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SABRE
NEWSLETTER

Issue 13, April 16, 2001

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SABRE NEWSLETTER

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Letter from the Editor

Spring is here! Spring is here! So, what's so great about spring? It's either too hot, too cold or too rainy. Basketball's over. And how many baseball games can one take?

Oh yeah, that's right, football is here! Spring football, a time of joy for football fans everywhere. Coach Al Groh opened up some practices for fans and media to get a first look at this year's team. On April 21st, the Cavaliers will strut their stuff for all to see at Klockner Stadium for the 2001 spring game. With the 'Tribe' encouraging the players to put their 'faces in the fan', this year's spring game should be a lot of fun.

This month is also basketball recruiting signing period. The Hoos have most of their class signed and in place, but are still waiting on a decision by Sagana Diop, the 7-foot, 320-pound center from Oak Hill Academy. Even with his recent foot surgery, it seems the NBA is willing to take a chance on him early. With the money that the NBA throws at Top 10 draftees, it's almost a certainty that Diop will go. This is bad news for Virginia, since they've basically held a scholarship for this young man for an entire year and may not have a big man to fall back on.

Still, the Cavalier class is in good shape as long as Elton Brown qualifies. He's retaken his SAT, taken his ACT, and still has another SAT to take just in case he doesn't improve enough on the last one. My gut feeling is that he'll qualify based on the number of opportunities he's had. Cross your fingers, Wahoo fans.

In this issue, we'll dip into spring football a bit, recap our current crop of basketball recruits, and revisit the past with a look at the great Barry Parkhill. For those who aren't old enough to remember Parkhill, he's the guy who holds the Virginia scoring record with 51 points in a single game.

Many of you have stated that you'd like to see some more columns and opinion mixed in with the human interest stories and interviews, so we've solicited work from a new columnist for this issue to balance things out a bit.

We hope you enjoy Issue 13 of the Sabre Newsletter and we look forward to your comments and suggestions. And by the way, don't forget that you have a 10 percent discount off everything in our store, TheSabreShop.com.

Regards,

Michael Ingalls

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Chris Williams Returns

by John Galinsky

Last spring, Chris Williams was a long-distance call away from the Virginia football team's practice fields. How appropriate, then, that the suspended safety was working as a telemarketer for the Bell Atlantic phone company at the time, pushing long-distance service.

"The worst," he says of his job. "I hated it. That was motivation to get out of there."

There was Newport News, his hometown and the place he served his penance after being temporarily booted from UVa following a superb redshirt freshman season. He started every game and finished fourth on the team with 69 tackles in 1999, showing outstanding promise, but just as quickly he was gone.

The reason was academics, but Williams hardly fits the stereotype of the dumb jock incapable of handling college coursework. After all, in addition to being a three-sport star (football, baseball, track) at Heritage High School, Williams was an honor roll student and the president of the chess, computer, science and vocational industry clubs.

His mistake, if you'd call it that, was Williams tried to take engineering classes while playing college football - endeavors that are demanding enough on their own, and twice as difficult when pursued simultaneously.

Though he was put on academic probation during his redshirt year, he thought he was back in good standing when his grades slipped again in the fall of 1999 - the same time he was excelling on the field. Since his poor semesters were not consecutive, he figured he would receive another warning, but under engineering school rules he was suspended from school for a year.

"That was a shocker," he said.

Williams returned home and moved back in with

his parents. Besides his job as a telemarketer, he worked out at the local YMCA nearly every day and longed to return to the football field. He appealed the suspension and was told he could return to school in the fall if he pulled a 3.0 GPA in his summer school courses.

"I got a 4.0," he said. "Straight A's."

Williams was back at UVa but remained ineligible to play football last fall. He was allowed to practice with the team, however, so defensive coordinator Rick Lantz put him on the scout team. That may seem demeaning for a former starter, but Williams made the best of it, studying film and learning the defense of the opponent every week.

"I'm tough-minded," Williams said. "It was hard but the first years made it easier on me. They knew who I was and they gave me respect from the get-go. I took a leadership role on the scout team and I spent the whole year going against the first-team offense. It felt good just to be playing football."

Still, not playing on Saturdays was tough. He didn't go to road games. At home games, he watched from the sideline.

"I felt like I was part of the team, but it was really hard not being out there with my teammates," he said. "It drove me really crazy."

The Cavaliers could have used Williams. Jerton Evans and Shernard Newby did a decent job as the starting safeties, but Evans was slowed by injuries and the team lacked depth at the position. UVa's defense was dreadful, so the absence of an adept run stopper and pass defender like the 6-3, 190-pound Williams proved costly.

This spring, the circumstances are decidedly different. Williams is back as a full-fledged member of the team and the Cavaliers appear well-stocked

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at safety.

UVa coach Al Groh knew little about Williams because he did not look at any film of Virginia games before the 2000 season. He said Williams did not make much of an impression early in the spring, but he has practiced well recently and seems to be in good form.

"There's always a bit of a confidence factor when you haven't played in a year," Groh said. "There's an anxiety in an athlete's mind that enters in that situation. You haven't done it on the field in a while, so you have to test yourself. When you achieve success again, you regain your confidence. It's a psychology of results."

Williams will have to fight for his old starting spot. Evans and Newby, also rising juniors, are back, as is rising senior Devon Simmons, who emerged as one of the team's most ferocious tacklers last season.

"I don't know if we have mediocrity or really good depth," Groh said. "The competition for those spots is probably as strong as it is at any position. We have four guys who are all at about the same skill level."

Williams says he doesn't expect to be handed the starting job.

"I just want to help the team out," he said. "All of us [safeties] are helping each other out. We're all competing and that's raising the level of our play and the level of our defense. I love the challenge."

One thing is for sure: Playing football and going to class beats the heck out of getting hung up on a hundred times a day, Williams says he never intends to return to telemarketing. His engineering days also are behind him. Now he is pursuing an interdisciplinary course of study in computer science and cognitive sciences.

Dumb jock, indeed.

"I was set back a semester and I lost a season of football," Williams said. "But I can't look back. I have two seasons left and there's a lot I want to accomplish."



Football Recruiting

Interview with Randy Jones

by Michael Ingalls

Randy Jones, a 5-11, 175-pound defensive back from Richmond Senior High School in Rockingham, North Carolina committed to the University of Virginia December 7th, 2000.

Jones is considered one of the nation's best defensive backs by many recruiting services, including SuperPrep, PrepStar and Borderwars. SuperPrep has him rated as the 18th best defensive back nationally and the 4th best player in the state of North Carolina. Jones was named the SuperPrep Mid-Atlantic Defensive Player of the Year.

In North Carolina, Jones was named to All-Conference and All-State teams. He was also the Defensive MVP of the Shrine Bowl, and South Atlantic Defensive Player of the Year.

Jones is an amazing talent. He's fast, and he's physical. Jones recently was clocked at 4.35 in the forty when he camped at Tennessee. His own coaches have him at 4.37. Jones led his team last season with 96 solo tackles while playing safety. He also had three punt blocks, two field goal blocks and four interceptions his senior year.

It is unknown whether he will play safety or cornerback at Virginia, but there's a good bet he'll get a shot at both as a true freshman. This quiet-spoken young man isn't quiet on the field. His hitting has been compared to that of former Virginia star and current Baltimore Ravens safety Anthony Poindexter.

The Interview:

SN: First, tell us why UVa?

Jones: I took a visit up there and liked it. Plus, when I started getting recruited from Virginia, I liked Coach David Turner. He told me there was a possibility of me seeing time as a freshman.

When I talked to Coach Groh, he told me the same thing. Plus, he was an NFL coach, so he's got a lot of experience and knowledge that he can share with me in order to make me a better player and person.

It's not really a big campus, it's more like a community. All the players and everyone seemed glad to have me up there.

SN: Talk about your official visit. Who was your host and what did you do?

Jones: I believe his name was Larry Simmons. First, we went out to eat with my family and the coaches. Then we went out to a party and met different players. We went to the stadium and walked around. We talked to some people that can help with what I'd be majoring in. They talked to me about what courses I'd be taking.

SN: Where were you when you heard Coach Welsh retired, and how did you find out?

Jones: I was practicing for the Shrine Bowl, and Coach Barnes came up there and told me about it. I didn't want to believe it. I was like, hmm, what am I going to do – 'cause they might not want to still recruit me.

SN: What went through your mind?

Jones: The first think I was thinking was, when am I going to get to talk to Coach Turner again. I knew that more than likely, if Coach Welsh were leaving, then he'd be leaving too. There were a couple of schools on my list already – I talked to East Carolina and Clemson, and they told me they'd be in touch with me.

SN: Where you wavering on your decision at this point, or were you just waiting to see who the new staff would be?

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Jones: I wanted to know who the new coaches were going to be, for sure. I didn't want to back out just because the coach retired, but I didn't want to be left hanging out to dry.

SN: Talk about the new coaching staff. What have they done to make you feel like you've done the right thing by sticking with your commitment?

Jones: As soon as Coach Groh took the position, he called me that day. He let me know what he expected and what he wanted in a player. And I guess I was the one he wanted. And then, to make it better, he sent Bill Musgrave down to get to know me, because he was my recruiter after Coach Turner left. He came to talk to me and let me know what was going on. Then Coach Groh came down the next week or so.

SN: Talk about your preparations for college football. What are you doing to get yourself ready for next season?

