inside track on finishing fourth in the Big East.

Syracuse Schedule
8/26 GT (KO Classic)
9/1 @ Tennessee
9/8 Central FL
9/15 ECU
9/22 Auburn
10/6 @ Rutgers
10/13 @ Pittsburgh
10/20 Temple
10/27 @ VT
11/10 WVU
11/17 @ Miami
11/24 BC

5. Boston College Eagles

Returning Starters: 14 (5 offense, 9 defense).

Key Returning Players: WR Dedrick Dewalt, TB William Green, CB Lenny Walls.

Big Losses: QB Tim Hasselbeck.

Strengths: A defense that was decimated by injuries last year is now fairly deep and experienced. Green is a great runner, and the BC offensive line should be solid again.

Weaknesses: No glaring holes, other than a general lack of team speed and lack of inspired play.

BC Schedule
9/1 WVU
9/8 @ Standford
9/22 @ Navy
9/29 Army
10/6 Temple
10/13 @ VT
10/20 Pittsburgh
10/27 Notre Dame
11/10 Miami
11/17 @ Rutgers
11/24 @ Syracuse

Prognosis: BC's problem is that they lack fire in their bellies. They usually beat teams they should, but then they get walloped by teams like VT, Miami, and other bowl teams. The Eagles have rebuilt themselves from a gambling scandal, but they're still looking for a break-through victory. I'm not making the mistake of saying they'll get it this year, so look for them to finish fifth in the Big East. Green is a prize, and new starting QB Brian St. Pierre was a big-time recruit several years ago, but I think the Eagles will once again fail to get over the hump. They'll bring back 14 starters in 2002, though, so maybe then … but not this year.

6. West Virginia Mountaineers

Returning Starters: 13 (4 offense 9 defense).

Key Returning Players: QB Brad Lewis, RB Avon Cobourne, DT Antwan Lake, DT David Upchurch, LB Grant Wiley, LB Kyle Kayden.

Big Losses: 4 of 5 offensive linemen, WR Khori Ivy,

Strengths: Defensive tackle and linebacker. Grant Wiley was last year's BE Rookie of the Year and is a great linebacker.

Weaknesses: Offensive line and possibly defensive backs. WVU is rebuilding the OL, and last year, the 'Neers gave up 233 yards passing per game, 89th in the country. But the DB's reportedly performed well in the spring.

Prognosis: WVU is a great unknown that could finish anywhere from 3rd to 6th, or even 7th, in the league. Head Coach Rich Rodriguez has installed a wide-open shotgun offense, and former VT defensive coordinator Phil Elmassion has come in and installed the "attack" defense. WVU will be good in time, but they may not have the personnel yet to run either the new offensive or defensive scheme well. They're a work in progress.

WVU Schedule
9/1 @ BC
9/8 Ohio
9/15 @ Maryland
9/22 Kent State
10/6 VT
10/13 @ Notre Dame
10/25 @ Miami
11/3 Rutgers
11/10 @ Syracuse
11/17 Temple
11/24 Pittsburgh

7. Temple Owls

Returning Starters: 19 — yes, 19 — or even 20, depending upon which source you quote (9 offense 10 defense).

Key Returning Players: QB Devin Scott, RB Tanardo Sharps, WR Greg Muckerson, DT Dan Klecko, LB Chonn Lacey, SS Lafton Thompson

Big Losses: LB LeVar Talley

Strengths: Offensive backfield and defensive line. QB Devin Scott is experienced, RB Sharps had 1,542 all-purpose yards last year, and FB Jason McKie is good run-blocker who can catch. As for the DL, they're deep and experienced; the top 8 DL's have earned 19 varsity letters among them, an average of almost 2.5 letters per player.

Weaknesses: The left side of the offensive line is young and relatively inexperienced.

Prognosis: Temple doesn't have a wealth of game-breaking talent, but if they can play together and take advantage of their experience (18 of their projected 22 starters are juniors or seniors), they can rack up some wins. Unfortunately, their league games against teams they're trying to catch up to — WVU, Syracuse, and BC — are all on the road. The Temple defense, which in 2000 was 43rd in the country against the run, 28th against the pass, and 33rd overall, should do well. But the offense, in particular QB Scott, must pick up some of the load if the Owls want to win more than 3 or 4 games.

