

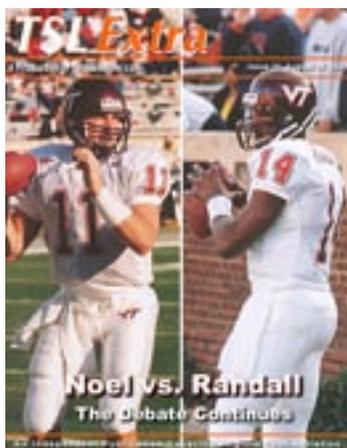
# ***TSL Extra***

Issue 22, August 29, 2002

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Tech's two-headed QB monster, Grant Noel and Bryan Randall, warms up prior to the 2001 Virginia game. Photos by Mike Ingalls.

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Dear Readers:

Back in 1987 or so, I had the pleasure of test driving a Buick Grand National. For those of you who don't know what a Grand National is, it's a car that Buick produced in the mid-late 80's that was based on the Buick Regal. Sounds tame, but the Grand National had a turbocharged 3.8 liter V6 engine in it that made it insanely fast.

Back in 1987, the fastest American-made cars were the Mustang GT (one of which I owned), the Pontiac Firebird/Chevy Camaro, and of course, the Corvette. In 1987, the Grand National was faster than all of them, making it the fastest American-made production car of its time. Later on, Buick would produce an even more powerful version of the Grand National called the GNX, a car so fast that the FBI ordered 500 of them for Bureau use.

I wasn't interested in swapping my Mustang GT for a Grand National (okay, I admit it, I *was*, but finances prohibited it), but despite that, I talked a Buick salesman into letting me test drive a Grand National. He readily agreed, and took me out to a pretty deserted stretch of straight road near the dealership.

The road was actually a long straight stretch that ended in a cul-de-sac, and the salesman took me down to the end of the cul-de-sac, pointed the car back down that straight stretch of road, and traded places with me, putting me behind the wheel.

"Punch it," he said.

Punch it, I did. The car leaped off the line, and as the turbocharger kicked in, the Grand National positively *rocketed* down the road. There was a moment where the car seemed to swell, accelerating wildly, and I felt as if all four wheels would leave the pavement at any second, launching the Buick into space.

Then the turbocharger was completely spooled up, and the acceleration settled down and became more manageable.

I'll never forget that initial rush of acceleration, though, and how it felt as if the car might careen out of control. It was akin to riding the crest of a wave as it breaks; you're not sure if you're going to be able to stay in control, or if you're going to wipe out.

I'm reminded of that Grand National test drive every year at this time, because the TechSideline.com web site does the same thing. Traffic on the web site builds as the season approaches, it swells almost out of control, but then, inevitably, I'm able to ride the crest ... just barely. I manage to stay on top of things, but it's always by a thin margin, and things never seem to stop moving fast, just like that car.

That's my fancy way of apologizing for this issue being so late. The wave started to crest, and it caught me off guard, and I wasn't prepared to release the issue at the same time as I usually do. But rest assured, we'll be back on track next month.

Also, I'll give you a heads up and tell you that the other reason I'm late with this issue is that we've been working on some really neat stuff that will greatly enhance your enjoyment of your TSL Extra subscription and make it much more of a screaming value than it already is. A lot of the things we're working on and getting ready to put into place are things that you have been requesting for a long time, and you're in for a treat.

But that's later. For now, enjoy issue #22.



## Noel vs. Randall: The Debate Continues

Last weekend's ASU game summed up the QB battle perfectly.

*by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com*

For more than three weeks in the month of August, the Hokie football team practiced nearly every day, sometimes two times a day, spending hours and hours on the practice field. They held four scrimmages. Bryan Randall and Grant Noel threw pass after pass after pass, and the coaching staff observed every play, broke the action down in detail, and tried to determine who the number one quarterback should be: the immobile, ACL-less, but determined and experienced Noel; or the quick, flashy, healthy, but inexperienced Bryan Randall

Meanwhile, Tech fans, the large, large majority of whom never got to see a practice or a scrimmage, waited outside a figurative wall, with no way to see inside, and argued and debated over who should be the starting QB. Hanging on every little word the coaches said, breaking down stats, and trying to read the tea leaves, the fans waited for the beginning of the games, and their chance to analyze the QB play.

Grant Noel entered fall practice as the number one quarterback, but the coaches declared the position to be available to Randall, should he step up and prove himself to be Noel's equal or better.

By all accounts, Randall never did that, and Noel, showing improved passing accuracy and arm strength, remained the number one QB throughout the weeks of fall practice. His knee held up, and he proved equal to Randall's

challenge.

Heading into the Arkansas State game, Noel was still listed number one on the depth chart. The long process appeared to be over, but then, in the late afternoon Friday before the Arkansas State game, Tech coach Frank Beamer announced that the two QB's would alternate quarters for the opener.

While Beamer made the obvious point that getting experience for Randall is important, primarily because of Noel's knee and its uncertain status, he also said things like, "In our coaches' minds, this competition is very close," and "I think we've taken away Randall's best asset. Because we've had the quarterbacks in yellow jerseys all summer, Randall hasn't been able to use his athleticism and his feet the way he might under normal game conditions." (Beamerball.com).

The message was clear: this quarterback duel isn't settled yet. Interpret Beamer's comments any way you want, but that's how this writer saw it, and the news was announced with the heading, "The quarterback evaluation continues this weekend."

The Arkansas State game came and went, and Hokie fans got their first public glimpse of the Quarterback Duel That Wouldn't Die. Since Noel only threw five passes and Randall only threw eight before they gave way to Will Hunt for most of the second half, many fans are saying that you can't draw conclusions about what you saw on Sunday, because the two QB's didn't play enough, and the competition was weak.

That's not true. What you saw on Sunday was actually, in my opinion, perfectly representative of how Noel and Randall have practiced and scrimmaged this fall.

### Grant Noel

Noel's performance was very short-lived. He was in for just fifteen plays, and he only threw

five passes in this game, completing two of them for 24 yards and a TD. He threw one poor third-down pass to Shawn Witten that fell incomplete, and he had two other passes batted down at the line.

His two completions were a five-yarder to fullback Doug Easlick on Tech's first offensive play and a 19-yard touchdown to tight end Jeff King that was nicely thrown. King wasn't even Noel's first option on the play, and King was surprised the ball was thrown his way on just his second-ever play in college football.

Noel's pass wasn't perfect, but it was darn good. It was delivered on time, to the right spot, over the outstretched arms of the closest defender.

Noel has thrown some good-looking passes this fall, including one absolute beauty to Shawn Witten in the final Saturday scrimmage on August 17th. The pass was for a 24-yard TD on a down and out, and Noel threw it as Witten broke his pattern outside. The pass hit Witten dead in the hands after his break, and the defensive back never had a chance. It was, no joke, an "ooh, ahh" type of pass. Practice observers have told this writer that Noel has thrown at least a couple of those types of passes this fall.

His throw to King in the Arkansas State game wasn't quite *that* good, but it was good.

