

# ***TSL Extra***

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Photo of tight end Keith Willis roaming the sidelines during the 2001 season. Photo by Michael Ingalls. Cover photo copyright 2002 Maroon Pride, LLC.

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## TSL EXTRA

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Dear Readers:

“Is it maroon? Because I don’t have a maroon one.”

That’s what Shawn Scales asked me when I told him that I have one of his old Tech football jerseys. We were just getting ready to conduct a phone interview a few days ago. Scales was a receiver for the Hokies from 1993-1997, and those of you who remember him know that his story is a compelling and interesting one. We retell it this month, and bring you up to date on where he is now.

I was a big Shawn Scales fan years ago, and I even got to meet him once. I was interviewing Bill Roth during the summer of 1997, and he was showing me around the Jamerson Athletic Center at Tech, when we bumped into Scales, and Roth introduced me.

After a brief chat, we parted ways, and Roth said, “He’s going to have a big year this year.”

It turns out Scales didn’t. He injured a tendon in his ankle early in the 1997 season, and that injury helped a promising year go very, very bad for the Hokies.

Shortly after meeting Scales back in 1997, I had the opportunity to acquire some genuine game-worn VT jerseys. I got road jerseys for Al Clark, Torrian Gray, Marcus Parker ... and a Shawn Scales home jersey. A maroon one.

“Yes, it’s maroon,” I told him. “Do you want it? I’ll send it to you.”

“No, that’s all right, man. You keep it. Enjoy it.”

We went ahead and conducted the interview. Scales was, as always, a good interview. He’s a smart guy, a good talker, and doesn’t mind discussing his personal life — God knows his background has been public knowledge for quite a while now.

It was interesting for me to finally get to interview a guy that I respected and admired from years ago. At the end of the interview, I got his address, so I could send him a copy of the article. I’m going to send the article, yes, but I also think that when he opens the package from me, it will include a genuine, game-worn Shawn Scales jersey. The maroon one, because he doesn’t have one.

The Shawn Scales story is this month’s attempt at a feel-good article. Wrapped around that, we’ve got a spring football wrap-up, an interesting look at tight end stats from the last decade or so, and three articles that will leave you feeling, I admit, a little unsettled and disturbed. We’ll take a look at the Big East bowl tie-ins, some thoughts on the future of Division 1-A football, and a not-so-funny look at an alternate reality where the Hokies are playing football in Conference USA.

Enjoy issue #18, but it will be easier to do so if you save the Shawn Scales and tight end articles for last.



# Spring Football Wrap-up

Some final thoughts on  
Spring Football 2002.

*by Art Stevens*

**Have you ever noticed how many different things people can see when looking at the exact same thing? You see half empty, I see half full. You see slow, I see fast. You saw Virginia Tech play this spring, I saw Virginia Tech play this spring.**

You have your opinion. I have mine.

Is mine any better than yours? Nope. Is mine any more "qualified" than yours? Nope. Mine, through no other reason than somewhat dumb luck, just happens to get a chance to get published.

For starters, I think the Hokies can earn their 10<sup>th</sup> straight bowl bid in 2002. It will NOT be easy. Tech needs to win seven games. Even though the Big East bowl situation is a bit murky at deadline time, it's safe to say that if the Hokies do get bowl eligible they will be selected to go somewhere. Years of "traveling well" will do that for a team.

A year ago, an 8-4 season was seen as somewhat of a disappointment. This year, I think 8-5 would be a very good season, given the strength of the schedule and the holes Tech has to fill.

I see six sure victories, three sure games where victory will be difficult (that's a polite way of saying sure losses) and four "tossups" that can be won or lost. Does that add up to 13? This season is soooooooooooooo long.

Sure W's: Arkansas State, Temple, Rutgers, West Virginia, Western Michigan and – tah dah! – Virginia.

Difficul \*\*\* oh, heck with it, losses: Miami, Syracuse, Texas A&M.

Tossups: Pittsburgh, Boston College, LSU, Marshall. They're not listed in any particular order. Pitt's a lot less scary without Antonio Bryant, Marshall is VERY scary with Leftwich, BC would be a sure L if Green hadn't bolted (but he did), and LSU's Josh Reed turning pro early might have been the best offseason news for Tech.

Keep in mind that most teams seem to find a way to win one they shouldn't and also lose one they shouldn't.

Now, here are some thoughts by position after spring observation. Again, only opinion and no better or worse than yours.

**QUARTERBACKS:** Randall was indeed a much improved quarterback. While that is a pleasing thought, it would have been more a cause for alarm if he hadn't improved than it is a cause for celebration that he has. He had a spring practice, his first. Daggone right he should be better.

We shouldn't immediately assume he's passed Grant Noel, because we didn't get a chance to see if Noel had improved. His coaches said he did, but his knee injury kept him out of the spring game. Noel's a tough nut, he may well be able to come back without surgery. If he's there and healthy on the first day of practice, his status shouldn't change for missing the spring game. If he's not fully ready, it's another story.

Randall showed he can step in and take over. He's mobile, he's smart. He still rushes things under pressure, and you HAVE to hit a receiver who is as open as Shawn Witten was on that one play. I'm not ready to concede that he's

ahead of Noel, but until Noel is A-OK, this is Randall's team. If you'd have said that last fall, I would have cringed. Now I see that as more than acceptable and, with continued improvement over the summer, quite possibly a good thing.

Marcus Vick? He needs a year, plain and simple. It would behoove the Hokies to have Noel and Randall for 2002 and then let Randall and Vick shoot it out in the spring. Doesn't matter if it is Randall-Noel or Noel-Randall. The Hokies need both.

Too bad we didn't get to see Will Hunt. Tech doesn't like him enough to have him in the top two, but it likes him enough to keep him at quarterback. He may be the 2002 backup, so let's hope that shoulder heals.

**BACKS:** Lee Suggs sure looked good at the end \*\*\* oh, wait. That wasn't Suggs. Hope he and Keith Burnell enjoyed their hijinks. Funny guys.

Tech is so solid at offensive back it isn't funny. Teams would kill to have a Suggs-Jones-Humes trifecta at tailback. As well as Jones did a season ago, Tech missed the short yardage mastery of Suggs. Keep your fingers crossed for health, this unit could be really special. With 13 games, there's a good chance of two 1,000-yard rushers.

The Doug Easlick-Josh Spence duo sure won't be Jarrett Ferguson at fullback. How can they be now? Ferguson started four years and was valuable in more ways than you can count. But the dropoff won't be too bad. The shovel pass lives and Easlick, assuming he holds on to No. 1, will catch his share of passes out of the backfield just like Ferguson.

Backs, and that includes the fullbacks, are the clear strength of this team.

**RECEIVERS:** Is Fred Lee as good as advertised? Finally we'll see, since Lee has qualified

and will join the team in the fall.

The receivers looked much better in the spring game than they did through spring practice. They caught the ball, which doesn't sound like too much to ask. There are plenty of bodies here, given the move of Burnell, Justin Hamilton and Chris Clifton in the spring. This could turn into a strength.

But I won't believe that until I see a couple of these guys step up and make some catches they shouldn't make, not just the catches they should make. Not every throw is going to be perfect, and a team needs an "oooh and ahhhh" catch a couple of times a game. Someone has to make that catch.

Ernest Wilford looked great on that one catch in the spring game, where he turned a short toss into a 30-yard gain with some good running. That's a positive. Wilford is a hard worker and a talented kid who needs good things to happen. He's an all-star if his confidence level ever catches up to his ability.

**OFFENSIVE LINE:** I didn't really notice this unit in the spring game. That's a very good sign. Offensive line, deep snappers, holders \*\*\* they're all positions you tend to notice only if they screw up. Randall was pressured some, which is to be expected. It didn't look as if there was exceptional pressure. He had enough time most of the time.

Jake Grove, the "shrimp" of the line (the rest of the starters pack more than 300 pounds onto their frames), has star qualities. He could be outstanding. The potential of young starters James Miller and Jon Dunn is exciting, too.