Jones: Well, they sent me a workout to go by, so right now I'm doing their workout. And I'm running track.

SN: Really, what events do you participate?

Jones: I run the relays, the 100-meter and the 200-meter and open 200.

SN: Did you run the 100 or 200 for times?

Jones: I haven't run the 100-meter for time yet. My best 200 was a 21.9.

SN: As defensive back, who would you compare your style to?

Jones: I don't know... Adrian Wilson from North Carolina State.

SN: A lot of folks say that you're a hard hitter, much like Anthony Poindexter. Is this accurate?

Jones: Yes sir. Since he's from Virginia, I can say that I emulate him a lot.

SN: Any players you want to be like?

Jones: Tay Cody from Florida State. He surprised me, because he started all four years at Florida State. To me, that's the best honor you could have, to start at FSU as a freshman.

SN: Did you ever look into Florida State?

Jones: Actually, I always wanted to go to Florida State. That was like a childhood dream. But, as I grew older I realized that, if I go down there, more than likely I'm not going to play right away – probably won't play for two years. I just feel I'm better off going where I can play early. The more experience the better.

SN: Obviously, Virginia's known as an academic institution. Were academics a priority for you when making your decision?

Jones: It was, because I have to have a good education. But I didn't put as much emphasis on education, because I know that, at any school, I'm going to get some kind of education. But, having Virginia be such a good academic school, I figured that would be helpful too.

SN: I understand that you've been playing safety in high school, but many colleges project you as a cornerback. Where do you see yourself?

Jones: At first, I thought I'd just be a great safety. Because, the first time I played cornerback, I realized that you have to be confident in yourself. Just looking at it, it's kind of easy – just guarding a man. But, you have to deal with different moves – it's about patience and confidence in yourself.

I played cornerback in the Shrine Bowl, and I like it a lot. Coach Groh told me that he wanted to use me at corner and safety, to be able to play both positions.

SN: Tell us about the play you remember the most in your career. I'm sure there's at least one big-fish story you can share with us.

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Jones: I think one of my best plays was in my 11th-grade year. I think it was third round of the play-offs. We were down 20-7 at halftime. In the fourth quarter, we started a comeback. It was the biggest play of the game. I was playing linebacker, because our middle linebacker had gotten hurt. It was like 3rd and maybe 7, and I blitzed and hit the quarterback right as he was throwing the ball. It would have been a dead ball, but one of our corners intercepted it. When he was running it back, the tight end was about to tackle him. I just ran up and knocked him out of the way – he was in the air, just flying. He scored and we eventually won the game. That was the best play for me.

SN: When you're not playing football or studying, what are you doing?

Jones: Usually just watching TV or hanging out with my friends.

SN: If you were to describe yourself to me, what kind of person are you?

Jones: Well, when you first get to know me, I'm quiet. But as I get comfortable around you, I like to talk. I like for people to underestimate me. When you look at me, I don't want you to say, 'he's this or he's that.' I want you to get to know me first. I've had people say that they thought I was stuck-up, but then when they got to know me, they would say they shouldn't have judged me in that way.

SN: If football didn't exist, what sport do you think you'd be playing?

Jones: I want to say basketball, but I'm not all that good at basketball. I'd probably be running track.

SN: Any other sports that you enjoy?

Jones: I like basketball.

SN: What professional team do you follow?

Jones: 76ers. I love Allen Iverson.

SN: Is it your goal to play right away, or would you prefer to red-shirt?

Jones: Right away.

SN: What are your goals for college? What would you like to achieve?

Jones: I'd like to look good for the NFL scouts. Hopefully one day I'll be playing in the NFL. Also, I think we can make it to [the championship level]. I want to be part of that. I always want to win. Virginia is always up in the top ranks. They never really have a bad year.

SN: Are you the type of player that can help Virginia beat Florida State?

Jones: I think so.

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The Legendary Barry Parkhill

by Jerry Ratcliffe

Barry Parkhill was exhausted. He had just returned to Charlottesville from San Francisco, having caught the red-eye flight to Dulles, and he was dragging.

Almost three decades have come and gone since Parkhill last sank a jump shot for the University of Virginia but even today, the former Cavalier superstar is still giving his all for his school. He had spent a few days on the West Coast in an attempt to raise money for the construction of a new basketball arena, something dear to his heart.

Parkhill was responsible for the first sellout crowd in University Hall, six years after it opened for business. The 6-foot-4 point guard from State College, Pa., an unknown in high school, became the nucleus that Coach Bill Gibson built his program around and took the Cavaliers to their greatest heights in 1971-72.

That season, Parkhill was phenomenal, leading the Wahoos to a 21-7 record, the first Top 10 ranking in school history and UVa's first-ever postseason appearance (NIT). He had raised expectations the year before when he became the talk of the town. Parkhill nearly brought the house down when he controlled the last eight minutes of the game and hit the winning jump shot to upset No. 1-ranked South Carolina, 50-49.

Charlottesville had never really gone basketball crazy until Parkhill's sophomore season. The upset over Coach Frank McGuire's top-ranked Gamecocks was a sign of things to come as Parkhill's legend grew and reached All-American status in 1972 and '73.

The university and all of those who witnessed his deeds have never forgotten. No wonder that when Barry Parkhill shows up at the door of prospective contributors today, he is often greeted with reverence. No one had ever created quite the stir around campus and the community that Parkhill did during his glory days. While Ralph Sampson

later reached All-American status and National Player of the Year, those who observed the careers of both UVa legends argue that even the hoopla that surrounded Sampson did not approach the fanaticism that surrounded Parkhill.

Parkhill became UVa's first ACC Basketball Player of the Year after the '71-'72 season and joined football star Frank Quayle (1968) as the school's only ACC Athletes of the Year at that time. The two-time All-American led the ACC in scoring in 1971-72 with a 21.6 points per game average and was the only unanimous selection to the All-ACC team his junior season on a star-studded squad that included North Carolina's Bob McAdoo, Maryland's Tom McMillan, N.C. State's Tom Burleson and UNC's Dennis Wuycik.

He broke the school's single-game scoring record by pumping in 51 points against Baldwin-Wallace, a record that still stands, and his No. 40 jersey was retired by UVa. When he played his final moments as a Cavalier in the '72-'73 ACC Tournament, the 15,000 fans at the Greensboro Coliseum gave Parkhill a 40-second standing ovation as he walked off the court for the last time.

Then, as today, Parkhill was a humble man who took little credit for a job well done.

"I had the best experience that any basketball player ever had at this university," Parkhill said upon his return from another fund-raising expedition to California. "Other players might disagree, but I'm convinced that I had the greatest experience of any basketball player here and that goes beyond just basketball."

He had so much attention heaped upon him, the reserved floppy-haired kid was embarrassed by all the publicity.

"I don't know if anybody can be ready for that kind of attention," Parkhill said. "I would like to

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think I handled it well. I never looked at it as pressure but if probably was. You get so much attention, it's just hard to explain. I hope I never took it too seriously."

There was even a ballad recorded locally about Parkhill's deeds. It was titled "Mr. BP," a moniker that Parkhill disdained nearly as much as the song.

"Don't mention the song to Barry or he won't talk to you," cautioned Parkhill's father, who moved to Charlottesville several years ago.

Asked about his reaction to the recording, Barry Parkhill cringed.

"That was a bit much," he said of the song. "I'm sure it was made with the best of intentions but when I heard it, I was embarrassed. I just wanted to run and hide."

But Parkhill's fame didn't allow him to hide. Charlottesville and the university were afire with hero worship for the man who had put Wahoo basketball on the map.

Parkhill had a flair about his game. A point guard who could score as well as pass, he was a good rebounder as well with his 6-4 size.

"I'd like to say I did what I was told," said Parkhill. "Scoring was something that in some respects I had to do. My teammates might disagree, but being a point guard I tried to set the guys up. I handled the ball 90 percent of the time and back then there was no hash mark on the floor (that came in during the 1972-73 season)."

The lack of the hash mark came in handy when McGuire's Gamecocks came rolling into Charlottesville. Gibson's plan was to shorten the game, not by holding the ball but to slow the pace down considerably for bits and pieces.

"At one point, I dribbled six minutes off the clock," Parkhill remembered. "South Carolina didn't come out and chase."

In fact, Parkhill dribbled away most of the final seven minutes of that dramatic game. South Carolina led 49-46 with 7:24 to play, but the Gamecocks wouldn't score again. Parkhill was fouled by John Roche with 3:09 remaining and connected on both free throws to pull Virginia within one. USC turned the ball over with just over two minutes to play and the drama was set.

Gibson called timeouts at the 56-second and 19-second marks to set up what turned out to be Parkhill's game-winning shot. After the final timeout, he dribbled to the right and put up a 12-footer that found nothing but net as time expired, and U-Hall was bedlam. Parkhill was hoisted above the fans and was given a hero's ride off the court.

"You know when you're messing around as a kid, pretending to win a game on a last-second shot, well you always hope to have a chance to win or lose a game when you grow up," Parkhill said. "I missed as many as I made, but a win over the No. 1 team in the country, that's one you can't forget. Everybody remembers that game because they were No. 1. What people forget is that it was the second game of a four-game home stand and we won all four and got into the Top 20."

Then there was the 51-point barrage against Baldwin-Wallace on Dec. 11, 1971. Up until then, UVa's first All-American, Buzzy Wilkinson (1955), had owned the top nine single-performance scoring games in school history and held the record for 48 points in one game. No longer.