On the other hand, Noel's one attempt at the option was, of course, weak. He rolled down the line to the right, didn't pitch, and was run down and tackled from behind by ASU's John Bradley, a 285-pound defensive tackle.

That's Grant Noel in a nutshell: an improved passer, in charge of the offense (to the point where he knows where his receivers are and can hit them in stride), but with limited mobility, and nothing special on the option. And there's the question of that knee.

## Bryan Randall

Randall had the option and quarterback draw clicking in his first turn running the offense, peeling off runs of 16, 19, and 12 yards, the last of which went for a TD. He looked sharp and fast to the corner when carrying the football, showing great quickness and speed for a player who weighs 225 pounds.

But two of his first three passes were simply awful. On his first attempt, he misread a break by Richard Johnson and threw outside when Johnson went inside. After a short completion to Imoh, Randall started his second possession of the game with his worst pass of the day, a throw to the flat to Justin Hamilton that hit an ASU defensive back, safety Lamar Lee, squarely in the hands. Lee did Randall the favor of dropping the ball, instead of picking it off and returning it for a touchdown.

On the very next play, Randall held the ball in the pocket too long, his head swiveling from one receiver to another. He was hit by a defensive lineman and fumbled away Tech's only turnover of the game.

After that, Randall settled down, eventually ending up 6-of-8 for 66 yards and a TD. Many of his later throws were very nice (except for a bounced pass to Witten on a flanker screen), and he didn't threaten to turn the ball over again after his fumble.

But you can see the rough edges on Randall's play. After his initial 16 yard run, he failed to get back to the huddle and get the next play off in time, causing him to burn a timeout needlessly. His TD pass to Imoh wasn't bad, but it was thrown slightly behind Imoh, and it was thrown a little late.

Many of Randall's passes at this stage of his career are just that: a little too late, a little slow to get to the receiver. It's not a question of arm strength, it's a question of when he delivers the ball. Against Arkansas State, that doesn't mean

anything, but against better DB's and better teams, it could add up to an interception as a defender breaks on a late-thrown ball.

One area in which he's got the decided edge on Noel is in the running game, as if we didn't already know that. Randall had 5 carries for 52 yards and 2 touchdowns. Meanwhile, Noel had one carry for minus-2 yards.

## When Will Things Get Settled? Who Knows?

What you saw in this game was what the coaches have been looking at all fall. Noel has greatly improved in the passing game, though admittedly, you *didn't* see that Sunday. He has good control of the offense (though you didn't really get to see that, either, in just fifteen plays). But his knee is an unknown quantity, and he simply isn't a threat as a runner.

As for Randall, he's not as crisp as Noel in running the offense, evidenced by his burned timeout, his miscommunication with Johnson, his near-interception, and his fumble because he held the ball too long. Ironically, some of those mistakes are the same ones Noel made last season, so it's primarily an issue of experience. A pass like the one Randall bounced off of Lamar Lee's hands could be a disaster against a team like LSU or Texas A&M, or any decent team in the Big East. We all know how Frank Beamer hates turnovers, almost to a fault.

Randall sure can motor, though. Yes, it was Arkansas State, they're not fast, yadda-yadda-yadda, but as one message board poster said, "I don't need to see the Hokies against a fast team to know that they're fast." So it is with Randall. He looked fast against Arkansas State because he *is* fast, not because they were slow.

But after the Hokies' little scrimmage against Arkansas State, the Tech coaching staff doesn't really have more to go on than they did before. The only new thing that happened Sunday was that their suspicion that Randall's legs are a real weapon was confirmed. Unfortunately, he

continued to make some of the same mistakes and show some of the same weaknesses he has shown all fall. Not that Noel set the world on fire, with his one bad incompleteness and two batted-down passes against a severely over-matched team.

I think this little back-and-forth indecision on Frank Beamer's part is understandable. He likes the way Randall looks peeling off those 15-to-20 yard runs, and then he throws his hands over his eyes when Randall nails a DB in the mits with a bad pass.

Beamer likes the precision passing he gets from Noel from time to time, like the NFL-caliber laser to Witten in the scrimmage. But he cringes when Noel rumbles down the line on the option and gets pounded from behind by a player who outweighs him by 60 pounds.

What to do? If Beamer didn't hate turnovers so much and was willing to sacrifice a few TO's for a duel-threat QB, this decision would be over, and Randall would be his guy, for better or for worse. But Coach Beamer, who lives by creating turnovers on defense and special teams, is kept up late at night by the thought of his own offense turning the ball over, and he thinks — and is probably right — that Noel would do that less often, for now anyway.

Beamer has said that Noel will start for the LSU game, and he and his coaching staff aren't elaborating any further on whether or not Randall will play. That's an old coaching tactic, designed to complicate the preparation by your opponent: if you've got a QB controversy, don't tell the media who's going to play and how much in the upcoming game, particularly if the two QB's have differing styles. LSU's scout team offense now has to imitate two QB's in practice this week, assuming the Tigers do it the way most teams do, with their scout teams mimicking the opponent.

We'll see if Noel is equal to the LSU challenge, because he certainly wasn't equal to the chal-

allenge against most of the good defenses he faced last year. If he struggles with LSU's speed on defense, Randall might get the nod early to see what he can do — and whether he can do it without coughing up the football.

Regardless of what happens, don't be surprised if the QB issue is settled by the time LSU jets out of town Sunday night, whether the Hokies win or lose. If the Tigers are too quick for Noel and he flounders, and Randall comes in and sparks the offense with his run/pass abilities, then Beamer may decide to go with Bryan as his starter the rest of the season.

On the other hand, if Noel rises to the occasion and plays one of his better games, while Randall makes a few key mistakes, maybe even touch-down-costing ones, Beamer's conservative side may take over, and he may go with the senior Noel for the rest of the season.

Or, like the Arkansas State game, it may be a wash, and the debate — and uncertainty — may roll on.

## Hokies of the Virtual Gridiron

A former insider to the video gaming industry tells you how they do it.

*by Greg Zesinger*

So another late summer was upon us, with its annual rites of passage. The college football preview magazines hit the stands, and the Hokie faithful were either jubilant or up in arms over their predictions, depending on whether Maurice DeShazo is labeled a dark horse Heisman candidate, or Lane Stadium is neglected from a list of “most intimidating places to play.”

With the preview magazines and the message board discussions about starting QBs, tardy season ticket delivery, and the latest Charlottesville fashion craze, another entity appeared in late summer to help get many of us ready for the football season – the college football video game.

For those unfamiliar with the intricacies of the NCAA video gaming world, new versions of EA Sports' and Sega Sports' college football games come out every year, with updated rosters, graphics, and features for the new season. Having worked in the sports video game world for over three years, I was part of this process at EA Sports of determining how fast a given cyber-player is, which stadiums needed to be updated, and how good the Hokies ultimately ended up being in a given year (heh-heh).

While not everyone on TSL is a video game connoisseur, how the Hokies come across in virtual form is important, as thousands of kids (and probably the same amount of adult college football fans) are playing these games, and potentially learning more about Virginia Tech

than they might otherwise, via occasional glimpses on SportsCenter and nationally televised games.