Temple Schedule
8/30 Navy
9/8 Toledo
9/15 UConn
9/22 @ Bowling Green
10/6 @ BC
10/13 Rutgers
10/20 @ Syracuse
10/27 Pittsburgh
11/3 @ Miami
11/10 VT
11/17 @ WVU

8. Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Returning Starters: 10 (5 offense, 5 defense). Two of the returning starters are projected as backups this year.

Key Returning Players: TE L.J. Smith, RB Dennis Thomas, CB Brandon Haw, SS Tarell Freeney.

Big Losses: QB Mike McMahon, a four-year starter, WR Walter King, OL Rich Mazza.

Strengths: Offensive line (which isn't all *that* good, but is a strength for Rutgers), defensive backs.

Rutgers Schedule
8/30 @ Buffalo
9/8 @ Miami
9/15 California
9/22 Virginia Tech
9/29 UConn
10/6 Syracuse
10/13 @ Temple
10/20 Navy
11/3 @ WVU
11/10 Pittsburgh
11/17 BC

Weaknesses: Defensive line and linebackers (in 2000, Rutgers finished 100th nationally in defense, 111th against the run).

Prognosis: New coach Greg Schiano is in the early stages of a rebirth of Rutgers football that is going well in recruiting, but must now pay some dividends on the field. Rutgers has some great recruits to lean on, including three running backs (led by Rikki Cook), some good defensive linemen (headlined by Davon Clark), and a top-notch QB, Ryan Cubit (son of the new offensive coordinator Bill Cubit). The new guys are good, but the problem is, they're *new*, and they'll get thrown into the fire early. Help should be on the way in future years, though, because Schiano is tearing it up in recruiting — his verbal commitments so far are even better than last year. This year, Rutgers has two built-in wins in Buffalo and UConn, but after that, it'll be tough. Home games against California and Navy provide other opportunities for wins, but that's about it, unless the Knights can pull an upset.

Inside the Numbers: Big East Media Predictions

We compare the Big East media predictions to where the teams actually finish and answer the burning question: just how accurate are these guys, anyway?

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Seeing this year's preseason predictions by the Big East media, and the fact that they had picked the Canes first for the seventh time in nine years, brought up the question: how accurate are those guys, anyway? And just as important, do they seem to have a bias for or against certain teams?

To answer that question, you would have to research the Big East media predictions and final Big East standings for 1993-2000, the eight completed years of round-robin play in the Big East. You would have to bounce the predictions off of the final standings, and maybe you could run some calculations to find out which teams were consistently underrated or overrated.

Well, this is "Inside the Numbers," and that's the whole point of this recurring TSL Extra feature: grab the numbers and crunch 'em.

Finding the numbers to write this article was no easy feat. The Big East final standings for 1993-2000 were easy to find, of course. I've got a Big East media guide from last year, and that takes care of that.

As for the preseason predictions, they were a little tougher to track down. I found some of them in old Hokie Huddlers, I got last year's from the Big East web site (www.bigeast.org), I grabbed a couple of years worth of rankings from the TechSideline.com archives, and a message board poster provided me with the preseason rankings for 1993 from a Hokie Huddler.

When all my research was done, I was still missing 1997 and 1999. I emailed Bill Roth, who graciously climbed up into the attic of his house and poked around, to no avail. As a last resort, I emailed John Paquette, an assistant commissioner of the Big East conference, who counts media relations among his duties. Not only did Mr. Paquette email me back within two hours, but he gladly provided the preseason predictions for 1997 and 1999.

So we're ready to rock and roll. Let's take a look.

The Data

As with most "Inside the Numbers" features, half the battle is presenting the data. I'll give you some interesting ways of looking at summaries of the data, and if you're interested in poking through the data yourself, I'll give you a link to a web page and a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that contain the data.

First, a definition of terms: "preseason prediction" or "preseason ranking" refers to where a Big East team was predicted to finish in the league. The source for preseason predictions are the Big East

media polls that are conducted every summer at the conference's Big East Media day, usually in late July or early August. The "finish" or "final standings" refer to where a team finishes in the Big East standings after the season is played.

Where They Start

Here's a breakdown of how the eight Big East teams fared in the preseason rankings from 1993-2000.