"I just couldn't miss that night," Parkhill recalls. "Every now and then you have a night when you just can't miss and that was mine. In the second half, Coach Gibson called a time out and said, 'Listen, you're close to the record and I'm going to let you get it.'"

"Well, at that point I started missing," Parkhill said. "I think if he hadn't told me that, I probably could have gotten 61."

With his usual modesty, he doesn't say much

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about still holding the record, 30 years later.

"This is no knock at Baldwin-Wallace but Ralph had some major games against some major league opponents," Parkhill said. "I can't say that the record doesn't mean anything but I can't say that it does mean anything. It was a fun night but other games stick out a lot more than that one. Somebody will break it someday."

He went on to All-American status, but to this day he refuses to take sole credit for his success.

"There are certain guys that you never read about who are out there every day, sweating their buns off, making you a better player," Parkhill said. "Guys like Brian Tully, Steve Morris and John Hill. Some people might remember them, some might not. But they never backed down from me every day in practice and made me a better player. My brother, Bruce (now associate head coach at Ohio State), pushed me more than anybody. He was a real player and taught me how to be competitive. He used to kick my butt. And my father (who played at Penn State) taught me all the fundamentals. I have a lot of people to thank for my success."

After a three-year stint in the now-defunct ABA with the Virginia Squires and the St. Louis Spirit, Parkhill returned to school to earn his Master's degree, then got into coaching. He became assistant coach to brother Bruce at William & Mary, then succeeded Bruce as head coach of the Tribe and was fired a few years later. He wound up as head coach at St. Michael's College in Vermont, then became assistant coach to Pete Herrmann at the U.S. Naval Academy before leaving coaching and returning to UVa as associate director of regional development.

He is now in his third year as associate athletic director for development, which brings him back to close ties with University Hall.

"The greatest percentage of my time comes right down to raising money, especially for facilities," Parkhill said. "I have spent most of my time on

(raising money for) the football stadium, although I try to help athletics and the VSAF as much as I can."

Now he is developing relationships that may lead to the financial support of replacing U-Hall, the smallest arena in the ACC. Parkhill prefers to call it a special events center, the type of facility that will not only host basketball games but other events that will treat the student body and the community as well.

He spends about 60 percent of his time on the road raising money all over the country and is involved chiefly in major gift fundraising, the kind you don't do over the phone or by writing a letter.

"I've got the greatest job in the world," Parkhill said. "I really mean that. I think now that I could fundraise anywhere, but I will never fundraise anywhere but the University of Virginia unless they send me packing. I totally believe in the place and this is the best community to live in. I get to meet lots of neat people and get reacquainted with people I went to school with. And, again, it's a tie to athletics, which is in my blood. Athletics are only a part of the university, but I believe a very important part."

And so is Parkhill, who etched his name into Virginia basketball folklore and has been the epitome of class ever since. Now, he is trying to help Coach Pete Gillen raise the standards at UVa once again with a first-class arena, so that the next Parkhill out there can generate a new excitement.

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UVa Basketball Review

by Kris Wright

For the University of Virginia men's basketball team and many Cavalier fans alike, the 2000-2001 collegiate basketball season couldn't tip off soon enough. Pete Gillen and company's quick turnaround had everyone itching for a new season and the excitement level was high.

The season flew by, with Virginia making a return to the NCAA Tournament, and March Madness crowned Duke as the National Champions. Unfortunately, the added pressure of the postseason and the glaring spotlight that created those favored shining moments also have had the adverse affect of slighting accomplishments. So were the Blue Devils the only ones with a successful season?

For instance, does a first-round loss to Hampton mean that Iowa State had a bad season? Does Stanford's pre-Final Four exit take away from a season where it spent week after week at No. 1? And what about closer to home? North Carolina had a second-round defeat, but the Tar Heels topped Duke among others and claimed the top spot in the polls as well. So was it a successful season?

While you ponder those cases, let's take a look at Virginia. UVa was ranked in the top 10 in the polls for numerous weeks; the Cavs can claim wins over three teams ranked in the top 5 at the time of victory for the first time in school history; the team posted wins over UNC and Final Four participants Maryland and National Champion Duke; and Virginia had a 14-1 home record. Did the Cavaliers, who finished at 20-9, have a successful season?

Most likely you'll get different answers depending on whom you ask. I won't judge either way. Instead, I'll go with the Dragnet approach: Just the facts ma'am, just the facts.

Expectations

Entering the 2000-2001 campaign, it is safe to say that the Virginia basketball program had higher expectations. Gillen and company had injected life into the program and returned to the postseason the previous year. The preceding season ended with a sour loss to Georgetown in triple OT in the NIT, while many critics claimed Virginia belonged in the NCAA Tournament. Regardless, the NCAA pass-over and the ensuing NIT loss proved to be a bitter pill at the end of a good season, and Virginia's players vowed a return to the Big Dance this season.

In addition to the stated goal of an NCAA Tournament berth, the Cavs also wanted to improve their out-of-conference schedule on both paper and in the win column. The new suspects included Purdue and Missouri as well as Tennessee.

And, of course, UVa wanted to post a solid showing in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Exhibition

A pair of exhibition games provided the Cavs a chance to get their feet wet before the official schedule began. Virginia didn't exactly put on a show-stopping performance in the preseason.

The Cavaliers did knock off the Nantucket Nectars, but that followed an exhibition loss to the London Leopards, 89-88. Plenty of critics took that loss to mean that UVa wasn't for real and that the Cavs were undeserving of their top-25 preseason ranking.

Out of conference

With the 1-1 exhibition record in tow, Virginia embarked on the non-ACC portion of its schedule. On tap for the Cavaliers was a slate of not-so-interesting opponents: Long Island, Coastal Caro-

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lina, Bucknell, UMBC and a trip to Dartmouth in a homecoming game for senior Keith Friel; and a slate of slightly-more-interesting games: Ohio, at VMI and at Virginia Tech on the eve of the UVa-VT football showdown.

In those out-of-conference games, Virginia helped soothe any worries about the loss to the Leopards. Despite the final margins of the victory, however, the Cavs looked less than sharp in the road games at VMI and especially Virginia Tech. It turns out that those winning, though not convincing, performances would provide a glimpse into the future.

The other three non-conference games came against more marquee opponents. In the ACC-Big Ten Challenge, the Cavs drew Purdue at University Hall. Virginia's superior quickness set the tone for a dominating performance by the Cavaliers as they cruised to a 98-79 triumph. The 19-point victory also solidified UVa's place on the national landscape as a legitimate top-15 team, even though the Boilermakers fought injuries and struggled through an atypical up-and-down season.

If the Purdue victory didn't win over the critics, the showdown with Tennessee on ESPN in the Jimmy V Classic left few doubters. Virginia was in control of the game the entire way, neutralizing the Volunteers' size with quickness. The Cavaliers cruised to the 107-89 win, the first of the three wins over top-5 teams.

The star of the show was undoubtedly senior point guard Donald Hand, who played close to home in the Meadowlands. Hand's family, friends and supporters were out in full force from nearby Paterson and he did not disappoint. He posted 21 points, including two big 3-pointers that kept any Volunteer hopes of a comeback at bay. Perhaps even more importantly, Hand racked up nine assists and mostly made all the right decisions. Hand's critics would get no shots in on the point guard in this one, though they came out in full force as the season wore on.

After playing a large portion of the ACC slate, the Cavs faced their final out-of-conference foe in late January when Missouri rolled into Charlottesville. Injuries took away from what could have been an even more successful season for the Tigers, but when they were in U-Hall they were playing arguably their best basketball of the season.

Kareem Rush and Clarence Gilbert put on an offensive showcase, making shots from all over the court en route to 20 and 22 points, respectively. But in the end, the Cavaliers' home crowd and pestering full-court defense made the difference as UVa pulled away for a 13-point victory. With a perfect out-of-conference regular season in the bag, the memories of a loss to the London Leopards were long gone and the Cavs were turning heads across the country.

The ACC

But as seemingly easy as life outside the ACC was for the Cavaliers, it was back to reality during the conference season. As Coach Gillen reminded everyone on a regular basis, every night in the ACC is a war: if you don't show up, you get blown up.

Virginia had roared out to a 10-0 start before rolling down to Winston Salem, N.C. for a date with the Demon Deacons of Wake Forest. For the first 10-15 minutes of the game, the Cavs seemed fit for the task, battling back and forth with the top-5 Deacs. Unfortunately for Virginia, Wake had other ideas and UVa never quite recovered.

The Deacons got physical and then pounded, pounded and pounded the ball in the paint. The strategy essentially broke the Cavaliers as Wake pulled away to a 23-point victory. At the moment, it seemed like Virginia had finally played with flaws and it was simply a loss. Time would reveal that it was something about playing on the road that these Cavs couldn't quite handle, though no one from Gillen to the players to the critics to the fans would figure out what that something was.

Basketball Feature

With the first loss finally on the board, the long conference season was off to a rocky start. But the Cavs would recover to put together a solid ACC campaign. They played UNC tough on the road in the second half, blew out Clemson in Little John and escaped Tallahassee by the time the season was through.

Of course, UVa also upset North Carolina, Maryland and Duke at University Hall, blowing out the first two in impressive fashion.