Having Suggs back will make any line look a little better, because he doesn't need a block held as long as most backs.

No catches for the tight ends in the spring game. There's a surprise. Until they become a bigger part of the passing game, they'll be

considered part of the offensive line. Not that that's a bad thing.

**DEFENSIVE LINE:** Nathaniel Adibi looked great in the Gator Bowl and didn't slow down in the offseason. He won the President's Award for outstanding leadership in spring drills and was a force in the spring game.

And he's just one fourth of the Hokies' excellent crew of ends. Cols Colas, Jim Davis and Lamar Cobb give the Hokies some serious wealth here. They can pressure a backfield from both sides and then have fresh bodies to do it again on the next play if they choose. Colas' improvement over the years has been amazing.

The tackle slot figures to change when Jimmy Williams and Jonathan Lewis join in August. THREE of the five tackles Tech lost – David Pugh, Chad Beasley and Derrius Monroe – were among the eight Hokies drafted this year. No way you lose that and don't have some dropoff. The hunch here is it won't be as severe as it could be. Williams was a prized JUCO recruit who will step right in. Kevin Lewis, Mark Costen and the younger Lewis will enable Tech to go with the two-deep rotation it likes to use.

The defensive line in 2003? Oh, my.

**LINEBACKERS:** Anyone else leave the spring game big-time impressed with Blake Warren? His dad was a standout tight end with the Redskins for years. This kid sure looks like the next Ben Taylor.

This was another position that got creamed and there's bound to be some dropoff. Taylor, Jake Houseright and Brian Welch got almost all the snaps inside last season.

Vegas Robinson will be the star this season. Everyone says Mikal Baaqee will play alongside him, but don't count out Warren. He got the Paul Torgersen Award for top newcomer on defense, and it was easy to see why, watching him play.

Mike Daniels was impressive in his few starts last season at whip, and having a spring and summer at the position will help considerably. Tech was caught with guys who could play the run well or the pass well but not both before moving Daniels from free safety. Added size will make him a better run defender. He's sure not afraid to stick his head in there.

Like the defensive line, the linebacking corps could be seriously good in another year. This year, it won't be as good as it was in 2001. It won't be bad, either.

**SECONDARY:** When DeAngelo Hall arrived at Tech last summer, only 17 years old, a man who knows Tech football very well said to me, "This kid will be the best to ever play here."

Keep in mind that this was only a few months after Michael Vick became the first pick in the NFL draft.

"Yes," I was told, "I haven't forgotten that. Michael Vick is a gem, a rarity, a wonderful player. But DeAngelo Hall will be the best to ever play here."

I still don't think he's at Vick's level. Not yet. But I'm starting to see where my pal was coming from, and I may be singing his tune in a year. DeAngelo Hall is awfully darn good.

Ronyell Whitaker made third-team All-America last season and this is not in any way a knock on Ronyell, but I think he's the third best DB behind Hall and free safety Willie Pile.

In other words, this backfield is strong, too. And deep. Eric Green and Garnell Wilds can go in with almost no dropoff at the corners. Vince Fuller is a heck of a guy to have as your backup free safety and some dude I'd never heard of, a walk-on named Jackson Dismukes, was all over the place in the spring game.

Rover sure sounded like a concern earlier this summer when Burnell was moved there briefly.

Kevin McCadam did a bangup job there last season. The staff now seems comfortable with Billy Hardee and Sam Fatherly, so we'll trust their judgment.

**SPECIALISTS:** I think Carter Warley returns to form. His back isn't bothering him like it was, and he'll be able to kick more in practice. He had a good spring, when the ball was placed. You may have noticed a problem with snapping and holding in the spring game. The head coach will make sure his special teams coach gets THAT straight.

I'm eager to see just how good Nic Schmitt is at kicking and if he can give Warley a run when he arrives in August.

Vinnie Burns is a terrific kid, but I do think it's about time for him to get a tad more consistent punting the ball. He came in talking about a 50-yard average. Let's get to 40 or so first and then work toward 50.

**COACHES:** This isn't a knock on Rickey Bustle, because he never got to guide Randall through a spring practice. But I do like what Kevin Rogers – Tech's first new assistant in three years – has done. His coaching and teaching style seems to suit Tech's quarterbacks, and I'm very curious to know if Noel has made the same progress under Rogers as Randall has.

Unfortunately, thanks to his knee injury, we may never know.

## Where is Division 1-A Football Headed?

The college football landscape could change drastically in the next few years.

*by Wayne Crump*

**My interest in this subject started last summer, when I joined the TSL Extra and read Will and Jim Alderson's articles "The Money-Makers" and "The Big East/ACC Merger."**

Following those articles, several news announcements awakened me to some trends involving the NCAA's Division 1-A. These trends bring up more questions than answers but are worthy of putting into some sort of thought pattern.

Chronologically let us start at the beginning.

In "The Money-Makers" series of articles in TSL Extra issues 6-8, 1998-1999 figures were given that listed profits and loss margins for the major colleges. These numbers show many college athletic departments, especially in the Big East, virtually awash in red ink. This generally concerns me not one iota. Being involved in non-profits, I can easily state that the last thing non-profits do is save money. It is frequently assumed that it is better to over spend, thus challenging your benefactors. If the red ink listed in the 1998-1999 year were ongoing, then many of our brethren would have already given up the ghost to bankruptcy.

Jim Alderson's column "The Big East/ACC Merger" in TSL Extra issue #6 had a more foreboding ring to it. It revealed that both Wake and Duke were on life support, at a level I had

never dreamed of, life support approximating that of Temple. Wake's ongoing efforts to drop ACC football were stunning news, and something I have been able to unofficially substantiate from a second source.

This was followed by a rumor that the D1A requirements had been modified.

Published statements appeared from both the Big 12 and the SEC that the BCS allotment wasn't fair. They began to insist that they have 12 schools and get one slot, while the ACC has 9 and the BE has 8. There was even a proposal in the press that the Big East and the ACC playoff for one BCS slot. I did not write this off as standard political posturing.

Notre Dame then turned down membership to the Big 10. Public opinion was that they wanted to keep their TV package. A close friend of mine, active in ND athletics, told me a different story. He said that ND had surveyed the Big 10, viewing 50,000 student campuses and 110,000 seat stadiums, and backed off. What did surprise me, (and appeared to be missed by virtually anyone else), was ND's public written press release. In it was the statement "The only current D1A conference that ND has a lot in common with is the ACC". Since this was in the written document, one MUST assume that the statement is intentional. Was ND trolling for a new conference alignment? As far as the Big 10 was concerned, why add ND now? Then I got to thinking, 11 + ND equals that magical number of 12.

Rumors surfaced that the PAC 10 was talking to BYU and a Colorado school (probably Colorado). 10 + BYU + UC = 12 schools. This rumor has been confirmed as of this month.

Thinking that recently the ACC had almost gone to 12 schools, but decided to only expand by 1 (Miami, which declined), it became apparent that every major conference in the country seemed to be targeting 12 schools.



Rumors continued about new D1A qualifications, yet I could not pin them down. Rumors that reduced D1A from around 120 schools to 87, or 89 or 91. Then came the half time show on an early Oklahoma broadcast. The Big 12 Commissioner openly stated that the goal was "84 teams". The announcer replied with "84?" The commissioner then confirmed "84" as the magic number. I began to think, "What makes 84 magical?" 84 is an interesting number. It is only divisible by itself, 1, 42, 21, (obviously none are useful), 7 and 12. Now 12 conferences of 7 schools would make little sense, but 7 conferences of 12 do — 8 BCS slots going to 7 conference champions and the top-ranked runner up. There was the magical number of 12 again.

Within the same week I was watching a Wyoming game, and at half time the Commissioner of the WAC publicly stated that at that point in time that half the WAC could not qualify to meet the new regulations for D1A! As for myself, I'm still asking "What regulations?"

Wake Forest's already troubled program then lost \$3.1 million a year coming in from RJ Reynolds Tobacco (16% of the department's gross income).