Big East Preseason Rankings

Team	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Avg.
Miami	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	**1.38**
Syracuse	2	5	5	1	2	2	3	3	**2.88**
VT	6	2	3	3	3	4	2	2	**3.13**
WVU	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	6	**3.88**
BC	3	3	2	5	5	6	5	4	**4.13**
Pitt	7	7	7	6	6	5	7	5	**6.25**
Rutgers	5	6	6	8	7	8	6	8	**6.75**
Temple	8	8	8	7	8	7	8	7	**7.63**

Note: preseason rankings are from Big East media rankings that are taken at Big East Media Day each year.

Worth noting:

· Out of the Big 4 — Miami, VT, Syracuse, and WVU — only Tech has never been picked to finish first in the league.

· Miami is the only team that has never been picked to finish in the bottom half of the league.

· With regards to preseason rankings, there is a huge chasm between the top 5 and Pitt, Rutgers, and Temple. While the top 5 have all been picked to finish as high as #2 at one time or another, neither Pitt, Rutgers or Temple has ever been picked to finish in the top 4. That changed in 2001 with Pittsburgh being picked to finish #3, but the 2001 data is not included in this report (because the 2001 final standings are not there to balance out the preseason rankings).

Where They Finish

Here's how the eight Big East teams fared in the final Big East standings from 1993-2000.

Big East Final Standings

Team	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Avg.
Miami	2	1	2	1	5	2	2	1	**2.00**
VT	4	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	**2.00**
Syracuse	5	3	3	1	1	1	4	4	**2.75**
WVU	1	4	4	4	3	4	5	6	**3.88**
BC	3	5	5	6	6	5	3	5	**4.75**
Pitt	6	7	8	5	4	8	6	3	**5.88**
Rutgers	7	6	6	7	8	6	8	8	**7.00**
Temple	8	8	7	8	7	7	7	7	**7.38**

Worth Noting:

- Virginia Tech is the only team that has never finished in the bottom half of the league. Rutgers and Temple are the only teams that have never finished in the top half of the league.

- The perceived dividing line between the top four teams in the league — Miami, VT, Syracuse, and WVU — and the bottom four teams — BC, Pitt, Rutgers, and Temple — is real. Teams from the top four have finished in the bottom half of the league just 4 out of 32 times (12.5%), and teams from the bottom four have finished in the top half of the league just 4 times. Pitt's apparent ascension and WVU's and Syracuse's apparent declines are altering that balance, but only time will tell.

- Syracuse's three straight first-place finishes (1996-1998) are the only time in league history that has been accomplished.

The Over/Under

The real item of interest in this article is comparing the preseason rankings to the postseason standings. Here you are:

Big East Preseason Rankings and Final Standings

Team	Avg. Pre.	Avg. Fin.	Avg. Dif.
Miami	1.38	2.00	-0.63
VT	3.13	2.00	1.13
Syracuse	2.88	2.75	0.13
WVU	3.88	3.88	0.00
BC	4.13	4.75	-0.63
Pitt	6.25	5.88	0.38
Rutgers	6.75	7.00	-0.25
Temple	7.63	7.38	0.25

Note:

Avg. Pre = average preseason rank;

Avg. Fin. = average finish in BE standings;

Avg. Dif. = Avg. Pre. - Avg. Fin

A negative Avg. Dif. Indicates a team is usually overrated by the Big East media; a positive Avg. Dif. Indicates a team is usually underrated.

Worth Noting:

- Most Underrated: Virginia Tech, which finishes on average 1.13 spots above their preseason ranking. The Hokies have *never* finished lower than their preseason prediction; all other Big East teams have.

- Most Overrated: Tie, Miami and BC, which finish on average 0.63 spots below their preseason ranking. This is not a surprise in Miami's case, because they're picked first almost every year, and given that, they're a lot more likely to finish lower than their preseason

ranking than they are to finish higher. As for BC, a majority of their "underrating" occurred from 1994-97, as the media took time to realize that the program was falling from the high perch of the Tom Coughlin years.

· Biggest Surprise: In 1993, WVU finished 1st, 3 spots ahead of their preseason ranking of 4th.

· Biggest Disappointment: In 1997, Miami finished 5th, 4 spots behind their preseason ranking of 1st.

· A Clear Crystal Ball: The Big East media's most accurate year was 1994, when 6 of the 8 teams finished exactly where they were picked to finish. Syracuse and BC were the exceptions (BC finished 5th instead of 3rd, Syracuse 3rd instead of 5th).

· Not So Clear: From 1997 through 1999, only one Big East team finished where the media predicted it would. Temple finished last in 1998, which the media correctly predicted.