"We thought we had an excellent season playing the best league in the country, in my opinion. We came in fourth, got 20 wins, beat Duke, North Carolina, Maryland, Wake Forest," Gillen said. "Another step or two and it could have been an unbelievable season, but we just came up a little bit short."

The victories over Duke and UNC, while both were ranked in the top 5, helped contribute to a 14-1 season at home (tops in the ACC), where at times the Cavaliers seemed unbeatable. Well, except for Georgia Tech.

The Yellow Jackets came into U-Hall, established their style of game and forced Virginia into a grind-it-out contest. GT took the win as the Cavaliers couldn't muster the energy that usually accompanied them at home. Tech would repeat the feat twice more to sweep the UVa team 3-0 on the year.

Losing to Georgia Tech proved to be the least of Virginia's worries, though. In the sluggish outings at Virginia Tech and VMI, then in the loss to Wake, the Cavaliers' problems on the road could have been chalked up to flukes, breaks from the norm. After embarrassing losses to the Deacs and Duke on the road, however, it was evident that the losses were anything but fluky.

On the road, someone stole the Cavaliers' mojo, took their spinach and donated a healthy dose of kryptonite, because these weren't the same players and this wasn't the same team. And no one could explain it. At times, the highly-ranked Cavs

looked downright pathetic. At others, the players looked inexplicably lost and out of synch.

"I'm disappointed in our guys that we didn't respond with the intensity and the aggressiveness that you have to play with," Gillen said after a road loss at N.C. State. "You've got to come out with a fire, with a passion, and we didn't."

"Maybe [we're] soft with a little bit of success. ... We don't know how to handle it. ... This is new, uncharted territory for us," he added.

Even now, weeks from the season's end, no one has an answer. One thing is for sure, however, the story line of Virginia's differences at home and on the road became the dominant theme for the year. By the end of the season, Virginia's road losses included this list: 23 points at Wake Forest, 42 points at Duke (UVa was ranked in the top 10 at the time), 10 points at N.C. State and 35 points at Maryland. Ouch.

ACC at Atlanta

Coming off the rough performance in College Park, the Cavaliers were looking for redemption in a variety of ways in the ACC Tournament. First and foremost, Virginia wanted to bounce back from such a humbling loss. Secondly, Virginia drew its nemesis for the season: Georgia Tech.

Twice, the Yellow Jackets had forced Virginia out of their comfort zone, and twice the Yellow Jackets took victories. UVa had thoughts of revenge and wanted to prove that GT didn't have the Cavs' number.

So much for that theory. With a possible NCAA at-large bid on the line, the Jackets braved their way to the sweep and Virginia returned to Charlottesville with one final chance at avoiding a really sour end to the season.

The Big Dance

The Cavaliers' impressive regular season – cracking the top 10, defeating Duke and UNC, reach-

Basketball Feature

ing the 20-win mark – had essentially locked up an NCAA at-large bid. Selection Sunday did not disappoint, as the Cavs did indeed receive an invitation to the Big Dance, their first since trip to the tourney since 1997.

On the other hand, however, was the assigned partner to the prom: Gonzaga. The tournament's darling for two years running was any high seed's nightmare as a first-round opponent. The Zags were tabbed as a 12 seed, a little low by pretty much anyone's standards, and they were dangerous.

Gonzaga had a powerful one-two punch in Casey Calvary and Dan Dickau, plus the team was tournament savvy, with an Elite Eight and Sweet Sixteen on the resume in recent history. And as Michigan State coach Tom Izzo so aptly noted later in the NCAA Tournament, the Zags were "America's Team." After all, everyone loves a Cinderella.

Other than its seeding, however, Gonzaga didn't really fit the description. As noted above, the Zags had tournament experience, the Cavs had none. The Zags had recent wins in the postseason, the Cavs had none. Beyond the experience comparisons, the match-up was a dandy on paper. The Cavaliers pressure defense vs. Gonzaga's disciplined, though free-flowing style with Dickau at the point; UVa's quick interior vs. the Zags' versatile big men; Virginia's return to the tournament vs. Gonzaga's return to America's hearts.

The teams did not disappoint, providing a tremendous game to watch with the Zags squeaking out an 85-84 win. The two battled it out, as neither squad dominated the action. Gonzaga pulled out to the game's biggest lead in the second half, but Virginia fought back setting up a thrilling stretch duel.

Roger Mason Jr. pushed Virginia ahead with a clutch 3-pointer and the Cavs made a defensive stop. Looking for more of a cushion, UVa again turned to Mason, who launched a deep 3-pointer that rimmed out. J.C. Mathis secured the rebound and

was fouled as he landed with the ball. With a one-and-one opportunity, Mathis stepped to the free-throw line and tossed up a solid-looking attempt, which also rolled around the rim and out.

This time Gonzaga ripped down the board, setting up a game-winning possibility for the Zags. Dickau drove the lane and put up a tough shot in the paint, which Adam Hall promptly rejected off the backboard with authority. Unfortunately for UVa, the ball ricocheted into Calvary's hands, and he put home the eventual game-winner. It appeared that Mason and Mathis had just switched on defense as Dickau took his shot, leaving both Cavaliers out of position for a solid block-out.

With the final possession of the game, Virginia went without a timeout and Mason had the ball in his hands. He drove hard to the basket, the defense rotated over and Mason had to take a difficult shot off the glass. The shot attempt never had a chance, and the Zags' took the win en route to a third straight Sweet Sixteen berth despite a career high 30-point performance by Mason.

When asked if the Cavaliers will be hungry during the off-season after losing in such disappointing fashion for the second straight year, Mason said, "We might be even more so. We got a taste of what the NCAA is like. I was so hungry this year, man, I'll probably be two times as hungry next year, just knowing the feeling of getting here and being so close to getting past that first hurdle. ... It's not just good enough getting here."

Emerging?

Mason's game against the Zags was a common trend in the season's final weeks. The sophomore emerged as Virginia's go-to player in most situations. He handled the ball on possession of the Duke win when Hall put in the game-winning bucket. Mason drained the long 3-pointer to beat FSU and he had a shot to beat Gonzaga. Without a doubt, the rising junior will be a critical piece of Virginia's puzzle for the upcoming season.

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"Roger's game is night and day from when we started the season," Friel said. "He's always had the talent. As the year progressed, he got more confident with himself and his teammates. The end result was his best performance of the season."

"I definitely feel I'm a different player, and I'm playing more to my abilities," said Mason, a 6-5 guard who led the Cavs in scoring at 15.7 points per game. "That's just the coaches getting more comfortable with me and my teammates having more confidence in me."

Mathis posted a solid freshman campaign and emerged as a formidable force in the paint. Though Mathis did take ill-advised shots at times, he obviously improved as the season moved forward and he should be an invaluable asset in the coming years.

Junior Chris Williams put together another solid season as well, though he didn't break out like many would have liked. In fact, many critics are still waiting for Williams to emerge as a second go-to player for the Cavs. The forward's ability to play both inside and outside in addition to his quickness and ball-handling skills would suggest that he could be a more dominant force for Virginia. Whether he actually emerges as what people envision as a senior remains to be seen.

Redshirt

The anticipated move by the injured Majestic Mapp to redshirt after tearing his ACL did indeed come to fruition, as Mapp did not suit up at any time for Virginia. With Hand exhausting his eligibility, Mapp steps in as the projected starting point guard for next season and the Cavs need him to be as solid a floor leader as his potential indicated in high school and as a freshman a year ago.

The End

With another season in the books, Gillen and company have righted the sinking ship at the University of Virginia. Whether that turnaround further

blossoms into a contending program from year to year will be decided in the seasons to come. After all the fact still remains that Virginia has yet to win a postseason game under Gillen.

"I'm proud of our steps up," Gillen said. "Now the question is: Are we going to continue to step up, or stay the same or step back? I think we're going to continue to step up."

So with that in mind, stay tuned ...



Spring Football Report, Part I

by Michael Ingalls

It's a little hard to grasp what type of team the Hoos will have in 2001, especially from just a few spring practices. How do you know if the offensive line is doing great? Maybe the defensive line isn't? Maybe it's the other way around? Maybe both are good? Maybe both aren't?

Still, there are things you can take from spring practice that help you to understand how good individual players have become. Here are some observations.

Enthusiasm.

Sure, there's always enthusiasm every spring, but this year seems different. I'm sure the new coaching staff has something to do with this. Sometimes change is good, just for the sake of change. Nothing wrong with Coach Welsh, but it was apparent many of the folks on his staff had lost the 'Right Stuff', if you know what I mean.

Enter Al Groh and his younger, more energetic 'Tribe'. Watching these folks operate on the field is entertainment in itself. The animation. The fire. The passion. Whether it's Coach Prince screaming at his offensive line to get low and drive, or Coach London sprinting from one station to the other just to slap Darryl Sanders on the helmet and say great job on a simple tackling drill, these guys just don't let up.

"With the new staff coming in, everyone wants to impress them and show them their skills." Matt Schaub said. "Everything's wide open with the new system, and everyone's going to get a shot to play. Everyone's trying to take advantage of that and make an impact. The coaches bring a lot of enthusiasm, and that helps us pick it up that much more."