Duke (in a newspaper release), asked the ACC to be omitted from their Out of Conference scheduling procedure, in order for them to schedule 3 or 4 D1AA schools. While I have no idea how much speculation was involved in the newspaper report, this does not sound like a school who thinks that they have a future in D1A.

On their official internet site, the Big Sky Conference states that if the new regulations do go into effect, they plan to cancel their plans to move the conference up into D1A.

Finally I found the regulations, and the reasons. Officially touted as a humanitarian effort, the requirements for D1A were supposedly being strengthened to keep all the good programs from migrating out of D1AA. I believed that for

probably less than one second.

## The New Division 1A Requirements

The new D1A requirements, as proposed by the NCAA Football Oversight Committee, published 8/3/2001, are a real eye opener.

1. While the maximum of 85 grants-in-aid per football program will continue, the minimum support allowed would be 90% averaged over 2 years (76.5 would mean you could have 76 one year, and 77 the next). This is major for some smaller schools. Halftime numbers given on a televised ACC game listed Duke as only having 52 or 53 grants-in-aid, and Wake was listed in the very low 60's. Both troubled programs will now have to dig deeper just to hold onto their status quo. For Duke, adding 25 scholarships will be no small matter.
2. Annually play a minimum of 5 regular season home games against D1A schools. This sounds like no problem, but if you are Marshall and are scheduling Virginia Tech at 3 road games vs. 0 home, that type of deal will be much more difficult. It will be harder for the bottom feeders of the division to operate, much harder. It also makes one wonder about Duke's request to the ACC involving more D1AA games.
3. Sponsor a minimum of 16 sports, with at least 6 for men and 8 for women. That effectively means that the Akron's and Wake's have to add two additional non-revenue sports. For financially strapped programs, this is major!
4. Offer a minimum of 200 athletic grants-in-aid to student-athletes on an ANNUAL basis. (The private and smaller schools tried to put in a \$4 million cap, but they lost. That would have allowed Duke to only have to provide about 105 to 110).

5. Annually demonstrate an average attendance of 15,000 for the five home D1A football games. That shouldn't be a problem, but I have seen individual year numbers that would put Akron, Wake, Duke, Temple and Rutgers in jeopardy.
6. Eliminate all waivers for membership criteria. (Currently the criteria allow for various attendance numbers but are around 17,000, OR you can be a member of a conference where a minimum of 6 schools meets criteria). Oh, and for you younger kids, when D1A and D1AA originally split, the exclusion clause was commonly nicknamed the "Wake Forest" rule.
7. The effective date for these requirements is 8/1/2004.
8. Bowl qualification will be 7 wins in a 12 game season, 6 in an 11 game season (no change here from the present rules).
9. In a 12 game season, a D1A school can play a D1AA school every year and have it count as a win towards bowl qualification.
10. Bowl certification will require a \$1 million payout as a minimum.
11. Bowl certification will require a minimum of 75% of stadium capacity over the last 3-year period. This will EXCLUDE revenue gained by contractual agreements (minimum ticket purchases) from the participating schools! Would anyone like to guess how many bowls fold in 2004-2005?
1. There will now be a clear divisional separation between D1A and D1AA schools. D1A schools will have to schedule more sports, and give out a higher number of grants-in-aid. Georgetown WILL have less in common with UCONN than it now does.
2. There will be a significant number of schools that do not meet the attendance criteria. While Duke, Wake, and Temple's figures were WAY up for the year 2000, (the last year posted by the NCAA), they are still only averaging around 17 to 21 thousand a game. At least 10 schools look virtually hopeless. A few schools like Wyoming (at 14,800) can probably sell a fair number of \$1 end zone tickets to get over the hump, but schools like Kent (at 7,468 a game) have no hope at all.
3. While the 30,000-seat stadium is no longer a requirement, a significant number of schools may not meet the scheduling requirements. How many times does Idaho think they can persuade UCLA to come to Boise for a visit in their stadium? You have to remember that many of the bottom feeders of D1A will no longer exist in the division. For smaller schools, finding 5 home field D1A opponents when Akron and Kent are gone could really become problematic.
4. Schools that are primarily men's schools may have a significant problem finding enough head count to field that many women's sports, (Navy immediately comes mind).
5. How can a bowl possibly afford to invite schools like Virginia, Syracuse, or Wake Forest? These schools habitually show up with 3,000 or less fans. The 75% seating capacity requirement is not only going to kill a lot of bowls, but kill bowl

## The Ramifications

Superficially this doesn't appear to mean very much. In actuality it does.

hopes for a significant number of D1A schools.

To no one's surprise, these new requirements don't seem to be creating a lot of comment in places like Blacksburg, Morgantown, or Knoxville. These requirements will have no direct effect on those schools. However, should you visit places like the WAC, or Mid-American, the changes are on everyone's mind. Some boards are having occasional meltdowns over it. The Big Sky seems especially miffed.

Then of course I asked another question. What is wrong with D1AA? Then I got an ominous answer, "Everything." D1AA is broke and no one wants to fix it. Actually college football is broke. Look at the per-game attendance figures below which compare the oldest and most recent years currently posted on the NCAA web site.

- D1A 1976- 30,047, 2000- 43,630 an increase of 45.2 percent!!
- D1AA 1978- 10,113, 2000- 8,618 a decrease of 14.8 percent
- D2 1978- 5,544, 2000- 3,400 a decrease of 38.7 percent
- D3 1978- 2,629, 2000- 1,877 a decrease of 28.7 percent

Essentially, not playing in College Division D1A is like placing your football team on life support. While the 15 to 1 difference between fans at Michigan vs. Kent looks gigantic (105,000 vs. 7,500) the difference between the top and bottom of D1AA are of biblical proportions. Southern U and South Florida both have around 27,000 at home games, and Yale's attendance is 23,142. At the bottom you find such stellar performers as Stony Brook at 672, and St. John's at 812. Friends, there are NO commas in those numbers and they are not misprints.

The top schools in D1AA have an attendance per game that is 50 times higher than the bottom feeders of the division. For those who care, Georgetown averages 1,644 per game. Some of these numbers aren't even good high school numbers!

## So What Does it Mean to Tech?

Well for starters, I think that we will see a requirement, very soon, that will force the BCS conferences into having 12 schools as a minimum. This should come in 2004.

Two avenues exist for regional D1A football. Either the upper tier of the BE will be absorbed into the ACC, or both conferences will expand to 12 schools. In the BE this will be over the bodies of the Seton Hall's of the world but that will not be important. Unfortunately, if both conferences are to keep their regional flavor and remain separate, pickings look pretty slim. There are Army, Marshall, East Carolina, Central Florida, and perhaps Louisville and Cincinnati.

Personally, I look for Wake and possibly Duke to leave the ACC in the near future, at least for football. I think Miami will be in, possibly Notre Dame, Syracuse, and Tech. The thing about this is that, for Virginia Tech, it could become a two-edged sword. When the ACC was voting to add 3 schools, the strongest supporters for Tech were Wake and Duke. Their goal was to minimize travel costs. If one or two schools leave the ACC, that leaves more openings for Tech, but if those schools are Tech's primary supporters, that may leave less.

The gutted Big East Football Conference would then be replaced with something else. The new conference will possibly have more of a nationwide flavor, centering around the current CUSA. It would have to contain such far-flung members as Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Tulane.

Each conference would have a championship game, and eventually it would lead to a playoff of sorts. I kind of see 7 conferences as follows:

1. The Big 12 (as is)
2. The Big 10 (add in someone like Syracuse, ND or the likes)
3. The SEC (as is)
4. The PAC 12 (add in BYU and Colo State)

for fun)

5. The Mountain WAC (Mt West, what is left of the WAC, and a couple of central teams)
6. The ACC (minus Wake and Duke, with top tier Big East teams and maybe ND)
7. The CUSA/BE remainders

Please don't read my opinions into this article. Personally, I think things are OK as is, and I see no advantage to this change.

I also don't think that they can cut it down to exactly 84 schools. Kent, for example, takes virtually nothing away from Tech and UCLA, and gives the Hokies and others someone to occasionally beat up on. They cost upper-level teams neither bowl slots nor media exposure.