· Sheesh: Eight years of ranking eight teams has produced 64 preseason rankings of individual teams. Out of those 64 rankings, the Big East media has been right just 18 times (28%).

The Data

The data links included below present the data in a different format than what you see here, so it's worth a look. You'll see year-by-year predictions, finishes, and the difference between the two for each team for each year.

You can download the data and view it, either as a web page, or as a Microsoft Excel 97 spreadsheet.

http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue010/bepredictions.htm

To download the data yourself in Microsoft Excel 97 spreadsheet format, head to this link:

http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue010/bepredictions.xls

(Right-click the link and do a "Save Link As" or "Save Target As" to save the Excel file to disk.)

Inside TSL: Crunch Time

Tech Sideline's head honcho looks to the horizon and sees ... the horizon.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

From where I sit, the next sixteen months will determine the future of Tech Sideline. I figure we've got two more football seasons for this business to either take off and be a raging success, or for us to decide to hang it up and go do something different.

As a business entity, Tech Sideline has made great strides in the last year alone. Revenue is up about 250% over what it was last year, but the problem with that is that last year's revenue was so low that it's not even worth discussing.

Even though we have pumped revenue up considerably, we've still got a way to go to break even. To give you some idea, we lost six figures last year as we established our business and weathered the dot-com collapse, and despite revenue rising considerably this year, we'll likely lose tens of thousands in 2001, barring a Christmas miracle at TechLocker.com. But overall, we're on a trend that clearly points towards next year (2002) as the year that we either break even or stop banging our heads against a wall.

Here's how it works: after much flailing around in the dot-com world, we have watched the trends and watched our own business, and to support it, we have set up three revenue streams: TechLocker.com, the TSL Extra, and advertising revenue.

TSL went full-time (as HokieCentral.com) back in August of 1999. We introduced TechLocker.com in November of 1999, and we spent the first year establishing it and ironing the bugs out. Then, in November of 2000, we added the TSL Extra. We have spent nearly a year working on the TSLX and improving it, all the while trying to build the subscriber base.

Along the way, we also added banner ads and pop up ads, in an attempt to build that third revenue stream, advertising. That hasn't gone very well. It started off halfway decent, but over the last six to eight months, third-party banner advertising has fallen off a cliff, and the revenue is so small now as to be negligible. Not to mention the problems that the ads (pop-up ads in particular) have caused with out readers. It has actually gotten so bad that last I heard, our ad company was going to drop us in favor of pursuing larger, more national sites. So to this point, the "advertising revenue stream" has been a bust.

We feel the best way to make good advertising revenue is to ditch the third-party banner ads and hire a dedicated ad sales person that can pitch our site to advertisers who want to reach Hokie fans. So we did just that, adding a full-time ad salesman in early August. Since he works for us, selling only our web site, our ad salesman can provide prospective advertisers with personal attention and can tailor ad packages to meet their specific needs and give them a lot of bang for the buck.

I've always thought that the thousands of Hokie fans who visit TSL on a regular basis are an advertising powder keg waiting to be detonated, and now that we've got a dedicated salesperson on the job, we'll find out if I'm right.

Where We Are and Where We're Headed

Here's a recap of how everything stands:

1.) TechLocker.com

The store is doing well, but not spectacular. It's slowly building a reputation for quality products and extremely fast delivery. As I detailed in "Inside TSL: What TechLocker.com Has Taught Us" in TSL Extra #6, we need to freshen up the product lines, and that job is almost done. We'll be introducing new products very soon, and the rollout will continue over the next two months, as we bring you more of what you want and need.

We're also working on making TechLocker.com more of a gift fulfillment center, with give-as-gift capability. Again, I've told you about that before (TSL Extra #6), and that capability will be in place well before the Christmas shopping season.

In short, over the next few months, TechLocker.com is going to get where we want it to be, and heading into 2002, it will be going full-bore.

2.) The TSL Extra

The TSLX is doing pretty well. On August 10th, we logged our 1,000th subscriber, and it continues to grow. After just ten issues, that's not bad, because the company goal was 750 subscribers in the first year.

But we really need it to reach 2,000 or 3,000 subscribers at a minimum before I consider it to be a success. The TSLX "give as gift" function is ready to put in place as I write this, and it should be done *very* soon (it's going to have to wait until this issue gets out, and then I'll be able to give it some time and finalize it). We figure that will give us a nice subscription boost, as the more enthusiastic of you send 1-3 subscriptions to friends as gifts.