Anyway, with that in mind, here's a glimpse into the world of NCAA video games, with some answers to some Hokie-relevant questions. Keep in mind, these answers are based on my experiences through 2000, so the exact processes may have changed slightly since then.

### Why Isn't Lane Stadium Up To Date?

In this year's games, the new SEZ is nowhere to be found (although painted end zones strangely are). With the games coming out in July, time is limited with how much can be updated. The game is usually completed in late spring. The video game artists generally rely upon reference photos, press guides, and videotaped games from last season to update stadiums. Unless the production team has someone really in the know about a given team who can point the artists to stuff like concept drawings of how the new stadium additions will look, you are generally stuck with last year's stadium.

### Where Do They Get Player Ratings From? Do They Know That Receiver X Was a QB In HS?

The bread and butter of the games are player ratings. Between 40-60 players per Div-1A team (and a handful of Division I-AA teams) are individually rated on a scale of 0-100 in attributes ranging from speed, pass blocking, catching ability, resistance to injury, kicking accuracy, and arm strength.

Who is responsible for coming up with these ratings? It varies from year to year. In past years, we worked with a conglomerate of reporters associated with CBS Sportsline and Lindy's College Football Preview magazines. The new ratings were almost always the last thing to go in the game, so most of the development of the game is spent using last year's rosters.

We generally received the ratings from our sources a little after spring football was over. In theory, each team was rated by the reporter who covered that team throughout the year. They turned their ratings in to the supervisors of the project, who then went through all of them, tweaking them to make sure one person's rating scale wasn't significantly different than another. For instance, a PAC-10 guy might decide that a 4.3 forty equates into 90 speed for an Oregon receiver, whereas a reporter in Big East country might assign that same forty time a 95. After we received these ratings, we would go in again and tweak them as well to make sure we didn't have these inconsistencies.

The ratings are rarely perfect, but you can usually bank on the superstar players being rated pretty well, along with most of the starters on the upper level teams. It's the backup players and smaller schools where it gets a little iffy. In general, the starters are always going to be rated better than the backups. Speed is the great equalizer in this game, so even though a player (say a Col's Colas) is faster than any other defensive end on the Hokie roster, since he has not been designated a starter, he will generally be slower than your Adibis and Davises.

Most of the time, players like Richard Johnson, Chris Clifton, or Bryan Randall who played multiple positions in high school at a high level will not have ratings that reflect those other positions. While I was there, I tried to incorporate some of these ratings for those I was aware of (for instance, I made sure Andre Kendrick had better passing ability than other running backs), but generally, the ratings won't reflect anything beyond what their collegiate position dictate.

The same would go for the inclusion of true freshman. Most of the time, you'd have to make an educated guess on what number the player would wear and how good they would be. Sometimes you'd guess right (a certain freshman RB #22 turned out okay) and sometimes

you'd guess wrong (a freshman receiver #1 was rated exceptionally well, but never made it onto the field, at VT or Norfolk State).

## **Does It Help If An Alumni From A Given School Works On The Game?**

Absolutely. With over 117 teams, the amount of research that can be devoted to each team is limited. Pre-existing knowledge on the part of the production team can only help a team's presentation in the game.

And of course, little biases tend to work themselves in as well. That's part of the reason (since the game is developed in Orlando), teams like UCF, Miami, FSU, and Florida always get special treatment. It's also part of the reason why, in years past, when you played with Tech, you'd hear a cannon fire when scoring a TD at Lane Stadium, have the option of playing in all maroon uniforms at home, and hear the in-stadium commentator announce the names "Vick" and "Suggs" over the PA before those two were stars.

## **Wait A Minute – I Thought Collegiate Athletes' Names Couldn't Appear In Commercial Products.**

They can't. All players are recognizable only by their jersey number, position, and in most cases, appropriate skin color. However, for the past few years, the game has given you the ability to type in the names of each of the players on your team. We had Chuck White, the Rose Bowl's announcer, record several hundred names prior to the 2000 season. If you happened to type in the name that had been recorded, the PA announcer would say the name. Names like Suggs, Vick, Burnell, and Zesinger.

## **Who Approves All This Stuff?**

For most colleges, we worked with the Collegiate Licensing Company, who pretty much serves as the middleman between schools and manufacturers. However, everything, from the

look of the Hokie Bird, to the correct shades of orange and maroon, to the use of the fight song, had to get ultimate approval from the licensing folks in Blacksburg.

## **Any Cool Hokie-Related Stories You'd Like To Share?**

Sure. While I was working at EA Sports headquarters in San Francisco, Jim Druckenmiller came to the office with his girlfriend. I had a nice chat with the both of them, and I had a VT mini-helmet at my desk that I was going to give to him to sign. However, he ended having to leave before I had the chance, so I gave it to our player relations person to give to Druck (which he did).

However, before I could get the helmet back, I ended up transferring to the office in Orlando. Druck was traded to Miami, and I doubted I'd ever see the helmet again. However, I was able to get his email address, and emailed him to see if he still had it. To my surprise, I received an email back, saying that it had probably gotten packed with his stuff to go to Miami, and that when he unpacked, he would send it to me. To make a long story short, I have a mini helmet on my bookcase autographed by Jim Druckenmiller that traveled with him from the 49ers to the Dolphins.

While working with EA, they held video game tournaments in the fall for a few years, several of them coming to Tech. I watched Cornelius White throw passes to WR #4, J.C. Price lay out some cyber-punishment, and I busted Andre Kendrick when he told me, while playing the game with Shyrone Stith, that he was Marcus Parker.

One fall, the finals were played at the Orange Bowl (the year Florida played Syracuse), and members of the production team were going to each of the qualifying sites to run the events. A co-worker and I drove from Orlando to the campuses of Marshall, West Virginia, Virginia Tech, North Carolina, and NC State and held

tournaments at each one.

We drove a rented van full of TVs and Playstations. As many of the tournaments occurred on consecutive days, we'd have to pack up quickly, and drive after dark. If you ever feel like being adventurous, try driving a van through the winding, poorly-lit mountain roads on your way from Morgantown to Huntington in the middle of the night!

At Marshall, I had the pleasure of meeting up with Mike Bianchin. As most of you know, he was one of our better offensive linemen a few years back, and is now an associate AD for the Thundering Herd. He's a big video game fan, and he treated us really well, though with the season coming up, I've felt funny wearing the Marshall practice shorts he gave me.

At Tech, we also had a spare Playstation left over from the tournament, so we decided we would donate it to Tech for the players' lounge. We walked into the newly-built Merryman Center to find out who we should talk to. As we were walking around, I noticed a player walk by with the #18 on his practice gear. Little did I know that he would lead us to a national championship game the following season. Spotting huge Derek Smith, I asked him who we should talk to about donating the Playstation. He directed me to John Ballein's office, and we walked down to it.