On the downside, there are true financial problems for some institutions. 37 D1A schools lost an average of \$1 million on football last year. The division between the haves and the have-nots continues to grow. Personally, I have great remorse in seeing another generation of smaller colleges head into the major league extinction that captured Washington and Lee, Georgetown, Chicago, and the Carlisle Indian School in times past.

I think Duke and Wake are positioning themselves for D1AA. I also think that the Big East kept Temple in until 2004 because they feel that after 2004, the NCAA will have removed Temple from the conference. I also feel that this explains several of Virginia Tech's schedule changes in the future.

## The Nightmare Season

A scary look at what Tech's 2002 football season might look like, if the Hokies were in Conference USA.

*by Jim Alderson*

**A recent post on the TSL Football Message Board that caught my eye talked of Tech possibly exploring a move to CUSA due to the onerous financial requirements imposed by the Big East.**

After the laughter subsided, I got to thinking about what a football season might look like had Tech joined CUSA back in 1995. Here's a look at an alternate 2002 football season.

I originally set out to write this piece as a dark comedy. While it is indeed dark, I'm not sure it's comedy. If it scares the hell out of you, sorry, but it should make you appreciate what the Hokies have.

### **August 25th: @ Oklahoma**

Oklahoma routed Virginia Tech 41-0 in the Eddie Robinson Classic. The fifth-ranked Sooners scored early and often while limiting the Hokies to only 135 yards in total offense. Oklahoma coach Frank Beamer won his first game coached against his alma mater, where he also coached from 1987-93. Beamer praised the effort put up by the Hokies, saying, "They really got after us. They've got some talent that worried us. Virginia Tech should have a good season."

Beamer called coaching against his alma mater "difficult, because I really love Virginia Tech, and might still be coaching there if things had gone a little differently. We have had a chance to do

some things here at Oklahoma that weren't available to us at Virginia Tech," a reference to the national championship Beamer's Sooners won in 1999. Tech coach Gary Darnell called the game "A learning experience that should help us down the road in CUSA play." Virginia Tech Athletic Director Sharon McCloskey noted that the \$500,000 payday received by Virginia Tech would help ease budgetary pressures.

### **August 31st: @ LSU**

A raucous Tiger Stadium crowd of over 90,000 roared their approval as eight-ranked LSU smashed Virginia Tech 49-7. The deafening atmosphere appeared to have an effect on Tech's play, which was acknowledged by Hokies' coach Gary Darnell during his post-game remarks, saying, "We don't play in front of atmospheres like this."

Tech Athletic Director Sharon McCloskey said that she was appreciative of LSU agreeing to schedule the Hokies in a three-for-one deal that would have Tech again visiting Tiger Stadium in 2004 and 2006 before hosting LSU in 2015. McCloskey added, "It gives us a chance to bring a big-time team to Lane Stadium."

### **September 11th: West Virginia**

Keith Burnell ran for 142 yards and Jason Davis threw for a touchdown pass as Virginia Tech notched its first win of the 2002 season, defeating West Virginia 27-24 in a Wednesday night game played before a Lane Stadium crowd of 35,000.

Tech re-claimed the Black Diamond Trophy, although the future of the rivalry between the two schools from neighboring states remained in doubt. West Virginia AD Ed Pastilong said that while he would "love to continue this excellent series, our priorities are our MAC schedule, which includes our season-ending rivalry with Marshall, as well as out-of-conference games against more traditional powers than Virginia Tech. West Virginia joined the MAC following the

dissolution of the Big East when Miami, Syracuse and Boston College joined the ACC in 1999.

## **September 21st: @ Penn State**

Kevin Jones rushed for 227 yards and three touchdowns as seventeenth-ranked Penn State defeated Virginia Tech 34-14. Tech coach Gary Darnell said that he "was very glad to see September coming to a close," a month in which the 1-3 Hokies had played three games against ranked opponents, all on the road.

AD Sharon McCloskey defended playing an out-of-conference schedule including so many road games against BCS powers, saying, "It was necessary for budgetary reasons."

## **September 28th: @ East Carolina**

Virginia Tech opened CUSA play by beating East Carolina 31-17 in a game marred by an on-field fourth quarter fight between the two bitter, border state rivals. Tech coach Gary Darnell said that while the bench-clearing melee was unfortunate, "In a rivalry this heated sometimes things get out of hand, and, after Virginia, this is the biggest game on our schedule, considering we recruit so much against ECU."

## **October 8th (Tuesday): @ TCU**

Virginia Tech defeated TCU 28-16 on a Tuesday night game in Fort Worth.

## **October 19th: Army**

Virginia Tech remained undefeated in CUSA by knocking off Army 27-7. Tech won the CUSA Cadets trophy for the third straight time. A Lane Stadium crowd of 30,000 watched as the corps of both schools paraded on the field before the game.

## **October 26th: UAB**

Virginia Tech won its fourth straight game,

defeating UAB 24-14 before a Lane Stadium crowd of 28,000. Tech's record improved to 4-3, 4-0 in CUSA.

In other Tech news, men's basketball practice opened. Coach Bobby Hussey claimed that he finally had enough talent, after six straight losing seasons and second-division finishes, to compete in CUSA.

## **November 2nd: Memphis**

Memphis upset Virginia Tech 35-21 before a crowd of 26,000 at Lane Stadium. The Tigers under first-year coach and former Virginia Tech assistant Ricky Bustle surprised Tech defenders by throwing the ball 60 times, wearing down slow Tech defensive backs.

The turnout was Tech's lowest football attendance since 1992. Tech coach Gary Darnell expressed disappointment in the small crowd, saying, "It was a Saturday afternoon game on a beautiful day and there should have been more fans in Lane Stadium." Darnell acknowledged that student apathy continued to be a problem for his football team, but said, "All we can do is play."

## **November 9th: @ Louisville**

Louisville beat Virginia Tech 34-27 and took over first place in CUSA and the inside track to the Liberty Bowl. Tech dropped to 5-5, 4-2 in CUSA.

In other news, the BCS announced that it had renewed its contract with ABC through the 2009 season. BCS Chairman and Big XII Commissioner Kevin Weiberg said that the controversial BCS, which determines a college football champion, would continue to match the champions of the five BCS conferences, the ACC, SEC, Big 10, Big XII and Pac 10, plus three at-large teams. CUSA Commissioner Mike Slive, who called it "Just another example of college football's elite getting richer at the expense of the non-BCS leagues", denounced the plan.

## **November 13th (Wednesday): Cincinnati**

Cincinnati defeated Virginia Tech 33-10 on a Wednesday night game shown on ESPN2. Tech coach Gary Darnell said of the loss, "I hate to blame the schedule, but we did have to travel on a short week." AD Sharon McCloskey agreed that it [playing on only three days rest] had been very difficult for Tech, but justified scheduling the contest, saying, "At least it was televised."

## **November 22nd (Friday): Southern Miss**

Friday night college football came to Blacksburg as Virginia Tech defeated Southern Miss 28-23. The game, televised by ESPN2, drew only 21,000 fans and was played amid bitter controversy. The game was played opposite a home playoff game at nearby Blacksburg High School, and the Bruins administration had denounced Tech for scheduling a high school game, with Blacksburg principal Alfred Smith claiming, "Friday night should be left for high school."

Tech Athletic Director Sharon McCloskey defended the Friday night game, saying, "It is necessary for Virginia Tech to receive the television exposure that is vital to recruiting. We are not in a BCS conference that gets the regular Saturday slots, so we have to take what we can get."

## **November 30th: Virginia**

Tailback Lee Suggs rushed for 136 yards and true freshman quarterback Marcus Vick passed for two touchdowns as tenth-ranked Virginia defeated Tech 38-14 for their eighth straight win in the series, continuing their possession of the Commonwealth Cup. Tech finished its season with a record of 6-7.