In short, I'd like to hit at least 1500 subscribers by summer 2002, and at least 2000 subscribers by the end of 2002. Anything less than those two goals will (a) disappoint me and (b) be a bad thing for the company bottom line.

3.) Advertising

This is the great unknown. While the addition of our new ad salesperson will hopefully enable us to add significant advertising revenue, hiring him means that we have taken on another salary and the overhead associated with adding an employee.

The good news is that our new guy is a born salesman, and he also has experience working with us and selling advertising in the past. We dabbled in dedicated ad sales for a while in late 1999 and early 2000, and our "new" guy handled it for us back then, so he's familiar with the sites and the clientele, and he knows what he's doing. He can hit the ground running, more or less. He feels that he can quickly make enough in sales to cover his salary and expenses, and before long, he will be contributing black ink to the bottom line.

It may be a little late for him to take full advantage of this football season's potential for ad sales and sponsorships, but by mid-2002, he's going to be going full speed and will make the most of the 2002 football season.

Beyond the Numbers

As you can see, all signs point to 2002 as the year to make a go of this thing. TechLocker.com, the TSL Extra, and advertising will all have a full head of steam during the year 2002, and we'll know by the end of that year whether or not we're fighting a losing battle.

But the decision to continue forward with Tech Sideline goes beyond just the numbers.

I started this web site in March of 1996 as a once-a-week hobby, and I've watched it grow and mature for well over five years now. Back in the beginning, my goal was to have a popular, well-read, well-received web site. I enjoyed Hokie sports, and I enjoyed writing about it and having people read what I wrote.

But over the years, as it became too big to do as a hobby, I had to take it on full-time, and thankfully, that opportunity presented itself. Now the goal is different: it must become a profitable business. It is now what I do for a living, and ultimately, what we all do for a living must be profitable, or our opportunity to do it ceases to exist (at least, if you're in the private sector, that's the rule). You can't lose money forever.

But beyond the numbers, the simple truth is that Tech Sideline is approaching the end of its evolution. There's nowhere left to go, and there are precious few ways we can morph this business, if it doesn't work as it's currently structured. Sure, we can turn it into a pay site, we can start charging for recruiting information, we can do this or that, but whether or not we'll be willing to do all that is another thing entirely.

For a long time now, the road ahead has been long, but now I'm starting to see the end. I have always thought that the web site had great potential to be a successful, self-supporting business, and I firmly believe that we have structured it to do just that — succeed. If it doesn't, I think there's a part of me that is going to accept that I've done all I can, and that perhaps it's time to do something else.

Every year, for those of us who work on the web site and invest in it, the work and sacrifices associated with it increase. The traffic increases, and therefore the workload increases, we have to buy new servers and invest in other ways, and we have to give up a little bit more personal time to the monster. We do it because we love it, and we want to do this for a long time and see it succeed. But ultimately, you have to draw a line in the sand and say, "If I cross this line, and the sacrifices are still occurring, and the rewards aren't, it's time to quit."

The investors and accountants measure the sacrifices and rewards monetarily. I measure them in other ways, the large majority of them being personal. And as this business grows and matures, I feel that all of us are mentally drawing our line in the sand at the end of the 2002 football season. We don't talk about it, but if we did, I think that's the point in time we would all gravitate to. It's the time that makes the most sense, both financially and emotionally.

So What Now?

On our end, we'll keep doing what we're doing, which is improving the store, the TSL Extra, and selling some advertising … and giving it time. This football season is going to be very interesting here at Tech Sideline. I can't wait to see what August-December brings in the way of store sales, subscriptions, and ad sales.

Or maybe I *can* wait, ha-ha. But no, I've got a good feeling about things. I like where we're headed, and I expect to see some good numbers. Profitability? Not yet. Progress? Yes.

But I find that one of the biggest obstacles we battle is that old "The Internet is free" mindset. I see it every day: some of our busiest message board posters and most frequent site visitors are not TSL Extra subscribers, and they've never shopped at TechLocker.com.

The reasons why people don't spend money on certain things are complex and varied, but in our case, many times, it just never occurred to them. After all, ESPN.com, USAToday.com, and all those newspaper web sites are free, so why should TSL require some sort of … contribution? These folks are not freeloaders who expect something for nothing — they're good people who love Tech Sideline, and it just never occurred to them that this site costs massive amounts of money to run, and therefore requires significant revenue to stay afloat.