When we came to his office, John was surfing the Internet, trying to find some information from the NY area about some Syracuse players who may or may not be injured for our upcoming game in the Dome. He was extremely gracious, giving us both a nice VT hat, and chatting with us for a little while. We would both receive thank you notes from him in the mail a week or so later, along with one from Coach Beamer. We thanked him as we left, hats and football posters in hand, and he went back to his computer, eager to find an extra edge for our team. Guess what site he was on?

So there's a little bit of insight into the world of sports video games. If anyone has any questions, I'll do my best to answer them in a later article. Feel free to write me at [gzesinger@apii.com](mailto:gzesinger@apii.com) .

## Life in the Not-So-Cheap Seats

In which our intrepid reporter braves the harsh environment of the Stadium Club to give you the scoop.

*by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com*

It's all so ... un-Hokie-like.

Luxury boxes, stadium clubs, chairback seats, donations of hundreds of dollars required to sit in a certain section ... these are all things that have arrived at Lane Stadium for the first time this season, thanks to the brand spanking-new 11,000-seat South end zone expansion that debuted in last Sunday's Arkansas State game.

Hokie fans pride themselves on being hardcore football nuts who scream at the top of their lungs and stay until the final gun sounds, whether the score is 63-0 or 0-63. They've never pictured themselves as fat-cat high rollers who pay extra dollars for the privilege of sitting in a luxury box or hanging out in an enclosed stadium club during games.

But with the advent of the new "SEZ" expansion, those opportunities have arrived, and Hokie fans are taking advantage of them. We even got a couple of those SEZ seats with stadium club access here at TechSideline.com, and for game one against Arkansas State, yours truly got a hold of the "company tickets," checked them out, and interviewed a couple of fans to get their impressions.

### An SEZ Primer

There are 11,120 new seats in the South end zone expansion, divided up as follows:

880 Zone Club Chairback Seats, \$750  
 321 Touchdown Terrace Chairback Seats, \$500  
 1,160 Goal Line Bleacher-Back Seats, \$200  
 8,759 Upper & Lower Deck Bench Seats, no charge

The Zone Club, Touchdown Terrace, and Goal Line sections require an annual "gift" per seat in the amounts shown. That means that if you want to buy a seat in the Zone Club, for example, you have to "donate" \$750 and then buy a \$252 season ticket. So that comes out to \$1002 per seat for the 2002 season, and the \$750 has to be paid every year.

The Zone Club and Touchdown Terrace seats come with access to the two Stadium Clubs available in the SEZ expansion; the \$200 Goal Line seats do not provide access to the clubs. The stadium clubs, one on each end of the SEZ, are each 5,000 square-foot clubs that provide full food and beverage service, multiple television monitors, custom seating areas throughout the lounge, private restrooms and glass walls for watching the game from inside the club.

I checked out the clubs, and yes, they're nice. They're carpeted and are nicely appointed without being lavish. Among the food offerings, they have standard fare like hot dogs, candy bars, and the like, just like what you would find at any concession stand around the stadium.

They also offer a nice buffet, including (for the Arkansas State game) mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, rolls, pork barbecue, and sliced-to-order turkey.

But note that your \$750 or \$500 donation doesn't buy you the right to cheap food. In the stadium clubs, food prices are sky-high, just like everywhere else: \$3 for drinks, \$5 for chicken wings, \$3 for a jumbo hot dog, \$2 for a candy bar, and \$2.50 for a big chocolate chip cookie.

In the buffet line, mashed potatoes and gravy, baked beans, and green beans will all set you back \$1.50 per serving. Barbecued pork on a

bun goes for \$4.50, and carved-to-order turkey costs \$4.75.

As a Zone Club or Touchdown Terrace occupant, your ticket stub is your access to the Stadium Club. Game tickets issued to those with Stadium Club access have special gold-embossed end stubs (it makes for a very sharp-looking ticket, I must say). When you enter the stadium through the SEZ gates, they do not tear your ticket; instead, when you first go into one of the Stadium Clubs, they tear one of your gold ticket stubs off, punch a hole through the ticket, and stamp a star on the back of your hand.

If you leave the Stadium Club and try to re-enter, a ticket with a gold-embossed stub is the first thing the Stadium Club doormen look for. The punched hole is in case you lose your other gold ticket stub, thus making your game ticket look like an “ordinary” game ticket. And the stamp on the back of your hand is a third line of verification.

## So, What Do the Fans Think?

VT grad Les Sutherland isn't a season ticket holder, but his company, Lopez and Associates out of Abingdon, Virginia, decided to buy some tickets in the \$750 Zone Club section, “to do something fun with clients,” he says.

Sutherland was lucky enough to score the company tickets for game one. For this particular game, he brought Robbie Blevins (not a VT graduate) with him. The two of them didn't check out the Stadium Club until half time, purchasing some concession food elsewhere and bringing it into the club with them.

They liked their seats in section 202, tucked right under the upper deck overhang, in front of the row of luxury boxes in the SEZ. “I think they're good,” Blevins notes. “We've got a good angle, because we're over to the side a little bit, so we're not blocked by the goal post.”

Indeed, the SEZ is steeply banked, enough so

that only the lower rows of seats suffer from severe depth perception problems. By the time you get up to Row J, the first of six rows in the Zone Club section, the visibility is good.

As for the Stadium Club, both Sutherland and Blevins like it, but you can tell that they treat it as more of a place to spend half time than a place to spend the entire game, or even a good portion of it, despite the fact that the club is roomy and climate-controlled, and the glass wall offers a good view of the action on the field.

“It's less crowded than I figured it would be,” Sutherland said, “especially during half time, considering it's the first game. But we're going back outside [to watch the rest of the game].”

Karen Shelor and her friend, Cindy Cunningham, didn't make it into the Stadium Club until half time either, just like Sutherland and Blevins. Neither Shelor nor her husband are Hokie grads (he's from Floyd and went to school at Duke, and she's from Maryland, where she attended college), but they have been Virginia Tech season ticket holders for over twenty years. They have had four seats at the top of section 12 on the West side for years, and like many Hokie fans in that position, they bought additional seats in the SEZ, without giving up their old seats.

“My husband wanted to try it and see if he liked it,” she explains, and immediately starts rattling off what she likes about the new digs. “The folding seat is really comfortable, and we like being out of the sun and the weather [the top three rows in the Zone Club section are under the cover of the upper deck]. It's nice to be able to come in to the Stadium Club, catch the first half highlights, and get some food.”

The view from the end zone is also perfectly acceptable to Shelor. “We're in section 205, right in front of the [luxury box] windows, the third row down. It's great, you can see the whole field. No turning your head like a tennis match. You can see everything.”

Having experienced the South end zone and the Stadium Club, Shelor's vote appears to be for the South end zone over her Row WWW seats in section 12. She's sold on the visibility and being under cover, but the Stadium Club isn't much more than a half time diversion for her.

"We'll probably just use it at half time," she says. "I usually stay outside. I feel like you're missing out [inside the Stadium Club]. It's not like being at the football game, because there's windows between you, and you can't really hear the crowd."

Cunningham agrees. "You don't hear all the excitement or the band."