The Wahoo victory marked the last time the teams would play at the end of the season. The series was moved at the behest of Virginia coach George Welsh, whose 11-2 team will play Miami in Charlotte next week for the ACC Championship. The veteran coach had said he

wanted a week off before playing a "much bigger and more important game than this one." Welsh, 71, added that he had no plans for retirement, saying he would continue to coach "as long as we keep winning and dominating recruiting in our state."

## Big East Bowl Tie-Ins

The Big East has three bowl tie-ins, with fingers crossed for five.

*by Jared Barringer*

**Jacksonville? Been there, done that. Two years in a row, in fact. Nice enough place, more fun the second time around. Let's not get carried away, however.**

Phoenix? Never been there, never done that, would like to see the place at least once before death comes calling. Syracuse fans will tell Tech fans they should have seen it LAST YEAR but, hey, can Tech help it if its long history of supporting bowls works in its favor?

Those are two of the three places Big East teams know for sure they can head for bowls after the 2002 season. The other sure thing right now is a Bowl Championship Series (BCS) game, which means a trip for the league champion to Miami (well, Ft. Lauderdale), New Orleans, Tempe or Pasadena. Nothing lousy about any of those trips.

But what about beyond those three? Are Big East teams in "bowl trouble" for 2002, considering the league at press time didn't have any others locked in?

Not necessarily. Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese is confident his teams will have places to play if they get bowl eligible. The league lost its tie-ins with the Music City Bowl and the Visit Florida Tangerine Bowl, eliminating two bowls relatively close to the Big East schools.

"We have our annual meeting in mid-May," Tranghese said. "One way or another we'll

know where we are. Bowls are important to our schools. This is all about opportunity and recruiting."

Bowls are indeed important to schools. Ask anyone at Virginia Tech, which has a streak of nine straight bowl appearances, if all that postseason success hasn't changed things in Blacksburg. If you're unsure, check an aerial shot of facilities then and facilities now. Bowl revenue, plus increased revenue from the support of a quality football team, makes a large and very noticeable difference.

Basketball coaches get judged on whether they make it to the NCAA tournament. Football coaches get judged on bowl appearances. Paid, too. Most contracts include hefty bowl bonuses and Frank Beamer's is no exception. He stands to gain an extra \$200,000 if Tech gets into a BCS game.

A vote in late April has a chance of altering the bowl scene dramatically. NCAA presidents will vote whether to lift a moratorium on the number of bowls that can be in business.

Most think the moratorium will be lifted. It is not certain.

"It is a hot debate and a couple of presidents want to go to war with this," Tranghese said. "For a variety of reasons, some people have felt there should be a limit on the number of bowls. Those in conferences don't think there should be a moratorium."

Tranghese couldn't discuss ongoing negotiations, but if the moratorium is lifted, the Big East figures to have five tie-ins again very quickly.

Numerous sources said the league will enter into deals with bowls in Charlotte and San Francisco. That will give the league two bowls in the east, two bowls out west and one BCS bowl.

For obvious reasons, a league likes to have its teams play in bowls that are as close to the



league's geographic region as possible. Getting to Jacksonville, for instance, is easier for Tech fans than getting to Phoenix. Getting to Charlotte will be easy for any team in the league. Some fans will travel anywhere, but more fans will travel if driving is an option.

San Francisco isn't a driving option for any team in the Big East, but the area is enough of a tourist attraction to draw more fans than would fly, say, to Boise, Idaho.

If the moratorium isn't lifted, things are much more complicated.

Six bowls are competing for one vacancy on the current bowl schedule. All signs point to Charlotte being approved to take that spot, which would be very, very good for the Big East.

That doesn't mean the league would be stuck at four. Several bowls operate without tie-ins so they can take whatever available team they want for their game. In theory, if all the Big East teams manage to get bowl eligible, they can all find a place to play.

But lifting the moratorium sure would make some folks breathe easier.

Bowl tie-ins are relatively new. Not that long ago, only a few bowls had specific tie-ins. The Rose Bowl, for instance, would match the Big Ten and Pac 10 champion.

"It was chaotic then," Traghese said. "People were making deals on the first weekend of October. You were getting some wrong teams in the wrong bowls."

The current system allows for assurances but also eliminates some variety. That's how Tech ended up in the Gator Bowl two straight years. If you don't get into a BCS game, the Gator Bowl is a very good option, but how many years can a team go to the same bowl before its fans get tired of the area?

Coaches have their eye on the bowl scene. They like to know what they're playing for before the season begins.

"Our league feels very assured they're going to have five bowl ties-in, at least," Tech Coach Frank Beamer said. "I don't think there's any question about that."

## Shawn Scales: A Life of Adversity

Shawn Scales has been fending for himself for a long time.

*by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com*

**When you think of great receivers in Virginia Tech football history, names like Carroll Dale, Ricky Scales, Sidney Snell, Mike Giacolone, Donald Wayne Snell, Mike Burnop, Antonio Freeman, Bryan Still, and Andre Davis come to mind.**

You typically don't think of Shawn Scales, but in 1996, Scales led the Hokies in receiving, with 30 catches for 510 yards and 4 touchdowns. In the wake of Bryan Still's departure for the NFL after the 1995 season, Scales became Jim Druckenmiller's favorite target, and in addition to those regular stats, he hauled in a TD pass from Druckenmiller in the 1996 Orange Bowl.

Scales was a redshirt junior in 1996, and in 1997, his season — and college career — were cut short by injury. He was injured in the fifth game of the 1997 season against Miami of Ohio, in a 24-17 loss that started a disastrous finish to what turned out to be a train wreck of a season.

Scales' 1997 injury was originally diagnosed as a sprained ankle, but that diagnosis was later changed to a "displaced tendon" — an injury whose mere name is painful — and he never made it back into playing shape, despite logging a few minutes in the Gator Bowl at the end of the 1997 season.

But what many Hokie fans remember Shawn Scales for is not his football career, which was solid but not history-making stuff, but rather, his life. Living in a home with a mother who was

addicted to drugs and a brother who dealt them, Scales somehow made it out of those circumstances, into college ... and on to a relatively normal life.

So where did he go after he left Tech, and where is he now? We'll get to that in a minute, but first, let's go back to the beginning.

### **"It Was Either That, or Stay Home and Starve All Day"**

Shawn Scales is from Prince William County, Virginia. His father left home when Scales was two years old, leaving Scales with his mother and his older brother, Raymond.

But in reality, as he got older, Scales was more alone than that. His mother was doing drugs, suffering an addiction that would span decades, and when Raymond matured, he started dealing. That left Scales home a lot, to fend for himself, from an early age.

In 1988, when Scales was twelve years old, he started asking his middle school coach, Richard Fry, for lunch money. Fry started to sense that something was wrong in the Scales household, and after a discussion with his wife one night, Fry invited Scales over to his house for dinner.

The dinner turned into Scales spending an entire weekend at the Fry house. Then later, another weekend, and another. And in January of 1989, in the middle of his ninth grade year at Woodbridge High School, Scales called Fry and told him that he "needed to get out." When Fry showed up at his door, Scales was waiting with a suitcase.

Scales lived with the Frys from January of 1989 to the end of his tenth grade year, in mid-1990. When the Frys moved to Manassas, Scales stayed with his stepfather during his eleventh grade year (his mother wasn't there), and during his twelfth grade year, he lived with the family of his friend and high school basketball teammate, Brion Dunlap.

Having been exposed to the drug culture at such a young age, Scales could have easily fallen into it, but he didn't. He looked around himself, saw what was happening to the people around him, and ran away from it, living on the kindness of friends and coaches for years, never having a home of his own.

"At that time, it was probably just my way of finding a nicer, more comfortable place to be," Scales said of his quasi-nomadic existence, in a recent interview with the TSL Extra. "The fact that it was tough didn't really bother me. I really didn't have a choice. It was either that, or stay home and starve all day. I was there at home, by myself, quite a bit."

His escape from a destructive lifestyle surrounded by drugs was partly a demonstration of his determination and force of will, and partly happenstance. Scales told Washington Post reporter Angie Watts in 1996, "I saw where the people close to me were headed and I knew that it was a short-lived life, and one that I didn't want to be a part of."