Combating that mindset takes a lot of time and effort. As TSL Extra subscribers, I count the thousand or so of you, as a group, among the ones that "get it" and understand this web site a little better. And in this very article, you have also just been treated to some details and facts that I would not post out on the free area of the site, which by definition gives you a better handle on what's going on than the non-subscribers.

So, on your end, I'm asking you to be TSL's foot soldiers and to spread the word and work against the Internet-is-free mindset. Do it quietly (the last thing I want is people screaming on the message board "TSL IS LOSING MONEY, SO YOU PEOPLE BETTER PONY UP!"), but be persistent and persuasive.

The next time you're talking to a friend, and TSL comes up, and your friend says, "Yeah, I love that web site!" just reply casually, "Me too. Do you subscribe to that TSL Extra thingy?"

If they say no, you know what to do: tell them to give it a shot. If they can't afford it, that's one thing, but if they say, "No, I'm too busy to read it," then just say, "Well, you can give it as a gift you know. You ought to send it to your brother/mom/cousin, the big VT fan." (But don't do that until the "give as gift" function is ready.)

Next time you see a friend who's talking about buying some new Tech stuff, ask them, "You ever try TechLocker.com?" If they say no, work on them. Tell them about those insanely fast delivery times.

The next time you hear someone complaining about Christmas shopping, tell them, "Do some of it at TechLocker.com. You can send a sweatshirt to your brother/mom/cousin in Hampton without even having to get out of your chair."

Work on 'em, folks. We're setting things up on our end and turning up the volume on our marketing efforts, and with your help, we can get over the hump — and hopefully, never have to talk about this stuff again. I don't like talking about it.

The clock's ticking, folks. It's crunch time. Let's get it done.

Inside TSL 2: Short Takes

TSLX comments, Will Hunt's future, and how Jack Bogaczyk once cut me some slack.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

Letter to the Editor

Will,

You asked for comments on TSLX, so here goes:

I've been reading your site since fall of 1997, and I still value it as my prime source of VT sports info. I say that because HC.com quickly surpassed Hokie Huddler back in '97, but I still get the newspaper, and I'm going to make some comparisons to that info source.

You mentioned in TSLX #9 about TSL access to VT personnel. I don't see your lack of access as a detriment when I decide to buy TSLX or view your site. I value the "outsider" point of view and relatively unmuzzled voice. I say relatively only because you are a conservative person and you are playing your official position / interaction with VT very carefully so as to not damage future relations. There has been a mellowing of your comments about official VTAA - at least what comes out in articles now versus, say 2-3 years ago. Anyway, I have hokiesports.com the newspaper (what a stupid name) to give me the "official" position and TSL to give me the real story.

Regardless of what some say, length does matter. TSLX is a monthly product, and should be meaty by nature. It is not to be read through in a quick sitting. I expect thoughtful reasoning and analysis, which TSLX has shown. 10+ page articles are not undesirable. Being monthly you have time for retrospection and deeper analysis of events. Keep that up - do NOT trend toward USAToday blurbs.

Length also contributes to my perceived value of TSLX. The 12-16 page Huddler (10-14 pages text, say 12 average) gives me 33 issues or ~400 pages for $38. TSLX @ 12 issues x 40 pages is 480 pages for $25 - no question it is a great value. And on TSL web site you cover the quick turnaround info - game review, etc.

I have absolutely no problem with the use of lots of numbers in the articles. Of course the P.E. after my name on work-related correspondence condemns me as a card-carrying nerd. Your audience includes many graduates of a fine technical institute - don't dumb down the analysis or shallow-up the explanation on our part. As in school, please show all work for partial credit.

A suggestion for the number blitz is the expanded use of graphics / charts instead of text tables of numbers. The smoothed curve of bball attendance (#8, pg 32) was outstanding.

Specific comments on issues:

TSLX#1 - thank you for dropping the broken story format. Continuous stories are SO much better.

#7 - Bowl attendance: shocking to me that only 15 out 70 CFA bowls in last 3 years sold all their tickets. So we can expect only 5 of 26 to sell-out this year. Tells me there are 5 - 10 too many bowls out there. Also shocks me that WVU has become a poor travelling fan. Maybe a few years of

no bowling as Rodriguez gets his troops assembled will re-wet their appetite. And not selling out the last Sugar Bowl (Miami vs. Florida) - any fan (even a fair weather Hurricane) should go to the ultimate bowl destination - Big Easy! I will have a core body temperature of 55 degrees F before I miss a Sugar Bowl with VT playing.