## **Nothing Beats the Great Outdoors**

Maybe it sounds odd to you that someone would spend \$750 per seat for access to a Stadium Club and then not use it heavily. But the Hokie fans we talked to, and the general traffic pattern throughout the day, indicated that it's not likely that those with access to the Stadium Club will do much more than hang out in it during half time.

I was in the East Stadium Club at kickoff, and there were a grand total of five people in the club when the Hokies ran out of the tunnel and when they kicked off. The clubs stayed mostly deserted during the first half, got some use at half time, and then were sparsely populated during the second half. Had the game been close, the fans may have completely cleared out after half time and gone back to their seats.

Sure, the clubs didn't seem to be getting heavy use during the game action, but it was 85 degrees and relatively comfortable outside. What about if it was 25 degrees outside?

Robbie Blevins laughs. "We'd still be outside in our seats. We'd just have some anti-freeze."

## A Massachusetts Fullback in Frank Beamer's Court

How a lightly-recruited fullback named Jesse Allen made it to VT as a walk-on.

*by Cary Whaley*

Even though it will be a year before he takes his first snap for the Hokies, walk-on fullback Jesse Allen is already a household name on the TSL message boards. Of the 14 recruited walk-ons in this year's class, Jesse Allen is arguably the best known of the bunch.

Coming from a small high school in Western Massachusetts, Jesse Allen is an unlikely hero in this year's recruiting class. The story of how an 18 year-old from Palmer Massachusetts ended up not only walking-on to Tech but becoming a fan favorite is a testimony to his hard work and training, and the love of his family and the power of the Internet.

### Playing Hard

Jesse has been playing football and, more importantly, hitting people, since the 4th grade. Since then his father, Tim Allen, has served as his personal coach and trainer. A former national champion swimmer, Tim believed in the benefits of hard training. On any given day, Jesse could be found in his yard, in full gear, training, lifting weights, running combines and knocking things around. One winter his father tied a snowmobile on him and made him drag it through the woods in a foot of snow.

As a three-year starter for Pathfinder HS in Palmer, Massachusetts, Jesse's years of hard training started to yield big dividends. He

started as a sophomore at defensive tackle and became a starting running back as a junior. In his junior and senior years, he rushed for a total of 4067 yards and 42 touchdowns, gaining All-Western Massachusetts honors at running back for both years. On defense he was equally as impressive, with a total of 380 tackles during his junior and senior years.

"By the time he was done, he was pretty consummate," said Pathfinder Head Coach Chris Pope. "The first thing I had to break Jesse of was that he just wanted to hit people. That's a nice problem to have. By his final games, he'd straight on a guy, wait for a block, burst speed, out-run people, he had a ton of tools in his hand and learned how to use them when he needed to. He ate up our league, absolutely.

"Jesse's conditioning is absolutely incredible," added Pope. "He's benching 370 lbs and is still growing. And you could put another 30 pounds on him and not lose a step."

### Recruiting Interest

Starting in his junior year, Tim Allen started contacting colleges via email. Jesse's uncle, Tom Allen, was convinced that Jesse was a Division 1-A player and created a web site, <http://www.jesseleeallen.net>, that had statistics and film clips. Colleges began to take notice. Jesse received scholarship offers from Division 1-AA schools University of Maine and University of Massachusetts.

Jesse attended combines at Northeastern University, Holy Cross, and Boston College. At the combines Jesse led the running backs and placed high in the bench press and ran consistent 4.6's. He attended camps at University of Connecticut and Boston College, where he took official visits, but neither school offered a scholarship.

Meeting NCAA clearinghouse requirements was also challenge for Jesse. Coming from a vocational school, where he majored in electronics

and carried college prep courses, Jesse was missing an Algebra 2 course. He took the course at a local college and received an "A" to meet clearinghouse requirements. However, he was still overlooked by D-1A colleges

"My theory," explained father Tim Allen, "was that Jesse played in a lesser division and these scouts didn't feel he could play at the higher divisions. The beauty of it all was when he was selected to play in the state all-star game his team made him captain because of the havoc he raised with all those AA kids. They lost the game 28-20, but Jess was very confident that he could play anywhere and was very happy with his performance."

"Part of it," said Pope, "was that his family was enamored with Virginia Tech. UConn and UMass were big-time interested. The family, his father, sincerely believed that Jesse could play at that level."

## Becoming a Hokie

Undaunted in his belief that Jesse could excel at the highest level of college football, Jesse's uncle Tom Allen became convinced that Virginia Tech provided the best opportunity for Jesse. A Miami resident and Hurricanes fan, Tom was familiar with Tech's traditional of success with walk-on players, particularly at fullback. He encouraged his brother Tim to contact Assistant Head Coach Billy Hite.

"My brother...was in touch with me asking about these different schools," related Tom Allen. "Tim calls me up and asked 'What's up with Virginia?' I said Virginia TECH is a great program. I've been a Miami fan and it's probably one of the best-coached teams I've seen. I told him it would be a perfect place. I knew about the walk-on program. That's when it all started."

During the 2001 Christmas break, Jesse went to Blacksburg on an unofficial visit while the Hokies were preparing for the Gator Bowl. The coaching staff and the football program as a whole

impressed Jesse and his family. By the end of the visit the Allens had spent \$500.00 on VT shirts, jackets, Hokie-birds, key rings etc. Jesse's car had a Hokie Bird on its rearview mirror, and he was never seen without a VT shirt, hat or shorts on. The Hokie bug had bitten him.

Meanwhile, Tom also became a frequent poster to TSL (under the ID "Tallen"). Hokie fans were watching the film clips on his web site and were becoming aware of Jesse's football talent.

In March of 2002, just when it appeared Jesse would accept a D-1AA scholarship at University of Massachusetts, Coach Hite asked Jesse to come to Virginia Tech's spring football game. During the visit, Hite offered Jesse a walk-on spot on the team, which Jesse and his parents readily accepted.

Jesse's father, Tim said the deciding factor was Coach Beamer and the entire Tech coaching staff. "They don't recruit hoards of all-Americans all over Florida and New Jersey. They recruit Virginia kids mostly, yet every year they're in a bowl game, etc. We like Coach Beamer and feel he will give Jesse what he deserves, if he can earn it. Jesse really likes Coach Hite. Hite is teaching him, molding him into the player he needs to be."

"Initially I was concerned with him going from being a big fish in a small pond, to playing at that (D-1A) level," related Coach Pope. "But when he came back from Virginia Tech, the first thing he said to me was 'Coach, I can play with these guys. Now I know it.' It was real heartening to me, just to hear it. From that point on, I felt real good about it."

## The Work Begins

Jesse comes to Blacksburg as an invited or "preferred" walk-on. Preferred walk-ons bypass walk-on tryouts and participate in the August two-a-day practices. He will practice with the scout team as a fullback. While he plans to

redshirt, he's already turned heads in the "middle drill," were his teammates have nicknamed him "Moose" after legendary Dallas Cowboys fullback Daryl Johnston.