But he also admitted to the TSL Extra in our interview that he just wasn't cut out for that life. "See, my brother was really outspoken. He wanted to be the center of everything, so it was easy for him (to be a part of the drug culture). I was a very quiet person, didn't say a whole lot. To be in that business, you can't be a quiet person. You have to speak out, and I wasn't that type."

"But the thing that I did do was play basketball. And I played it well for my age. So that was my outlet. And the other thing that I did was, I went fishing all the time. So I was never around when they were doing all that drug activity."

During his time at Woodbridge High, Scales received support from many different people that he met along the way. There was Edwina Drake, Scales' high school English teacher, who gave him \$25 a week; Drake actually gave the money to Scale's basketball coach, Will

Robinson, who passed it on to him, but Scales knew where it came from.

There was Coach Robinson, who was the first to tell Scales, in the ninth grade, that he could earn a college scholarship if he applied himself. There was Woodbridge AD Don Brown, who once gathered money from faculty members to send Scales to an optometrist to get contact lenses that he needed.

And when Scales, who developed into an all-state wide receiver and defensive back, failed to qualify academically out of high school, people in the Woodbridge and Manassas communities pitched in thousands of dollars to help Scales pay the \$12,000 tuition to Fork Union Military Academy for a year.

## On to Tech

Scales attended FUMA for the 1992-1993 school year, played football, and wound up getting a scholarship offer to Virginia Tech, a place he fell in love with the instant he saw it. He redshirted during Tech's 1993 season, and then injuries and a stint on academic probation slowed his 1994 and 1995 seasons.

In 1996, though, with Antonio Freeman and Bryan Still gone to the NFL, Scales stepped up and became Tech's top receiver and Druckenmiller's favorite target. Scales and Cornelius White each had 30 receptions that season, but Scales led the team with 510 yards (17.0 per catch) and 4 TD's.

Against Pittsburgh that year, he had 3 catches for 95 yards and 2 TD's, which came in a two and a half minute stretch and turned a 17-14 deficit into a 28-17 lead; he caught 4 passes for 71 yards in a 21-7 road victory over Miami; and he scored Virginia Tech's last TD of the regular season when he took a 17-yard reverse into the end zone against Virginia.

He also led the Hokies in kickoff returns, with a 26-yard average. The diminutive Scales (5-11,

191 pounds) had proven himself to be a playmaker, and he was looking forward to his senior season.

At that point, he was thinking about the NFL. "I was really thinking that. I was to the point where I was feeling confident in my ability to play the game. I caught the ball well, and I was returning kicks well."

The 1997 season started out well. In the first four games, with the Hokies going 4-0, Scales caught 10 passes for 217 yards (21.7 yards per catch) and 2 TD's.

In the fifth game, against Miami of Ohio, Scales was having another good game, catching 3 passes for 81 yards, but then disaster struck. He was injured with what was diagnosed as a sprained ankle, but when the injury persisted, his ankle was re-examined, and the diagnosis was changed to a detached tendon in the ankle.

Scales was done for the season. He battled back and rehabbed and played in Tech's crushing 42-3 Gator Bowl loss that year, catching one pass for 13 yards, but he never completely healed during the 1997 season.

## The NFL and Beyond

Scales' Virginia Tech career was over, and thus began a multi-year odyssey that has seen him spend time with the San Francisco 49ers (fall of 1998), the Pittsburgh Steelers (fall of 1998 to fall of 1999), and the Frankfurt Galaxy of the World Football League (summer 1999).

He signed with the Niners as a free agent in 1998, and he lasted until the final cut. The Steelers picked him up, put him on their practice squad for the 1998 season, and then assigned him to Frankfurt, where he spent the 1999 season. Frankfurt won the World League championship that year, and Scales still holds the World Bowl game and career records for kickoff return average (he returned 3 kicks for 107 yards in the 1999 World Bowl game, averaging

35.7 yards per return).

"Football-wise, I thought the experience was good," he says of his three months in Europe. "The facilities that we had were great, so I had places to go and relax and be by myself when I needed it. Personally, I thought it was good for me, because I had never been out of the country, and you read about other places, but you usually don't get to see them."

But injury reared its ugly head again, and it would cost him another shot at an NFL career. And when he returned for Steelers' training camp in the fall of 1999, he wasn't full speed. "When I went into camp with the Steelers," he recalls, "I had tendonitis in my Achilles tendon, and that's detrimental for a wide receiver. So I wasn't real thrilled about what was about to happen. It was inevitable. There wasn't anything I could do. Again, I went until the last cut."

He signed briefly with the Calgary Stampeders of the Canadian Football League in 1999, and signed for just a few days with the Albany Firebirds of the Arena League in 2000. But mostly, he just knocked around, working for Wal-Mart and doing other such jobs.

Scales felt as if his football career was over, but then he tried a stint with the Prince William Monarchs of the Mason Dixon Football League, a semi-pro league that has 17 teams in a 7-state area in the mid-Atlantic.

He tore it up. In the 2001 season, Scales dominated the league from the wide receiver position. He only played in seven games out of the ten-game season, but he led the league in receiving with 46 catches for 1,128 yards and 19 touchdowns. Prince William QB's had 32 touchdowns last season, with Scales catching well over half of them.

Teams in the MDFL, as it is called, only play in front of several hundred fans at a time, but averaging close to 25 yards per catch and nearly 3 TD's per game, says Scales, "Put the

taste for the game back in my mouth.”

Scales tried out with some Arena Football teams, but was not able to make a roster, and in early 2002, he caught on with the Richmond Speed of arenafootball2.

And then, an old friend visited. That’s right: an injury, in just the third game of the season.

“Injuries don’t come freakier than this,” he recalls. “I’m running a route, and when I planted to make a cut, my foot got stuck in the turf. One part of my leg went in one direction, and another part went in another. Nobody even touched me. I tore the ACL. They said I probably have a grade 1 MCL tear, too, but they tested that, and it’s pretty strong, so it’s not the big deal, the ACL is.”

Another injury, in a career full of injuries. Scales is starting to get the point.

“I’m really leaning towards just hanging up the shoes. I rehab well. I know that I could come back from this strong, because I’m mentally tough. But I’m 29, I haven’t had a real solid career. It would be two years before I could rehab and then develop anywhere, so I’m thinking, ‘What’s the point?’”

## The Future

Scales is now at Osbourn Park High School in Manassas, where he is working in the Security office and helping out coaching football and basketball, the two sports he is so good at and loves so much.

“A buddy of mine (Osborn Park football coach Brian Beaty) wanted me to coach. He asked me to come up here, and I decided to, and they found a place to put me. I’m helping coach both football and basketball.

“I have a really good rapport here at the school with the kids. They all look up to me, they know where I’ve been, and where I’m coming from.

They look up to me as a role model, so I’m really thinking about hanging up the shoes and just being a coach and at some point, teaching.”

There’s just one small snag with that. Scales doesn’t have his degree from Tech yet. “I’m still one class short (from a degree in Human Nutrition and Foods). I’m in the process now of trying to get it done. The class I need to take is only offered at Tech. I’m working on some things, because I want to get some other certifications while I’m doing that.”

The fact that the class is only offered in Blacksburg poses a bit of a problem, but Scales will get that figured out.

“I’m not worried, because I’m still young. The only thing is, I have to find a career. I have an idea of what I *want* to do and what I’m *going* to do, but now I just have to get there. And part of that is taking that class (and graduating).”

Scales was once asked to speak at a Woodbridge High School graduation, in 1997, five years after he had graduated from there. He considered it to be a great honor, but he also knew that it was his status as a Virginia Tech football player that led him to that honor, not just his ability to rise up from his past.

“I thought, if I wasn’t playing football anymore — because that’s how they saw me — then how would I handle that? I worried about that.”

Now that football, barring something miraculous, is out of his life, Scales is about to find out what it will be like to not be playing anymore. The good news is, both his brother and his mother are doing well. Drug addiction is a never-ending thing, but both of them have been clean for a while.