#9 - Much better look to .pdf version I printed. Definitely more professional.

Sorry for the long note as your busy season starts up. Thanks again for improving the quality of my (VT) life!,

Arthur (Coach) Dailey
BSCE '81

Hunt: Shuffled Down the Depth Chart

As a journalist, I'm not supposed to "root" for any given player over another, but I've got to admit that I'm pretty disappointed that Will Hunt didn't throw well in early practices and is headed for a redshirt year.

I interviewed Hunt way back in issue #3 of the TSL Extra, and he is a great kid and a great inter-view, so I want to see him do well at Virginia Tech. Like many people, I root for the underdog, and in the three-horse freshman QB race, Hunt was certainly the underdog. Bryan Randall is a highly-rated recruit from in-state, so he received a lot of publicity, and Chris Clifton, another in-state prod-uct, generated quite a bit of buzz among the Hokie faithful as a dark horse QB prospect.

Hunt, on the other hand, was an early commitment from Springdale High School in Springdale Arkansas, far out of state, so he didn't get as much recognition from Hokie fans or the Virginia press.

I have seen loads of highlight film on Will Hunt, and it is a pleasure to watch. I viewed Hunt's fifteen-minute highlight tape from his junior year, and it was play after play after play of Hunt scrambling to avoid the rush (Springdale's offensive line was not very good Hunt's junior year) and then peeling off a long broken-field run or nailing a pass on the run. He is a born playmaker with amazing pocket presence, sensing the rush and avoiding it without really seeing it, and he is a shifty, elusive runner in the open field.

I also viewed an hour-long tape commemorating Springdale's 2000 season, Hunt's senior year. Hunt's older brother is a film major at the University of Arkansas, which is just minutes from Springdale, and he was allowed to travel with the Springdale team and film their season. He pro-duced the one-hour tape from hours and hours of highlight film, and it tracked Springdale's unde-feated regular season and their journey deep into the state playoffs, where they eventually lost.

The tape was very entertaining, and it included more classic Hunt highlights — scrambling, throw-ing, and generally making plays. One unusual play that stood out was a long run by Hunt down the sideline where he was cut off by a defensive back who had the angle on him. Instead of running out of bounds, Hunt lowered his shoulder and laid the defender out on the field with a vicious hit. On the tape, the fans can be heard oohing and aahing after Hunt knocks the DB onto his butt.

But the one thing that really cast Hunt in the underdog role among the three freshman QB's was the fact that he came from a running offense at Springdale High. Former Springdale Coach Jarrell Williams, a 36-year veteran who retired after coaching Hunt's senior season last fall, relied on the run, and according to sources close to Hunt, "never" worked with Hunt on his passing.

Hunt is a self-taught passer, and despite playing in a running offense that featured two great tailbacks and a great running fullback, he threw for over 2400 yards in his last two seasons at Springdale (147-339, 43.3%, 2,430 yards, 20 TD's, and 12 INT's).

But his lack of experience in a passing offense finally caught up with him. When the three true freshman QB's arrived for second summer session, Hunt excelled in the "paper" portion of their training, acing written tests on blocking schemes and reading defenses. But when it came time to participate in passing drills, read the defensive alignment, and make the throws, Hunt was unable to make the transition from executing on paper to executing live. He's a smart player, so it will come with time, but it takes experience, and more importantly, the Hokie coaches have to have the time to teach him — and in fall practice, that time does not exist. Spring is the time for teaching, and fall is the time for preparing for games.

So Hunt has fallen down the QB depth chart and is destined for a redshirt year. As I write this on August 16th, Grant Noel has solidified his hold on the starting job, and behind him, Clifton and Randall are battling it out for the #2 spot. Jason Davis and Hunt are listed as tied behind them, which means that Davis will barely see the field, and Hunt will redshirt. The loser of the Clifton/ Randall battle will probably redshirt, too.

For Hunt, the future is uncertain. As a speedy, heady player, he is a candidate to be moved to another position, but the same can also be said of Randall and Clifton. So only time will tell. Perhaps Hunt's performance in the classroom portion of his early development will convince the coaches to work with him on his passing in the spring.