Not surprisingly, Jesse has also made an impression in the weight room where he had the third best bench press (370 lbs, surpassed only by DE Chris Burnett and OL Brandon Gore at 380 lbs) amongst the incoming freshman class. With his passion for training, he'll most likely find a soul mate in Assistant Athletic Director of Athletic Performance Mike Gentry.

He's currently listed at fourth team fullback, but has the size and ability to excel at linebacker. While he prefers to play at fullback, Jesse's goal is to help the team in any manner. Anyone who knows Jesse thinks he'll go far.

"They're getting a kid with incredible genetics," said Pope. "You could take this kid a long way. He'll do everything and more for them."

## Inside the Numbers: Rating the 1991 Recruiting Class

We take a look at the class that won the Sugar Bowl.

*by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com*

This is the second in a series of articles rating Virginia Tech recruiting classes from 1990 to the present. Last issue, we rated the 1990 recruiting class, and discovered that it had some outstanding players in Jim Pyne, Maurice DeShazo, Antonio Freeman, Tyronne Drakeford, and Ken Brown.

This month, we'll take a look at the 1991 class that included such memorable names as Jim Druckenmiller, George DeRicco, and J.C. Price. Like the 1990 class, there is no question that the 1991 class was a great recruiting class. This class played a key role in winning the 1995 Sugar Bowl, a level the Hokie football team had never reached before.

While some of the key players on that 1995 Sugar Bowl team were from other recruiting classes — guys like Torrian Gray, Antonio Banks, Bryan Still, Cornell Brown, Jim Baron, Brian Edmonds, and Bryan Jennings — the 1991 class provided some of the key players, like Druckenmiller, Dwayne Thomas, and a number of the guys that formed the deep and talented defensive line that the Hokies bludgeoned opponents with that year; Price, Jeff Holland, Lawrence Lewis, and Hank Coleman, mainstays of that eight-deep line, all came from the 1991 recruiting class.

The 1991 class also had its duds and flameouts, guys you've never even heard of before. Who remembers Jon Bishock, Joel Chapman, Ben Scott, and Kevin Skinner? Unless you're a recruiting junkie from way back, those names won't be any more familiar to you than the third string offensive line at San Diego State.

Beginning this issue, we get to start on the really fun part of this ranking exercise: we get to stack players from different classes up against each other. From here on out, we'll maintain a Top 10 list of recruits and update it as we compile more and more data on other classes. I can already tell you that it's interesting and eye-opening to see how recruits compare across different classes.

Let's get on with it, but first, a few notes on things I learned this month.

### A Quirk in the System

The more astute among you will notice right off the bat that Druckenmiller seems to be out of place, like he doesn't belong in the 1991 class. After all, DeRicco and Price redshirted and played their senior seasons in 1995, along with some other names you'll recognize as stars from the 1995 Sugar Bowl championship team. But Druckenmiller played through 1996.

The answer to that little riddle is that Druck signed with the Hokies in February of 1991 but did not enroll at VT that fall. Instead, despite being an academic qualifier, he stayed home in Northampton, PA and took community college classes. He didn't enroll at Tech until January 1992. He redshirted in the fall of 1992 and then played from 1993-1996.

Technically, because Druckenmiller enrolled in January of 1992, his scholarship counted against the 1992 class, not the 1991 class. But if you research Hokie Huddlers and Virginia Tech media guides from that era, Druckenmiller is always listed with the 1991 recruits, in all instances. So that's where we have slotted him.

But here's the problem, and it reveals a flaw in the TSL recruit rating system: points are awarded for "team" accomplishments for a recruiting class: wins, bowl wins, Top 25 finishes, etc. The team accomplishments that a class is given credit for are the accomplishments that would have occurred during that recruiting class' redshirt freshman through redshirt senior years. For this 1991 recruiting class, that means the class gets credit for what the Hokie football team accomplished in the 1992-1995 seasons.

Last issue, I acknowledged that true freshmen sometimes make an impact, but it's rare. Cornell Brown did in 1993, but the 1993 recruiting class will only get credit for team accomplishments from 1994-1997, not the 1993 season that Brown played a key role in.

This issue, we have the problem of Druckenmiller being a key cog in the 1996 Hokie team that went 10-2 and made it to the Orange Bowl, yet under the ranking system, the 1991 recruiting class, of which he was a part, will not get credit for accomplishments in the 1996 season.

As a sidebar, two other 1991 signees delayed enrollment until January: offensive lineman Jared Hamlin and defensive back Kwamie Lassiter. It's safe to say that neither one of those guys had an impact on the 1996 season — neither one was even in school then — so for the most part, this flaw in the TSL system doesn't get exposed.

I'll keep an eye on this flaw and will make adjustments in the future if a lot of January enrollees start having a significant impact "six seasons out," like Druckenmiller did.

Enough jawing, let's check out the numbers. As a reminder, here is a list of how many points are awarded for what accomplishments:

Individual accomplishments: letter earned (1 point); season starter (2 points); VT season stat leader (2); VT game (5), season (7) or career (10) record held; All-American (10); First-team AA (15); Consensus AA (20), Unanimous AA (25); national award (20); Heisman finalist (30); All-Big East 2nd (3) or 1st (5) Team; BE Player of the Year (10); BE season stats leader (5); BE game (6), season (8), or career (11) record held; BE academic honor roll (2); drafted by the NFL (3-10 points).

Class achievements: Wins (2 points per win); conference win (2); win over Virginia (5) or Miami (5); BE Champions (25); Top 25 (10) or Top 10 (15) finish; play in (15) or win (10) minor bowl; play in (25) or win (25) BCS bowl; play in championship game (50).

Note that the reasons for this ranking system, and its strengths and shortcomings, were talked about in detail last issue. Also note that this month's "Inside TSL" has a letter to the editor that talks about this ranking system a little more.

## Example From the 1990 Recruiting Class

Let's do a walk-through with Tyronne Drakeford, a key member of the 1990 recruiting class. Here are his accomplishments:

- Lettered, 1990-93 (4 points, 1 for each letter)
- Started, 1991-93 (6 points, 2 for each season)
- Led VT in interceptions, 1991-93 (12 points, 4 points for each season)
- All-Big East 2nd team, 1991 (3 points)
- All-Big East 1st team, 1992-93 (10 points, 5 for each season)
- Led Big East in interceptions, 1992 (5 points)
- Drafted in the second round, 1994 (9 points)

Total points for Tyronne Drakeford: 49

## Individual Points Scored by Members of the 1991 Recruiting Class

Here's the entire 1991 recruiting class, and how many points each player scored in the TSL Extra system:

| Player             | Pos | Points |
|--------------------|-----|--------|
| Druckenmiller, Jim | QB  | 57     |
| Thomas, Dwayne     | RB  | 37     |
| Price, J.C.        | DT  | 31     |
| DelRicco, George   | LB  | 23     |
| Malone, Chris      | OL  | 17     |
| Coleman, Hank      | LB  | 15     |
| Bianchin, Mike     | OL  | 7      |
| Lewis, Lawrence    | LB  | 6      |
| Holland, Jeff      | DT  | 5      |
| Holmes, Jermaine   | WR  | 5      |
| Bass, Trenton      | DL  | 3      |
| Hamlin, Jared      | OL  | 3      |
| Stevens, Tewon     | LB  | 2      |
| Williams, Michael  | WR  | 2      |
| Williams, Rafael   | DB  | 2      |
| Cox, Mike          | OL  | 1      |
| Bishock, Jon       | DE  | 0      |
| Champan, Joel      | DT  | 0      |
| Lassiter, Fred     | QB  | 0      |
| Lassiter, Kwamie   | DB  | 0      |
| Scott, Ben         | LB  | 0      |
| Skinner, Kevin     | TE  | 0      |
| Williams, Rhasheyd | QB  | 0      |

## The Top Five and Their Accomplishments

**Jim Druckenmiller (QB, 57 points):** Lettered four years; started two years; led the Hokies in passing offense and total offense in both 1995 and 1996; All-Big East 2nd team QB in 1995, 1st team QB in 1996; Big East Offensive Player of the Year in 1996; Big East total offense leader in 1996; 1st-round draft choice (26th overall) of the San Francisco 49ers in 1997.