One moment worth remembering was the individual instruction Coach Al Groh gave to cornerback

Art Thomas on the second day of practice. Apparently, Thomas wasn't checking the receiver hard enough when he was leaving the line of scrimmage. Groh took him aside and demonstrated the proper way by him a two-handed push, knocking Thomas back about 5 feet. Groh then indicated to Thomas to do the same to him. Thomas responded, but not as aggressively. Hey, who can blame the kid? That's the head coach. Groh shook his head and popped Thomas again, knocking him back again. This time, Thomas responded by giving Groh the chuck he had hoped for, knocking the coach back a few feet. This delighted Groh, who gave his young corner praise and sent him back to his group.

It's situations like this that happen over and over again, every day of practice. The coaches are everywhere, watching everything – and the players know it.

"Normally it's the players bringing the other players up," Jerton Evans said. "In this situation, it's the coaches that are bringing the level of play up from the players. They bring a positive experience, and that helps us to get motivated for practice. We're ready to play right now. Everybody is just ready to go out and hit somebody."

Attendance.

Spring football has often been a time of player absentees. All too often in most recent years, nagging injuries have forced players to sit out several days in the spring, valuable days that count toward having a great fall in preparation for the season. With the new staff on board, this trend has seemingly reversed itself.

"I'm trying not to have it any other way," Groh said. "At the same time, obviously, you have to deal with reality. One of the things that goes along with leadership is to set the standards and then try to get the team to comply to those

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standards. I've tried to convey to the players that, the only way a team can get better, and prepare for a game is for the players to be at practice - not only for the preparedness, but also for the competition that it creates. Maybe it's good fortune on our part, I can't say that some other springs might be otherwise. I like the fact that a large percentage of the players are [participating]. I think we had only three players that didn't practice today."

Playmakers.

Every spring it's the same old story. Everyone is excited to learn which players are showing the most promise. While it's difficult to keep track of performances by every player, I did notice some standouts at key positions.

At **quarterback**, if I had to give the nod to someone early, it would have to be Matt Schaub. He seems to always hit his receivers in stride. The ball comes out of his hand without hesitation. He's completed some of the most technical passes I've seen in a Virginia quarterback since Shawn Moore. The ball seems to always get where it's supposed to be. His timing with the receivers is right on, and he doesn't take a long time to make decisions. He's been like that since opening day.

While Bryson Spinner has looked good at times, he's been off on others. His biggest knock last season was his accuracy, and he seems to be struggling with that again this year. Still, it's really early and I'm sure Spinner will get better as the spring goes on. One thing he's improved on is the swing passes to his backs. Early in the spring, Spinner often threw high or behind, instead of hitting them in stride. Now, he looks more comfortable in that situation.

Coach Groh is holding true to form, but not allowing anyone to really know what he's thinking in terms of the quarterback situation. The Cavaliers held their first full-contact scrimmage this past weekend, yet Groh only had minimal words about these two young players.

"I think they both did nicely [in the scrimmage]," Groh said. "They both had their moments. They both had a couple that they'd like to have back. That's about all you're going to get out of me."

No matter which quarterback eventually wins the starting role, Virginia fans shouldn't have much to worry about. If Schaub continues to play this well and Spinner wins the job, then that just means that Virginia has one hot QB running the show, and another hot QB waiting for his chance to play. Still, it's too early to really know, and the young quarterbacks are just worried about learning what they need to run the system.

"We're just getting the system down, working on our plays and getting them sharp so we can put more stuff in." Schaub said. "It's been upbeat and intense, but at the same time there's been a lot of learning. Everyone seems to be picking up [the offense] pretty well. We're keeping it kind of simple since there's a lot of new stuff. We've been executing pretty well, and everyone is picking it up really quick. That's a good thing."

The **running back** corps seems to be settling in. John Duckett has been moved back to his natural position at linebacker. Jonathan Ward has moved to fullback with Tyree Foreman. That leaves Antwoine Womack, Arlen Harris, Marquis Weeks and Brandon Isaiah at tailback. Wow. Who wants to be the defensive coordinator that was to prepare for that? Foreman and Ward are former tailbacks with good speed and excellent pass-catching ability. One would assume that those players might be upset with the change, but apparently Coach Groh uses the fullback in much the same fashion as he does the tailbacks.

Overall, Groh seems pleased with the running back corps. This past scrimmage told a lot about these players.

"I thought the running backs as a whole had their best day," Groh said. "I would say that because they had their best day in pass protection. They did some good things running the ball, but I thought they did a very good job in pass protection, and

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that's significant. Besides running the ball, I thought a couple of them caught the ball pretty well, too."

But what about Antwoine Womack, the ACC's leading rusher last season?

"He probably has been the most consistent of all the backs in his pass protection," Groh said. "He's also had a couple of Womack-like runs [during the scrimmage]. He's got the talent to go to [the next] level. He's already proven that he can lead this conference in rushing without being around Al Groh. I'm sure that he could do that again, but I'd like to play a part in his learning about the position and what not. I like coaching him."

At **wide receiver**, watch out for Tavon Mason and Michael McGrew. Mason's biggest problem last year wasn't speed, and wasn't his ability to catch the football or make plays. What kept him off the field was his inability to read defenses. One thing I've noticed from Mason this year is his attentiveness, and his ability to run the correct routes. Also, the young man has made some excellent catches, and has the ability to get open.

McGrew reminds me of Michael Irvin. He uses his body to shield the defender from the ball, runs precise routes, and catches just about everything thrown his way. When he runs, although he's not a speed-burner, he appears to 'glide' down the field. After the catch, McGrew has more moves than Terrence Wilkins. They look so effortless, yet he finds a way to make the first tackler miss on most occasions. Let's just hope that isn't a sign of bad defensive play. Frankly, I doubt that's the case. Our good young corners and safeties don't seem to have a tough time tackling any of the other receivers.

Billy McMullen started off slow this spring, but is starting to look better. He's got the athletic ability and the size, but he was having concentration problems reminiscent of last season. McMullen would make a tough catch one minute and drop an easy, routine pass the next. This first week

of spring wasn't any different.

Right now, it appears that only three receivers have stepped up and been consistent players in practice.

"I think that the three that we came in with, McMullen, McGrew and Mason, are probably going to come out of it much the same way," Groh said. "We've had a couple of [other] guys do a few things here today and yesterday that were step-up days for them. If they can do that for Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, where they've done them for five days in a row instead of two, then I would say they can probably push themselves into that position."

On the **offensive line**, Virginia returns four players who started at one point or another last season. Jermese Jones, Evan Routzahn, Josh Lawson and Jared Woodson. Filling in the last spot is Kevin Bailey, who saw a lot of action last season. I'm not sure how well they're playing spring ball, but they're staying healthy, and that's about as much as you can ask of the big uglies at this time of year. One minute, they're opening some good holes for Womack and Weeks. The next, there's no hole. Again, how do you know?

At **tight end**, Virginia returns Chris Luzar. Luzar struggled a bit the first couple of days of practice, but has come on strong since. He gets down field like a receiver, and makes tough catches. Some of the catches he's made this spring have been amazing, and his blocking has improved from last season. Luzar has All-ACC potential. Since it appears that no one else has really stepped up at this point, it may be up to true-freshman Patrick Estes to provide depth.

The Hoos finally look to have a good stock of **corners**. With the departure of starting corners Ahmad Hawkins and Tim Spruill, Coach Groh felt the need to move Jamaine Winborne from safety to corner.

"When we looked at the initial roster, their were very few corners on the roster, period," Groh said.

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"I believe you have to have good corners. Whether that was going to be a tailback or a wide receiver or a safety, somebody had to go play corner. What we tried to do, through some study, was try to make the best selection possible amongst those guys who might be candidates. So that's how Jermaine got over there. It could've been somebody else, but I thought he showed the best combination of skills that corners need to have."

Winborne joins young corners Art Thomas, Almondo Curry and Jay Dorsey. Also returning is Rashad Roberson, who received ample playing time last season.

"The system of coverage is a little bit different than what they played last year, so they're all young in terms of experience. But I think we've made some progress at that position, most particularly in the last three or four days."

While they're young, Virginia's new corners are pretty darned good from what I've seen. Art Thomas, Jamaine Winborne, Almondo Curry and Jay Dorsey have been impressive with their ability to play man-to-man coverage. These kids are picking up on things very quickly. It certainly doesn't hurt that all of them are a tenth or two faster than Virginia's recently departed corners. But what has impressed me most is their ability to break on the ball. Dorsey, a red-shirt freshman, has been unbelievable at times. He's already snagged a few picks, and knocked several other passes down in just a few practices that I've attended. On one play, it looked as if McGrew was going to beat him deep. The ball was thrown perfectly, McGrew jumped up to catch it at its highest point. Out of nowhere, Dorsey leaped up, took the ball out of McGrew's hands, and fell to the turf. It was a great play that got the attention of everyone on the field, and in the stands.

"[Dorsey] is really good," Tavon Mason said. "He looks really strong. I've noticed a lot of the young defensive backs – him, Art, Muff, Winborne – the young corners are going to be real good. They've

been impressive, and will provide competition in the spring and the summer."

With Thomas, Winborne and Curry playing so well this spring, it may be tough for Dorsey to break into the lineup this season, but the future is bright for this young man.

"I think he's in the second tier of those corners," Groh said. "Like the rest of them, he's made some progress here the last three or four days. He's right in that spot where he could play himself into some time, particularly when we go to our sub-packages. Whether it's nickel or dime, sometimes you end up with as many as four of them in there. You really need more corners on your team than you need safeties for the overall conduct of the game. In that context, I think that there's certainly an opportunity for him to continue to advance."