It's no doubt disappointing for Hunt, who has been working very hard since Michael Vick announced he was leaving Virginia Tech back in January. From January to his arrival on campus in July, Hunt has been studying the Virginia Tech playbook, following workouts provided by strength and conditioning coach Mike Gentry, and gearing himself up to battle for the QB job. For seven long months he worked out alone at home, but in barely one week of live practice, he has been pushed down the depth chart, while his fellow freshmen remain in the limelight.

From here on out, we will see what Will Hunt is made of. Once a Big Man on Campus in Springdale, Arkansas, he will now have to toil in obscurity as a redshirt, working, watching, and waiting for his next chance. Some players never make the adjustment and either fall behind or quit the team. Others work hard, bide their time, and become future stars.

Which will it be for Will Hunt? No one knows, but as I noted, I'll be rooting for him.

"Pops" — Exit, Stage Left

After 27 years with the Roanoke Times, columnist Jack Bogaczyk departed the paper in early August. I contacted Jack and requested an interview for the TSL Extra — my, would *that* have been interesting — and Jack agreed to it. But mere days before the interview, he had to cancel it.

His new job is PR Director for the Roanoke franchise of the National Basketball Developmental League (NBDL), a team that goes by the incredibly silly name of the Roanoke Dazzle. (I'm trying to picture a 6-10, 250 pound center saying, "I'm a Dazzler.")

Jack couldn't do the interview with me because his new employers told him, in Jack's words, "not to do anything that will mention (or perhaps enrage) the newspaper, potential NBDL fans, etc." So an interview with the TSL Extra, in which I would have asked Jack some *interesting* questions, was ruled out.

Jack was perhaps mischaracterized as Act 2 of the much-maligned Bill Brill, whom he replaced about ten years ago. Brill has a deserved reputation as an ACC homer whose first inclination when discussing Tech sports was to criticize. Many fans viewed Bogaczyk in the same light as Brill, because Jack occasionally wrote columns critical of Tech sports or Tech sports administrators.

I personally didn't care much for Jack's opinion columns. His columns were often chock-full of cute phraseology that required you to peruse the same paragraph two or three times before you could figure out what he was trying to say, and that was annoying. But he was an outstanding journalist. When he set out to write a factual article that required research and quotes, he produced top-notch work — clear, concise, correct, and packed with useful information.

But the only reason I bring all this up is because Jack, despite being blasted frequently by the TSL message board posters, was always very good to me personally. He was very cordial and very helpful on many occasions.

No big deal, you say? Well, I thought it was, because I definitely got off on the wrong foot with Jack, but he moved beyond it and treated me with respect and often wished me well.

In April of 1999, Bogaczyk was being discussed on the (then) HokieCentral message board, and some posters started to make fun of his name. They were trying to figure out what it rhymed with.

I've got a friend here in Radford who calls Bogaczyk "Bo-Zack," and not in a malicious way — my friend just can't figure out how to pronounce his name. While reading the message board thread, I thought of my friend and "Bo-Zack," and for some reason that is still a mystery to me, I chimed into the thread and said something like, "I think it (his name) rhymes with Prozac."

Silly, stupid, and unprofessional. I committed the egregious sin of making light of a man's name, which is one of the things that a person holds most dear. I once read a quote by a famous poet, I don't remember who, who said, "When talking to someone, call them by name. The sweetest sound to a person is the sound of their own name." People are proud of their names, and you don't mess with them.

I got my first-ever email from Jack within ten minutes. He called me out on the carpet for what I had done. He told me that he didn't expect much from the HokieCentral masses, but he certainly expected me, the webmaster of the site, to conduct myself in a more professional fashion and to not stoop to something so low and insulting as making fun of a man's name.

He was right, and I apologized, feeling sheepish. We traded a few more cordial emails, and that

was that.

Over the next two years, Jack and I emailed each other and even talked on the phone from time to time, and he surprised me by always being very nice and wishing me well, despite my idiotic faux pas in April of '99, and despite the criticism he often took on the HC/TSL message boards. Like most mainstream journalists (this will surprise you), Jack doesn't like the fact that TechSideline.com doesn't have media access. Journalists take the access issue very seriously, and I have yet to encounter a print writer who doesn't think I should be allowed to interview players and coaches and attend practices.

Point being, Jack's not a bad guy. As I said, his writing style as a columnist never appealed to me. But he always tried to be honest, and he was always nice to me, despite me not giving him any reason to be.

See you next month.