**Dwayne Thomas (RB, 37 points):** Lettered four years; started three years; led the Hokies in rushing, 1993-1995; led VT in scoring, 1993; led VT in kickoff returns in 1993 and 1995; All-Big

East 2nd team RB in 1995.

**J.C. Price (DT, 33 points):** Lettered four years; started three years; 3rd-team AP All-American in 1995; All-Big East 1st team DL in 1995; 3rd-round draft choice (88th overall) of the Carolina Panthers in 1996.

One note about J.C. Price: Jeff Holland and J.C. Price played the same defensive tackle position from 1993-1995. In 1993, Holland began the season as the starter and started 6 regular season games. Price finished the season as the starter, starting 5 regular season games and the bowl game. Since they started an equal number of games, each player was given credit as a starter for the season.

**George DelRicco (LB, 23 points):** Lettered four years; started three years; led Hokies in tackles in 1994 (130) and 1995 (137); All-Big East 1st team LB in 1995.

**Chris Malone (OL, 17 points):** Lettered four years; started four years; All-Big East 1st team OG in 1995.

## Team Points Scored

In terms of team accomplishments, the 1991 recruiting class wins points for what the team accomplished in the 1992-1995 seasons. These accomplishments are:

| Category             | Stat           | Points     |
|----------------------|----------------|------------|
| Games Won            | 29             | 58         |
| Conference Wins      | 16             | 32         |
| Wins over Virginia   | 2 (1993, 1995) | 10         |
| Wins over Miami      | 1 (1995)       | 5          |
| BE Championships     | 1 (1995)       | 25         |
| Top 25 finishes      | 3 (1993/94/95) | 30         |
| Top 10 finishes      | 1 (1995)       | 15         |
| MinorBowls           | 2 (1993, 1994) | 30         |
| Minor Bowl Wins      | 1 (1993)       | 10         |
| BCS Bowls            | 1 (1995)       | 25         |
| BCS Bowl wins        | 1 (1995)       | 25         |
| <b>Total Points:</b> |                | <b>265</b> |

## 1991 RECRUITING CLASS RATING: 483 Pts POINTS PER PLAYER (23 PLAYERS): 21.00

The 483 total points posted by this recruiting class and 21.00 points per player are pretty far behind the 548 points and 22.83 points per player put up by last issue's 1990 recruiting class. The following paragraphs accumulate the data we've got so far

### Comparison With Previous Classes Rated

So far, only one other class has been rated: the 1990 recruiting class. Here's how they stack up against each other:

|                               | 1990 | 1991 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>Number of Players:</b>     | 24   | 23   |
| <b>Individual Points:</b>     | 415  | 218  |
| <b>Team Points:</b>           | 133  | 265  |
| <b>Overall Rating Points:</b> | 548  | 483  |
| <b>Points Per Player:</b>     | 22.8 | 21.0 |

As a team, the 1991 class outdid the 1990 class almost two-to-one. The 1991 class won more games, won more conference games (of course, they *played* more conference games), beat Virginia more, had a victory over Miami, and won a Big East Championship and a BCS bowl (or Alliance Bowl, as they were called back in 1995).

But the 1991 class did not rack up nearly as many points for individual accomplishments as the 1990 class did. No one from the 1991 class got anywhere close to the 1990 trio of Pyne-DeShazo-Freeman, who scored 93, 90, and 89 points respectively. Druckenmiller got the closest, with 57 points.

### Top Ten Players So Far

Now that we're two classes into our rankings, we can start compiling an ongoing top ten list.

## Top Ten Recruits So Far (Classes Ranked: 1990 and 1991)

| Year | Player            | Points |
|------|-------------------|--------|
| 1990 | Jim Pyne          | 93     |
| 1990 | Maurice DeShazo   | 90     |
| 1990 | Antonio Freeman   | 89     |
| 1991 | Jim Druckenmiller | 57     |
| 1990 | Tyronne Drakeford | 49     |
| 1991 | Dwayne Thomas     | 37     |
| 1991 | J.C. Price        | 33     |
| 1990 | Ken Brown         | 29     |
| 1991 | George DelRicco   | 23     |
| 1991 | Chris Malone      | 17     |

Four of the top five players are from the 1990 class, but the 1991 class brings up the slack in the bottom five, giving each class five players in the top ten.

See you next month, when we do the 1992 recruiting class and take a look at players such as Antonio Banks, Bryan Still, and Torrian Gray.

### The Data

To download the data in HTML (web page) format, go here:

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue022/1991RecruitingClass.htm>

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

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue022/1991RecruitingClass.xls>

## Inside TSL: Letters to the Editor

An announcer works his butt off, and a webmaster takes some abuse.

by Will Stewart, TechSideline.com

### He Puts the "Plus" in ESPN+

Will,

I worked the ASU-VT game as the play-by-play announcer this weekend with Jim Donnan for ESPN+ and I'm tentatively set to work the Hokies TV game at WMU. I got the call to work Sunday's game just a couple of weeks ago after Dave Sims was unable to do it, so I started a bit of a crash course on VT that included religiously checking your site for the articles at the VT Hokie News page and reading your message boards. I got BeamerBall.com to comp me a free password the week of the ASU-VT game and I drove around listening to cassettes of the Hokie Hotline that I recorded off the archives available at VT's official site

I've always had a special feeling for the Hokies, because the father of one of my best friends in junior high school helped set up the original VT radio network (Tom Gannoway, Sr.). In fact, I was happy to have Bill Roth drop in for a short visit on my radio show in Charleston last night.

Dave Weekley  
Charleston, WV

Hokie fans, think of that the next time you're

watching a game on TV and feel like saying, "These announcers suck!" Dave Weekley, at least, does his homework and takes his job very seriously.

### A Deactivated Poster Vents His Rage

Will:

You are a complete idiot.

You deactivate my account because why?

My user name was orangecking. Was there swearing, was there anything offensive? NO. Yet, because a fan from an opposing team comes on your board to talk a little smack, you deactivate them. Your a joke.