At **safety**, Virginia welcomes back Freshman All-American Chris Williams. While Jerton Evans and Shernard Newby started last season, you've got to wonder if Williams and hard-hitting Devon Simmons will end up taking their places this season. Both are amazing athletes with a nose for the football. With Groh's 'face in the fan' approach, he's bound to take a liking to these two players.

"I think the safety position is one of the most competitive on the team," Groh said. "We have four players there who have all seen action for this team in the past. They've all done a good job in the spring, and all are getting better. We truly have playable depth at that position – not just 'talk about it' depth. Most particularly, I think we have very significant competition at that spot."

The **defensive line** appears to be coming along well, and praise has been extended to most of the players throughout spring practice. I've heard good things said about Darryl Sanders and Chris Canty. Watch out for Canty. This kid could be a monster. Change his number to 85 and it would be tough not to believe that's Chris Slade out there. Not so much by his play, although he is

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playing pretty well, but more by his appearance. He's tall and strong. Stick him at left defensive end and right-handed quarterbacks are going to have problems.

"I think [Canty's] a player who has a bright future ahead of him," Groh said. "He's got talent. He seems to have a lot of want to. He's starting to make a little bit of a move. I think, with four years of playing time ahead of him, he's got the potential to be a significant player for us for quite some time. He's done a nice job. Pope's done a nice job. Darryl Sanders is doing a nice job there. Stamenich is doing a good job. And Stanley's starting to make a little bit of a move right now.

"I think as a group, they've had one of the more positive springs. Mike London's done a very good job with them. I like watching them work. What I see, when I watch tape and watch them on the field, I see real evidence that they're doing the things they're being trained to do. I like the way that's progressing right now."

Raymond Mann and Antonio Mayfield have been moved back to **linebacker** along with Duckett. Scooter Clark, Rich Bedesem and Angelo Crowell return at that position from last season. Also, Earl Sims has been cleared by the medical staff to return at that position. Virginia lost their three starting linebackers from last year, Greene, Isabelle and Thweatt. But never fear, the returning backers are pretty good, and there are several young ones looking to get some time. Since Coach Groh will most likely run a 3-4 defense, good play from some of the young linebackers is essential. Jermaine Hardy, Dennis Haley, Mann and Mayfield will all be asked to step up and make contributions. Dennis Haley has raised the most eyebrows thus far, but he will miss the remainder of spring practice with what first appeared to be a cartilage tear in one of his knees. Haley experienced no swelling, and was asked to use crutches as a precautionary measure prior to having arthroscopic surgery on April 6th. The surgery returned negative results and Haley should be back in full swing come summer.

The **kicking game** should improve from last season since veteran kickers David Greene and Mike Abrams return. Greene has hit some pretty deep field goals in practice. Abrams has shown consistency with his punts, and even the bad ones seem to travel 40 or more yards. Last Monday, Abrams nailed a punt over 70 yards in the air. OK, he did have the wind at his back, but still.

"I think we have two good kickers," Groh said. "Standing behind them during each one of those live drills – during each one of those periods I thought about the respective kicker himself, and thought, 'Gee, you know this guy might be amongst one of the better players on the team.'"

Though I've had the chance to sit through five spring practices, it's still very hard to judge where this team is going. The enthusiasm and toughness are there. The players seem to be attentive and willing to learn the new system. The coaches are giving it their all. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they'll be much better than they were last season. Only time will tell, and there's a lot of spring ball to be played.

"I didn't really have any specific expectations for the spring," Groh said. "I thought we'd just go out and start coaching the team and see what we had and see where we would go. We were just out there in the early stages just to get it started – to get to a point where we would then have enough information to form expectations. After 11 practices here, I think that this has been a positive time for us. I'm pleased with what we've gotten done. I try not to be optimistic or pessimistic, but I will say that I have a positive response to what the players have done to this point."

The key to Virginia's success this season, may very well lie on its second year players. Virginia's recruiting classes the past two seasons were pretty good, and many of those players are starting to step up.

"I think there's nice talent there," Groh said. "It may not be rare talent, but there's nice talent

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there. I think a very important thing for us to do in the latter stages of this spring camp – and this certainly isn't isolated to that class – we want to make a quantitative jump with all of the players on the team in this next week. The young players, like Canty, Ward, Mann or any of that group – if that group of players can take significant steps between now and the end of spring practice, and in the early going in August, then that's really going to move the team along.

"I'm pleased with the way things have gone. The players' responsiveness has been very good – they're fun to coach. I see improvement. I see a lot of young players really starting to show some things for us to be enthused about. I wish that they could have another three or four practices. But that's not the case, so I'll be looking forward to the start of it in August."

Next month, look for Part II of our spring report. John Galinsky will provide an in-depth wrap-up with a full report on the Spring Game, which is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., April 21st at Klockner Stadium. The event is free and open to the public.



Fear of the Unknown

by Glenn Pappalardo

I'll never forget where I was when I heard the news that Al Groh had been hired as the new head football coach at the University of Virginia. I was sitting in a cab in Las Vegas, on my way to the Paris casino, when my cell phone rang. On the other end of the line was my mother, of all people, telling me that CBS Sports had just interrupted its broadcast of the Dolphins playoff game to announce that Groh was leaving the Jets to take the head job with the Cavaliers. The Virginia Cavaliers. I repeated it back to her, to make sure I had heard it correctly, as well as to make sure she had read it correctly (my mother can sometimes be mistaken on matters such as this – just don't tell her I said that), and she patiently confirmed the news.

My first reaction was stunned silence. After all, I had joked with my good friend, a UVa grad and lifelong Jets fan, about Groh leaving New York to return to Charlottesville, but at no point had I ever considered it a realistic possibility. An NFL head coach, resigning his position to return to college? And not just any college, but Virginia? It seemed so implausible, so ridiculous, so...not Virginia athletics. The significance of the event began to sink in as I hung up the phone.

I decided I was cautiously excited about the situation, and that I couldn't wait to share the news with the rest of my Wahoo friends joining me for New Year's in Vegas. I loved being the first one of us out there to know, and at least for once, it would probably be a pleasant surprise.

My friends' reactions were, on the whole, quite similar to my own. All expressed initial disbelief, which gradually evolved into pleasant optimism. But it was interesting that none of us, myself included, jumped for joy. It seemed a little odd, and at the time, I couldn't quite figure out why.

It has now been three months since the announcement, and I, as well as most Cavalier fans, have

had a chance to get our feet wet with Coach Groh and the new staff. Sure, we haven't seen any real game action yet, and the newest recruiting class was actually more a product of the old regime than the new, but overall, a sense of stability seems to be settling in. And as the first buds of spring began to open up and grow in Albemarle, so too did the first signs of change in the Virginia football program begin to show themselves.

From the head coach hitting the recruiting trail, to practices that are open to the public, to rumors of a 3-4 defensive front, it is becoming undeniable that this Virginia football team is going to be different. After all, with names on the backs of jerseys, and stripes on the helmets and pants, how could it not be? (Perhaps this is a subject that is better left unmentioned.) But while change inevitably brings with it the excitement of the new, the wondrous possibility of the unknown, I am now becoming aware of what it was that kept my, and my friends' reactions so subdued on that Saturday afternoon in Las Vegas: Fear.

For almost twenty years, Virginia football fans knew what to expect. Like the rising and setting of the sun, they knew that their teams would come out and play relatively conservative, hard-nosed football. We would run it up the middle. We would punt it on fourth and 5 from the opponent's 37. We would usually play pretty good defense, and we would compete in just about every game. We would win ones we didn't expect to and lose some we shouldn't. And we would win seven or more games every year. We would be, in short, Virginia.

In fact, by the end of the Welsh era, it seemed most fans could even tell you in August what games would drive them nuts, what would we do wrong, what we would do right, and who would be doing it. Like an old pair of jeans, the program was comfortable, and while the jeans may have

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been getting a little threadbare in parts, you still didn't mind throwing them on, because you could count on them for what you needed them to be. And then, one December day, someone threw the jeans out. In their place was a pair straight out of the store, blue and sturdy, but entirely untested. They may end up being as comfortable and as reliable as the old pair, maybe even more so, or they may end up disappointing entirely. But you can't know until you try them on.

Come August 25th, Virginia football fans are going to try on that new pair of jeans. We'll settle into our seats at Wisconsin's Camp Randall Stadium (the lucky ones of us, that is), or we'll sit down on sofas and chairs, in homes and in bars, and we'll begin to break in our new jeans, our new team. And to be perfectly honest, the prospect of this scares me stiff.

This isn't because I don't think Coach Groh, the new staff, and the new schemes will get the job done. The fact is that my gut reaction tells me they're all going to work out. But the reality is I just don't know. And neither does anybody else. Perhaps it is the cynical Wahoo in me, beaten down by years of disappointments tempered with occasional successes, but I have real trouble just taking a flying leap of faith on this one. I believe in the unofficial motto of Virginia athletics – "I'll believe it, when I see it." Then again, maybe I'm just a grouch, who needs to lighten up a little.

Regardless of what I think, or anyone else thinks of the chances for the "new" Virginia football, there is one thing that all can agree on – the fall can't come soon enough. As nice as the summer months can be, affording us beach trips, rounds of golf and afternoon picnics, they have one glaring weakness – they're dominated by professional baseball. And to me, professional baseball is to college football what veggie burgers are to a bacon cheeseburger. I'll eat 'em if I have to, but I can't say I crave them.