Raymond, who once called Shawn his “hero” during Scales’ time at Tech, finished serving a prison term for drug-related two years ago, and to this point, he is handling his return to society well.

"I can't say enough things about my brother," Scales says. "For someone who was locked up for seven years, you really think they become institutionalized and can't survive out here anymore. But I've gotta give it to him. The man has done wonders.

"I got him a job at Wal-Mart two years ago. I told him up front that I didn't know how Wal-Mart was about hiring convicted felons, and I told him to just talk to them and be honest. And now, he's done so well with Wal-Mart that I can't stand it," he says with a laugh. "He's been working for them going on two years now, and he's got himself a brand new car, and he lives in a townhouse that he's paying for by himself, so he's really established himself back in society.

"The first six months (after his release), I was worried, because he was telling me, 'Sometimes it's really tough. You just want to pick up the phone and make that one call.' But he has fought that temptation off. He's big in church, and he and I talk quite a bit about his past, to keep him level. He lives right around the corner from me in Culpeper."

Scales' mother, Louise, who has suffered from drug addiction for over 30 years, has changed the focus of her life after all these years.

"Mom's doing well," Scales says. "She has cleaned up quite a bit, and I'm very impressed with her, also. I feel good about her future, because I think now it's more important to her to keep her family around. At one point, I wasn't sure about that, because she was trading us off to do whatever she wanted to do. I'm not saying we weren't a priority for her, but when you're addicted, that addiction is your first priority. But now, we're more of a priority, and she wants us to be around more often. She's doing very well."

Life hasn't been easy for Shawn Scales. But through it all, he has learned to be self-reliant, and after what he has been through, nothing scares him.

"It's definitely made me stronger, and it's made me smarter, too," he says of his background.

"I said a long time ago that I was going to write my own destiny and set my own future. No one can tell me that I'm going to wind up in the streets. No, you set your own life."

## Inside the Numbers: Tight End Performance

Virginia Tech tight ends are blockers first, receivers second. We examine the numbers.

*by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com*

*Editor's Note: this article is presented in single-column format because of some tables that are included*

For years, Virginia Tech football fans have been calling for the Hokies to throw the ball to the tight end more often. Tech fans see outstanding tight ends like Jeremy Shockey (40 receptions for 519 yards and 7 TD's) of the 2001 Miami Hurricanes, or Pete Mitchell of Boston College, who played from 1991-1994 and holds the BC career record with a whopping 190 receptions ... and they think, "Hey, why doesn't Tech do that?"

During the tenure of former VT offensive coordinator Rickey Bustle (1993-2001, with a one-year break in 1994), nary a Hokie Hotline radio show

went by that either Bustle or head coach Frank Beamer wasn't asked, "When is Tech going to throw more to the tight end?"

The cry started in earnest during the 1995 and 1996 seasons, when Bryan Jennings was the starting tight end, and Hokie fans felt that his considerable talents as a receiver were underused. Jennings was a 1992 Parade All-American coming out of Jefferson Forest High, but in his four-year Tech career, he caught just 35 passes for 462 yards and 4 TD's. For comparison purposes, Shockey outdid that last year alone, and Mitchell had nearly 2,400 yards receiving and scored 20 TD's in his great career.

After the departure of Jennings, from 1997-1998, the tight end position was used as a receiving option even less than before. But with the emergence of Bob Slowikowski and Browning Wynn during the 1999 season, the Hokies began to use the tight end more than they did in the mid-90's, or at least, more effectively. It seemed that every time Wynn or "Slow" caught a pass, it was a long gainer for a first down.

Wynn and Slowikowski are gone now, and with Bustle's departure and a new offensive coordinator in Bryan Stinespring, the tight end position will once again come under focus in the 2002 season.

Hokie fans feel the winds of change coming in the Hokie passing game, and they wonder how profoundly it will affect the Tech tight ends. Is this the year that the tight end position finally catches 20 passes or more in a season, for the first time since 1994? Keith Willis, the heir apparent to the position, is a gifted athlete who might have the talent necessary to pile up receiving numbers like never before seen from a tight end during the Beamer bowl era.

Only time will tell if the VT tight ends will continue to serve primarily as blockers for the running game. But as the 2002 season approaches, heralding a new offensive era at Virginia Tech, it's worth taking a look back at exactly what the Tech tight ends have done during the Beamer bowl era (and the Ricky Bustle era), from 1993-2001.

The numbers — or lack thereof — won't surprise you, but it will give you a frame of reference for evaluating whether the Hokies are really "throwing it to the tight end more" during the 2002 season and beyond.

## Some Bullet Points

Before we delve into the statistics from the 1993-2001 time frame, here are some interesting notes about Virginia Tech tight ends:

- Tech's record holder for receptions in a season is current radio analyst Mike Burnop, who was a tight end at Tech. Burnop caught 46 passes for 558 yards and 2 TD's in 1971.
- Burnop is also the career receptions leader for Tech tight ends. He played from 1970 to 1972 (back when freshmen weren't eligible), and he had 90 receptions for 1,141 yards and 5 TD's. He ranks seventh all-time in passes caught, behind six wide receivers. Steve Johnson, who played tight end for four years from 1983-87, is Tech's second most productive tight end ever, with 84 catches for 1,058 yards and 8 TD's.
- In 1987, Frank Beamer's first season as head coach at VT, Johnson caught 38 passes for 475 yards and 3 TD's. Since then, no Tech tight end has caught that many passes in his *career* under Beamer.
- Since Johnson's 1987 season, only one Tech tight end has caught 20 or more passes in a season. Greg Daniels had 21 receptions for 205 yards and 1 TD in 1991.
- 1994 was the last season that Tech's tight ends as a group caught 20 or more passes. Kevin Martin (16 catches) and Bryan Jennings (4 catches) combined for 20 receptions for 210 yards and 3 TD's.
- Jennings had 12 catches for 159 yards in 1996, and since then, no Tech tight end has caught more than ten passes in a season.

So you can see that over the years, production from the tight end spot has diminished, to the point where it is very low under Beamer. The Hokies haven't been pass-happy under Beamer, to say the least, but the fact that the tight ends haven't registered more than 20 receptions in any of the last six seasons speaks to the tight end's role as a blocker first under Beamer.

## Total Tight End Production, 1993-2001

Now, to the numbers. As mentioned, we're going to stick to the 1993-present time frame, for two reasons. Number one, Beamer shook up his staff and revamped his offensive and defensive schemes prior to the 1993 season, and number two, 1993 represents the beginning of the Beamer bowl era, the beginning of Big East play, and in a sense the "current era" of Virginia Tech football.

All statistics from 1994-2001 are taken from Virginia Tech football media guides. 1993 statistics are from Volume 11, No. 12 (Nov. 22, 1993) of the Hokie Huddler.



All statistics are regular-season only. We'll talk about bowl stats later.

There are, of course, different ways to look at the tight end production. Let's start with season totals.

Year-by-Year Tight End Reception Stats							
Year	Games	Catches	Yards	TD's	Long	YPC	YPG
1993	11	13	178	3	28	13.7	16.2
1994	11	20	210	3	40	10.5	19.1
1995	11	17	244	1	37	14.4	22.2
1996	11	12	159	2	27	13.3	14.5
1997	11	7	72	1	22	10.3	6.5
1998	11	8	169	0	35	21.1	15.4
1999	11	17	336	0	35	19.8	30.5
2000	11	12	289	2	72	24.1	26.3
2001	11	14	283	1	39	20.2	25.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>1940</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>19.6</b>

Some Notes on These Statistics:

- Virginia Tech averaged 1.4 catches per game from the tight ends from 1993-96, 1.05 from 1997-2001.
- The tight ends have averaged exactly 1 touchdown per season from 1995-2001.
- To place the number of tight end receptions in perspective, over the last four seasons (1998-2001), the Hokies have completed 505 passes. Tight ends have caught 51 of them, or roughly 10%.
- From 1993-97, Tech averaged 12.5 yards per catch; that figure shot up to 21.1 yards per catch from 1998-2001.
- From 1993-98, the Hokies averaged 15.6 yards per game from the tight ends; that number went up to 27.5 yards per game from 1999-2001.
- From 1999-2001, the Hokies gained 283 yards or higher each season on tight end receptions, while from 1993-1998, their best season total from the tight ends was 244 yards, in 1995.