The Hokies suck and so does your pathetic excuse for a website.

Here: check this out: the true definition of a HOKIE:

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/duplin/pubs/an.workbook/turkeys.html>

And that, my friends, is mild compared to some of the emails I receive. I used to respond to them with a canned response that went something like, "Dear (to whom it may concern): Thank you for your feedback on the TechSideline.com web site. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our web site, and your input is very valuable. We appreciate you taking the time to share your opinion with us. Thank you for visiting TechSideline.com, and please come again."

I once sent that email to a deactivated poster, and he responded to it with an even more irate and abusive email. So I sent my email again. And he responded again. So I sent my email again. He eventually quit, probably because his computer blew up.

By the way, it always cracks me up when rival

fans tell me that TechSideline.com “sucks,” or is “a pathetic excuse for a website.” Uh, yeah. Let’s just say that I’m not insecure enough about TSL to believe that for a *second*.

## Comments on the TSL Recruit Ranking System

Will:

You made a perfectly understandable, but contradictory claim regarding your points system. You count being drafted by the NFL in the point system, but you discount a players’ accomplishments in the NFL. Your claim for the latter is:

*>3.) Accomplishments after leaving school were not factored into our >ratings. Bruce Smith, for example, is an outstanding professional player, >but that shouldn’t factor into whether or not he was a good recruit for >Virginia Tech. All Bruce’s pro career does is reflect nicely in some small >way on Virginia Tech; it is of no direct value to VT, in terms of wins, >losses, or statistics, during the time he was actually at Tech.*

As you might have guessed by now, I think you have other reasons for valuing a draft pick over an NFL career. Frankly, all a draft pick does “is reflect nicely in some small way on Virginia Tech.” In fact, draft picks happen after the college football season, so it is also after that student’s football career at VT which is equivalent to after they left school for this analysis.

I do NOT want you to get into some kind of deep quagmire about NFL stats, but I think a high draft pick is only an indication of potential success, much like recruiting rank. Being a starter on an NFL team (which should be easily verifiable) is the equivalent of college career honors and does have a

positive impact on the school’s recruiting and visibility. Say what you will, but people remember that Don Strock, Bruce Smith and Antonio Freeman went to VT and played well in the NFL. Any VT alum being a starter even for one game does SO MUCH MORE than some other player who was drafted but never started in the NFL.

It’s your ranking system, but I suggest you consider dropping the draft status OR adding something reflecting an NFL career (perhaps 5 or 10 points for being an NFL starter and 5 or 10 points as at least a two-time pro-bowler—in order to have some easy measure of quality and longevity to their career). Both of these do “help” Tech and both are easy to identify and objective measures worth considering.

Dave Bott

Dave: Hmmm, I can already tell that I’m going to have trouble expressing exactly why I don’t think NFL accomplishments should be part of TSL’s recruiting ranking system. I have a feeling that after the following ramblings, you probably won’t be any more convinced, but I’ll give it a shot, anyway.

I tried to award points for a player’s accomplishments that either were of direct value on the field or were of indirect value for bringing recognition to Virginia Tech as a quality football program. Examples of accomplishments that are of direct value on the field are letters earned, seasons started, and VT and Big East records held. Those are all direct measurements that a player contributed something on the field.

Then there are the accomplishments that bring recognition to the player and/or the program but don’t add any value whatsoever on the field. Antonio Freeman, for example, was second-team All-Big East three times, and that brings good recognition to VT, but it didn’t help VT directly win any ballgames. The fact that he led the league in punt returns in 1994 *did* directly

contribute to winning games, because it equated to field position and even a TD or two.

I realize this sounds as if it contradicts what I said in the Bruce Smith material that you quoted. I made a statement about how Bruce Smith's NFL career wasn't of any "direct value to VT, in terms of wins, losses, or statistics, during the time he was actually at Tech." Well, if you want to get nit-picky, neither was Jim Pyne's retired jersey, but I gave him 25 points for that, didn't I?

And here's the point where I start getting wrapped around the axle, so let me explain why I think, for example, that being drafted #1 by the NFL is worth some points, but being an All-Pro in the NFL isn't.

When you're drafted, or you're named an All-American, or you win the Nagurski Trophy, that is based on your college accomplishments or is a good, direct reflection on your college career, your school, or both.

But Bruce Smith being named an NFL All-Pro in, say, his fourth year in the NFL doesn't really have much to do at all with Virginia Tech. By that time, his career is about what he has done in the NFL, and how he has prepared himself in the NFL, not anything he did at Tech. And when they announce the teams, he is listed as Bruce Smith of the Buffalo Bills (or Washington Redskins, now), not Bruce Smith of Virginia Tech. So the link between Bruce being an All-Pro (or, in your other example, a starter for x years) and the fact that he went to Virginia Tech is very tenuous.

Well, then why give points for being an NFL draft choice? Bruce was picked #1 because he worked out for the Bills, they watched his film, and they thought he could be a great NFL player (they were smart cookies, but that's another story). Sure, he got their attention with his college exploits, but what really sold them on him was other factors, not the fact that he racked up 46 career sacks at VT, the large

majority against the likes of Richmond, William and Mary, and Appalachian State.

Yes, your draft position is largely based on NFL workouts and evaluations, not your college career per se, but when NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle (he was still the commish in 1985, right?) announced that Bruce was the #1 pick, he leaned over and said clearly into the microphone, "Bruce Smith of *Virginia Tech*." And the college and pro football fans watching took note, and VT had their moment in the sun. Bruce Smith's draft selection very much reflected well on Virginia Tech.

And I don't know about you, but every year, I go over the NFL draft day results to see what teams drafted whom from what colleges. To some of us, guys like me, the NFL draft is closely tied to the college game, but I don't follow the NFL much at all, so once the players get beyond the draft, I couldn't care less.

So I maintain that being an NFL draft choice, while it might seem like a thin connection to awarding "recruiting" points to a player, is certainly more closely tied to a player's college career than his accomplishments after he has made the NFL, when his NFL training and experience take over.

In addition, I'll tell you one of the main reasons I discounted NFL accomplishments in the TSL ranking system: too much data, and too hard to research. In the TSL system, recruits are awarded points in a whopping 22 categories, and if I started adding NFL accomplishments to the list ... well, it would quickly get more unwieldy than it already is.

You suggest NFL seasons started and All-Pro status as good grounds on which to award points to a player. Why stop there? What about NFL records held, being named the NFL offensive or defensive player of the year, NFL season stats leaders, years played, etc., etc., etc.? Where should it stop?

Also, I can research what I need to know for the current ranking using my VT media guides, my Hokie Huddlers, and my Big East media guide, all within easy reach. If we start adding NFL accomplishments, then the data gets very hard for me to find. I have no clue, for example, if Ken Brown or Dave Kadela ever started in the NFL, and I wouldn't know where to look.

So even if you could convince me to add some NFL accomplishments to the ranking system, I don't think I could handle the work load. In addition to the arguments of logic presented above, which you may or may not find convincing, the difficulty of researching the NFL data makes it impractical to make it part of the system.

See you next month!

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