In the meantime, we'll have to settle for spring practice, the Spring Game, and the off-season rumor mill, or what is left of it. Yet another of the

many changes accompanying the Groh regime has been the apparent death of the inside information pipeline for Virginia football junkies. As one could probably guess, this shift to silence has gone over about as well as the stripes on the uniforms. (Sorry, I promised not to bring that up again.) And it hasn't done a whole lot to assuage that gnawing worry in my gut, either. But, to liberally paraphrase Coach Groh, the situation is what it is, and everyone, myself included, will just have to get used to it. Kind of like that new pair of jeans.

And when it's all said and done, with any luck, fifteen years or so from this late August or September my stomach will once again be filled with nervous jitters, my hands will wring and my head will ache. I will pace nervously, counting down the days, hours and minutes until a "new" Virginia football program debuts. And I will fret that it won't play quite the same way that I'm used to, and maybe won't win or lose the same way I am accustomed to. And maybe I'll even complain that the uniforms should have been left alone.

But, much like I will do this August as that opening kickoff soars high into the air, and the bands play and the crowd roars, I will slowly, timidly slide my leg out of my old and comfortable jeans. I'll put them away, somewhere they'll be out of the way, but not forgotten. And I will reach for the new pair, and with a big, deep breath pull them on. They're going to feel a little strange, a little different. Maybe they don't bend in the same way, or aren't as baggy as the old ones. And in the same way, maybe the Cavaliers won't be the same ones I have always known. Maybe they'll pass when the old ones would have run, or blitz when the old ones would have fallen back into a zone. Maybe they'll win more of the ones they're supposed to, and less of the ones they're not. And maybe they'll find themselves in an Orange Bowl or Rose Bowl someday, or possibly not in a bowl at all. They're going to end up doing a lot of things differently.

But perhaps that isn't so bad. After all, in the long run, I know I'll get used to them, like I get

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used to a new pair of jeans. I have to, I guess, because I know I just can't go without jeans. And I just can't go without Virginia football.

S

Sabre Tidbits

by Michael Ingalls

Billet to Virginia

Todd Billet, a 6-1 sophomore guard from Rutgers has decided to transfer to Virginia. Billet led the Scarlet Knights in scoring with just over 16 points per game. He also led the team in assists with 114. Billet will have to sit out one year and will have two years of eligibility starting in 2002.

Virginia has already received a visit from another possible transfer, Nick VanderLaan. VanderLaan is a 6-10, 215-pound sophomore center from the University of California. VanderLaan averaged 6 points and 5 rebounds per game last season. If VanderLaan transfers to Virginia, he will also have to wait until 2002 to play.

There has been much concern about the number of scholarships available and the number of players the NCAA will allow Virginia to have. The NCAA says that a team can only sign five players in a given year, and can only have 13 scholarship players on the roster.

This brings up an interesting situation for Virginia's coaching staff. Currently, the Cavaliers have four signed players for the 2001 recruiting class: Jason Clark, Jermaine Harper, Elton Brown and Keith Jenifer. Clark and Harper have qualified, Brown and Jenifer have not. Sagana Diop is apparently headed to the NBA, so that leaves one spot open for Billet. But what if Nick VanderLaan transfers to UVA as well?

Scenario one: All four signees qualify, and Virginia gets only Billet. Virginia stays within the 13-scholarship limit and no action is necessary.

Scenario two: One of Virginia's signees does not qualify, and Virginia gets Billet and VanderLaan. Virginia still stays within their 13-scholarship limit and no action is necessary.

Scenario three: All four signees qualify, and Vir-

ginia gets both Billet and VanderLaan. Since Billet and VanderLaan are waiting out a year, apparently there's a loophole in the NCAA rules that allows Virginia not to count players who are sitting out their transfer year against the five-player limit per year. But, they would still count against Virginia's 13-scholarship limit for the season.

Under this scenario, Virginia would be over their limit by one player, which means that someone would have to pay their own way for a year. Scholarship players for next season would include; Adam Hall, Chris Williams, Majestic Mapp, Travis Watson, Roger Mason, Jason Rogers, Maurice Young, J.C. Mathis, Elton Brown, Jason Clark, Keith Jenifer, Jermaine Harper, Todd Billet and Nick Vander Laan. If my math is correct, that's 14 players, one over the limit.

Question is, who pays their way? Would it be Billet or Vander Laan? Would it be someone else on the current roster taking one for the team? Another scenario would be the possibility that one of our current players is transferring, but let's not go there, at least not yet.

As for Brown and Jenifer qualifying, each have recently re-taken their SATs and are awaiting their results. Brown also took the ACT last week. Each player still has opportunities to re-take their SATs in early May and June if their recent test scores don't put them over the top.

NFL tryouts

Eleven seniors. One dream. The NFL. Over the past few weeks, many of UVA's senior football players have been working out for the various NFL scouts that have made their way to Charlottesville.

The players: Donnie Green (LB), Byron Thweatt (LB), Yubrenal Isabelle (LB), Brad Barnes (OL), Dustin Keith (OL), Tim Spruill (DB), Ahmad Hawkins

Quick Hitters

(DB), Demetrius Dotson (WR), Kevin Coffey (WR), Billy Baber (TE) and Patrick Washington (FB).

The scouts: Giants, Patriots, Bengals, Jaguars, Redskins, Broncos, Chargers, Browns, Panthers, Titans, Falcons and Saints. Even the XFL stopped in to take a look.

In order to prove they have what it takes, each player has to go through extensive workouts in the hope that they will receive a phone call or two from NFL teams, inviting them to their respective summer camps. Every Tuesday, for the last few weeks, different NFL teams have come to Charlottesville in the hopes that they find the next piece to their puzzle.

The routine started with height and weight measurements. Then it was on to the bench press. With the bench, every player uses the same weight (225 pounds) and tries to press as many repetitions as possible. Since all the players had already gone through the workouts for other teams previous to the day I attended, only the players wishing to improve on their previous workouts hit the bench. Barnes completed an amazing 27 reps, while Baber came in second with 25.

Players then moved on to the broad jump. The best for the day was Coffey, with a jump of 10 feet - 3 ¼ inches. No one else in the group cleared the 10-foot mark, although Dotson came close, missing it by only a quarter of an inch.

Other drills included the vertical leap, 20 yard pro agility drill, the 'L' drill and 40-yard dash. The 40-yard dash was timed in the Cage, a slippery and often dangerous place to run since there isn't much room past the finish line. Still, a couple of players pulled in some great times. Most impressive was Thweatt's 4.63. Dotson pulled in the fastest time overall at 4.45. Hawkins was second with 4.52.

Overall, the players looked good. The linebackers got an individual workout on the turf field by the Patriots scout. The Bengals scout took Wash-

ington and Baber aside for their drills. And the Giants scout called everyone into University Hall for even more agility drills. All in all, the process lasted about 4 hours. Some of the players felt good about their chances, others seemed disappointed in their efforts and were talking about alternate plans, and the dramatic difference between base salary in the NFL and base salary in the XFL and NFL Europe.

Here's to the senior Hoos. May they all find success in the pros. If not, they've always got that UVa education to fall back on.

Title IX

What was originally designed to be a way of making college athletics fair for women's sports has now turned into a program killer. Title IX is supposed to be about creating opportunities for women's sports. Unfortunately, it is slanted in such a manner that it could mean the end of several men's sports at many Universities. Where's the opportunity in that?

At first, it only seemed to affect the smaller schools, often forcing them to give up football in order to match the scholarships one for one. Now it's effecting larger schools, like Virginia. Most recently, a task force at UVa recommended taking away funding for several men's sports, including golf and indoor track. So, while programs that have been in existence for decades are getting cut, sports like women's crew are getting 20 or more scholarships and are traveling to places like Europe to compete. How fair is that?

The problem with Title IX is that it incorrectly considers the 85 football scholarships into the equation. There isn't one women's sport that compares to football, so it shouldn't even be considered. Without football, most of the revenue used to support these women's programs would not exist. But because of football, Title IX is forcing other men's programs to take a back seat on funding so that club sports like women's crew can be fully funded.

Quick Hitters

Everyone seems to recognize the problem with Title IX, but no one can do anything about it. At this rate, the only fully-funded men's sports will be football and basketball, every women's sport will be fully-funded, including field hockey, crew, and no telling what other women's sports they decide to adopt in order to grab as much money and as many of the scholarships as they can from prospering men's programs. What's next, women's skeet?

Solution. Take football out of the equation. Match up all of the other sports. Then divide up the scholarships based on the priority of each sport. It would go something like this: (1) basketball, (2) soccer, (3) lacrosse, (4) baseball/softball, (5) track and field, (6) swimming and diving, (7) crew, etc. It's fair, it makes sense, and not one program gets cut. At least then, they would be comparing apples to apples.

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Basketball Recruiting

Four Easy Pieces

by Jim Reedy

You've been hearing about these guys for more than a year. You know everything about their senior seasons – how many points they scored, how many rebounds they grabbed, how many assists they dished out ... everything but how many girls they kissed. But what Elton Brown, Jason Clark, Jermaine Harper and Keith Jenifer did this year in high school or prep school may not have much bearing on what they'll do when they arrive at Virginia in the fall for their first year of ACC basketball. They'll be the four newest faces on a Cavalier roster stocked with talented players fighting for playing time. Their abilities to contribute in Pete Gillen's frenetic style of play, as much as their highly-touted pedigrees, will dictate their level of success.