Those last two points bear closer examination. From 1999-2001, Browning Wynn and Bob Slowikowski dominated the tight end reception stats for Virginia Tech, and although the number of catches they accumulated over those three years was nothing spectacular (an average of 14.3 receptions per season), it seemed that they made each and every catch count.

In his career, Wynn had 24 catches, and 23 of them were for first downs. He averaged an impressive 20.2 yards per catch. Slowikowski topped him with an Andre Davis-like average of 23.8 yards per catch on 12 receptions. Neither one caught a lot of passes, but because each reception seemed to be such a big gainer, Hokie fans started to feel as if Tech was truly utilizing the tight ends effectively.

And in a sense, the Hokies were using the tight end effectively. *Very* effectively. Just not very *often*.

## Individual Tight End Production, 1993-2001

Now let's break it down by player, by season, from 1993-2001.

Individual Tight End Stats, 1993-2001								
Player	Year	Games	Catches	Yards	TD's	Long	YPC	YPG
Burke, John	1993	11	10	142	2	28	14.2	12.9
Jennings, Bryan	1993	10	2	22	0	13	11.0	2.2
Martin, Kevin	1993	11	1	14	1	14	14.0	1.3
Martin, Kevin	1994	11	16	173	2	40	10.8	15.7
Jennings, Bryan	1994	11	4	37	1	15	9.3	3.4
Jennings, Bryan	1995	11	17	244	1	37	14.4	22.2
Jennings, Bryan	1996	11	12	159	2	27	13.3	14.5
Sullivan, Sean	1997	11	7	72	1	22	10.3	6.5
Carter, Derek	1998	11	5	115	0	35	23.0	10.5
Slowikowski, Bob	1998	11	2	40	0	24	20.0	3.6
Wynn, Browning	1998	11	1	14	0	14	14.0	1.3
Wynn, Browning	1999	11	7	157	0	35	22.4	14.3
Carter, Derek	1999	11	7	132	0	30	18.9	12.0
Slowikowski, Bob	1999	10	3	47	0	24	15.7	4.7
Wynn, Browning	2000	11	8	167	1	33	20.9	15.2
Slowikowski, Bob	2000	11	3	101	1	72	33.7	9.2
Willis, Keith	2000	10	1	21	0	21	21.0	2.1
Wynn, Browning	2001	11	8	147	0	39	18.4	13.4
Slowikowski, Bob	2001	11	4	98	0	29	24.5	8.9
Willis, Keith	2001	11	2	38	1	31	19.0	3.5

Some notes about these stats:

- From 1995-1997, only one tight end caught passes in each season (Jennings in 1995 and 1996, Sullivan in 1997).
- It's no wonder that Jennings was perceived as a talented receiving tight end — he was. His totals of 17 receptions in 1995 and 12 in 1996 have not been approached since then.
- Jennings' average of 22.2 receiving yards per game in 1995 is the only time in the Beamer bowl era that a single tight end has averaged over 20 yards receiving per game. His 244 yards that season were the only time a tight end has gone over 200 for the season.
- No tight end has scored more than 2 TD's in a season.
- Bob Slowikowski averaged a whopping 33.7 yards per catch in 2000, but that stat is skewed by his 72 yard catch-and-run for a TD (the longest ever for a tight end) against WVU. He only had two other catches for 29 yards the rest of the season.

## Career Tight End Production, 1993-2001

Here's a look at career statistics for tight ends who have caught passes in the Beamer bowl era. Note that John Burke and Kevin Martin caught passes prior to 1993, and those stats are included here.

Career Stats for Tight Ends, 1993-2001								
Player	Years	Games	Catches	Yards	TD's	Long	YPC	YPG
Jennings, Bryan	1993-96	43	35	462	4	37	13.2	10.7
Wynn, Browning	1998-01	44	24	485	1	37	20.2	11.0
Burke, John	1990-93	37	18	277	2	48	15.4	7.5
Martin, Kevin	1992-94	30	18	204	3	40	11.3	6.8
Carter, Derek	1998-99	22	12	247	0	35	20.6	11.2
Slowikowski, Bob	1998-01	43	12	286	1	72	23.8	6.7
Sullivan, Sean	1997	11	7	72	1	22	10.3	6.5
Willis, Keith*	2000-01	21	3	59	1	40	19.7	2.8

\*Still has eligibility remaining

Notes on these stats:

- None of the tight ends averaged 12 yards a game. Derek Carter was the highest, with 11.2 yards per game.
- Kevin Martin, a forgotten name among Tech tight ends, is tied for third-most productive tight end, if you go by number of catches. He is also second in catches per game (0.6, behind Bryan Jennings's 0.81).

## Bowl Game Stats

What do you see when you take a look at tight end receiving statistics in the bowl games from 1993-2001? The short answer is "more Bryan Jennings."

Bowl Game Tight End Statistics, 1993-2001						
Player	Year	Games	Catches	Yards	TD's	YPC
Burke, John	1993	1	3	26	0	8.7
Martin, Kevin	1994	1	2	6	0	3.0
Jennings, Bryan	1994	1	1	41	0	41.0
Jennings, Bryan	1995	1	6	77	0	12.8
Jennings, Bryan	1996	1	4	58	0	14.5
None	1997	1	0	0	0	0.0
None	1998	1	0	0	0	0.0
Wynn, Browning	1999	1	1	7	0	7.0
Carter, Derek	1999	1	1	5	0	5.0
Wynn, Browning	2000	1	2	27	0	13.5
Slowikowski, Bob	2001	1	2	36	0	18.0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12.9</b>

Notes on these statistics:

- Of the 283 bowl game receiving yards by VT tight ends from 1993-2001, Bryan Jennings has 176 of them (62%).
- Jennings had 35 regular-season catches in 43 games, and in just three bowl games, he had 11 catches, nearly one-third as many. And in the 1996 Orange Bowl, Jim Druckenmiller threw the ball behind him a few times when he was wide open, or he would have had even more.
- Since Jennings played his last bowl game in 1996, VT tight ends have caught just six passes in the ensuing five bowl games.
- Tech has scored 10 receiving touchdowns in the last nine bowl games, not one of them by a tight end.

## Conclusions

As you suspected, Virginia Tech doesn't throw to the tight end very often. Frank Beamer is committed to the running game, and it shows in the tight end production, as they are used more for blocking than receiving.

The Hokies have averaged 1.2 receptions per game from the tight ends since 1993. The good news is that the yards per catch has increased significantly in recent years, topping 20 yards per catch over the last four seasons.

What does the future hold? As we discussed earlier, Virginia Tech has a new offensive coordinator, and Bryan Stinespring has promised a few new wrinkles in the offense. Only time will tell whether or not the Hokies will use the tight end more often as a receiver, perhaps bumping the number of receptions up to two or more per game.

The immediate future promises to be much like the immediate past. Redshirt junior Keith Willis is a worthy successor to Wynn and Slowikowski, and he is joined by redshirt sophomore Jared Mazzetta and redshirt freshman Jeff King. The Hokie coaches appear to like all three players (recently listing the three of them as co-number ones on the depth chart), so the platooning of tight ends that has been in effect from 1998 onward will likely continue.

The key numbers to remember are:

- 1.2 (number of receptions per game from 1993-2001)
- 21.1 (number of yards per catch from 1998-2001)
- 27.5 (number of yards per game from 1999-2001)

Compare what the tight ends do in 2002 to those numbers, and you'll have a good feel for whether or not production is up over previous years.

## The Data

The data that went into this article are available as a web page or a Microsoft Excel 97 spreadsheet.

To see the tight end data that went into this article, check out this web page:

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue018/tightendstats.htm>

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

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue018/tightendstats.xls>

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

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