So how will the newcomers fit in? From one perspective, Virginia has added four freshmen to a squad that loses only three seniors and features a number of players with star talent. Is it realistic to expect each member of the Class of 2005 to make an impact next season? Mo Young and Jason Rogers couldn't crack the regular rotation as freshmen. Rogers still hasn't. Some of the rookies could spend a lot of time at the end of the Cavalier bench, chatting with trainer Sue Saliba.

On the other hand, though, this four-man class (assuming Sagana Diop does as is widely expected and bypasses college for the NBA) is a pretty solid group in its own right, even if it doesn't look as though it'll match up with the Mason/Watson/Mapp class Virginia reeled in two years ago. Brown and Clark are ranked on Bob Gibbons' list of the nation's top 50 seniors, while Harper and Jenifer may have been undervalued because their early commitments deprived other schools of the chance to fight for their services.

A conversation with Cavalier assistant coach Tom Herrion, Gillen's right-hand man and top recruiter, reveals his belief that height is overrated in the college game, his faith that all four recruits will be

eligible as freshmen and his talent for tossing out a Gillen-esque one-liner every once in a while. Most importantly, it reveals Herrion's confidence that the Cavaliers have added four valuable pieces to the championship puzzle they've been assembling for three years.

"We were – and still are – extremely excited about that class when we signed it in the fall," Herrion said. "We felt as though those were four players we identified very early in the process, that we had high on our list at their respective positions. We recruited them extremely hard and aggressive throughout the summer and the fall and we felt fortunate to sign all four of those kids in the fall signing period."

With Diop all but out of the picture, it looks as though Gillen and his staff will fail for the third straight year in their elusive quest to bring a true center to Virginia. Brown, the biggest member of the quartet, stands 6-foot-9 and weighs 250 pounds. A sizable fellow, no doubt, but not a behemoth who can look eye-to-eye with past ACC foes like Brendan Haywood and Alvin Jones. Yet Herrion said the days of Alcindor, Walton and Ewing – not to mention a tall, lanky fellow who once wore No. 50 for the Cavaliers – are long gone. Teams can thrive with a handful of power forwards taking care of the dirty work under the hoop. Travis Watson, of course, is Exhibit A.

"The college game has changed," Herrion said. "Obviously we'd like to get guys who measure tall in height, but if you've got guys that play bigger than they are, you can accomplish the same things. We saw that in the Final Four. Other than Loren Woods, there wasn't a dominant center in the Final Four. Duke with [Carlos] Boozer, who's a power forward. Michigan State didn't have a center. They play with power forwards, and obviously Maryland does the same thing. The game has changed a little bit and I think that height in general is overrated, if in fact we're able to get

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guys like Travis Watson, who plays much, much bigger than his height is listed.”

Brown – is it too early to give him the burden of being The Next Travis Watson? – should provide Virginia with some of the additional inside bulk it so sorely needs. He won’t be confused any time soon with high flyers like Adam Hall, but Brown showed during his career at Warwick High in Newport News that he can get the job done in the paint – and can also step out and hit an occasion jumper. Like many promising big men, he needs to improve his conditioning a bit, but there’s a reason Gibbons has him rated as the No. 35 recruit in the nation.

“Elton can be as good as anybody in the country, pound for pound, inch for inch,” Herrion said. “We think he’s got that type of talent. He had a very good year for Coach Moore at Warwick, [especially since] most nights teams were trying to take him out, concentrating solely on shutting down Elton. He was one of the best low-post scorers in the country at the high school level this year. He’s big, he’s wide, he’s strong. He’ll be a very good complement to our post players.”

Clark, who stands a Watsonian 6-foot-7 ½ and weighs 225 pounds, gives the Cavaliers another low-post presence. He is more explosive, athletic and versatile than Brown, his former AAU teammate, though he probably lags between Brown in terms of fundamental skills. Gibbons has Clark at No. 44 in the nation after the latter helped lead the postgraduate team at Hargrave Military Academy to a typically outstanding season. Hargrave’s lone loss came in triple overtime.

“Jason is probably one of the most underrated players in the country,” Herrion said. “You truly don’t appreciate him just by looking at his statistics. You have to watch his game. He’s a blue-collar kind of a throwback, garbage type of guy. He’s just a total team player, willing to do whatever it takes for a team to win. ... He can play a couple positions for us. Probably the biggest things he’ll bring to the table is his ability to rebound, and his post defense. He’ll be one of our more physi-

cal players next year as a freshman. He’s got a chance to step in and make a big impact on our program.”

Brown and Clark certainly look as though they will get the chance to contribute to a rotation of Virginia big men that basically consisted of Watson and freshman J.C. Mathis last season. The Cavaliers graduate combo forward Stephane Dondon, and Rogers, despite his 6-11 frame and developing package of skills, has not yet been able to establish himself as an ACC-caliber player. Chris Williams will obviously log his usual 30-odd minutes at small forward, but the opportunity appears to be there for Brown and Clark to help out in the frontcourt in some fashion.

“Adding those two kids definitely improves our depth and our overall talent up front,” Herrion said. “Those are kids we think have the chance to contribute right away. They’ll be in a competitive situation with Travis [Watson] and J.C. [Mathis] and Jason Rogers to help us solidify our frontcourt. We think we’ve addressed some of our concerns in terms of getting a little bit bigger even though when you measure the kids, there’s still not really a true center in that class. But for our style of play, we really feel those kids are going to have a big impact on the program.”

It remains to be seen whether Harper and Jenifer will get the same opportunity next year. With Roger Mason Jr., Adam Hall, Majestic Mapp and Young already in place, the Cavalier backcourt will be crowded. As Herrion joked, “We’ve got more guards than anything. We got bodyguards, life-guards ... we got a lot of guards.” Who sits so Harper and Jenifer can get on the court? Hall won’t want to lose his 30-plus minutes and Mason’s role is only getting bigger. Mapp figures to suck up all the minutes freed up by the departure of Donald Hand. So that leaves Young, Harper and Jenifer to fight amongst themselves for Friel’s minutes. Or maybe the Cavaliers go big more often and Brown and Clark take some of that playing time. At any rate, Virginia’s got plenty of options

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Of course, having too many guards is better than having too few.

“The game is changing a little bit, going a bit more to a quicker game,” Herrion pointed out. “Our style allows us to have flexibility in terms of playing small people together. ... But that’s nature of the game – there’s just a dire need for size. That’s why all these kids are jumping early to the NBA. You look across the country at the college game and you’re not going to find in the future many true centers. The landscape has changed with early entry, and I think it’s going to get even worse. I think the teams that are the quickest are going to be the ones that have the most success in the future.”

Harper may be a better bet than Jenifer to rise above the madding backcourt crowd and poke into the rotation next season. The 6-foot-3, 170-pound California native had a fantastic season for one of the top five teams in the state, leading the Blue Ridge School to the Independent Schools championship and earning league player of the year honors. With his scoring ability, defensive pressure and athleticism, Virginia feels Harper can play either guard spot or even small forward in a pinch. He should fit right into Gillen’s style. He’s already begun fitting in, actually, making the short trip down Route 29 from St. George to play with the Cavaliers a few times in their offseason pickup games.

“We think Harper’s a wing,” Herrion said. “You’d probably list him as a two-guard, but he’s got the talent and the athleticism to play three positions. He’s an electric athlete, kind of a high-wire guy. At times, with the way we play, we could even play a three-guard offense. With his ability to defend and his quickness and athleticism, you plug him into our style of play and he’s exactly what you’re looking for in a perimeter player.

Jenifer, the floor general of that tremendous Hargrave team, is the least hyped member of the class. Like Harper, he needs to add some bulk to his slight 6-foot-3 frame, but his quickness, ability to penetrate the lane and court vi-

sion are already top-notch. Of course, when you’re quarterbacking a team that includes players like Clark, James White and Andre Collins, you’d best have good court vision. But despite going to Hargrave in an effort to boost his grades, Jenifer, like Brown, isn’t eligible yet.

Jenifer “benefited tremendously from being at Hargrave this past year, playing for Coach [Kevin] Keatts down there,” Herrion said. “He was able to play strictly at the point, learn a little bit more about the position. In high school, he was asked to score a lot more. Then he gets to Hargrave and is playing with so many talented players that he was able to really concentrate on becoming a better point guard.”

Of course, this meticulously assembled recruiting class could dwindle to two if Brown and Jenifer can’t gain NCAA eligibility. Their perilous academic situations, along with Diop’s apparently impending leap, are the reasons behind Virginia’s recent acceptance of Rutgers transfer Todd Billet and its continuing flirtation with Nick Vander Laan, the lanky 6-10 center looking to transfer from California. Brown and Jenifer have yet to receive the results of their most recent attempts at the SAT – and in Brown’s case, also the ACT – but they have two more chances at it if the latest ones didn’t do the trick. Herrion said the coaching staff has confidence that come September, all four recruits will be eligible.

By this time of year, you’d think the Virginia coaches would know how their recruiting class was going to shape up. Not this year. But even if they’re unsure exactly which pieces they’ll end up with, they remain confident that those pieces will help complete the puzzle somehow.



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