



The Commonwealth Times

VOL. 60, NO. 17
JANUARY 23, 2019



Photos by Erin Edgerton Lettering by Saffeya Ahmed

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WOMEN'S BASKETBALL RANKED ONE OF THE BEST DEFENSES IN THE NATION:

*According to NCAA rankings

#2

Field Goal Percentage Defense

#2

Scoring Defense

#2

3-Point Field Goal Defense



Junior center ranks in A-10 top 10 for blocks this season



Rams maintain win streak after defeating Rhode Island

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Stat of the week

Women's Basketball extended its win streak to seven games, including five in a row in A-10 play.



Lettering by Safeya Ahmed

Sophomore guard Tera Reed has started all 18 games for the Rams, averaging a team-high 13.4 points. Photo by Shayla Bailey

Women's Basketball rivals Men's HAVOC

“

We want to use our defense to establish the tempo and to help our offense generate some points. We talked a little bit about being chaotic out there and just being really aggressive.”

Beth O'Boyle, Women's Basketball coach

BEN MALAKOFF
Contributing Writer

STRONG DEFENSE HAS CARRIED

Women's Basketball to many wins, but it's not the same as the Men's HAVOC. The women are creating “chaos” on the court for this season's opponents.

The Men's defensive style is now known by its nickname, HAVOC, and an equivalent hasn't been widely-bestowed to the women. But the defensive style of Women's Basketball is arguably one of the best in the nation — coach Beth O'Boyle said the team wants to generate “chaos on the floor.”

“We want to get deflections. We want to use our defense to establish the tempo and to help our offense generate some points,” O'Boyle said. “We talked a little bit about being chaotic out there and just being really aggressive.”

Women's Basketball ranks second in the nation in scoring defense, field goal defense and 3-point field goal defense, according to NCAA rankings.

“A lot of credit [to our defense],” said sophomore guard Taya Robinson. “We have been working on that a lot ... and we talk about it as a team. When we get our defensive intensity up, we come back into games and our offense goes harder.”

Chaos is one way to describe what Women's Basketball does on the court. In a game against Fordham Jan. 16, the Rams came back from 17 points down, including holding their opponent's offense to just four points in the last quarter.

Robinson said assistant coach Kirk Crawford helped her improve her defensive skills.

“He helped me work [on defense] in the summertime and during the season,” Robinson said. “I knew it was something that I needed to work on. I knew I needed to work on a lot of things, but defense was one of them.”

But the “chaos” O'Boyle describes has not always characterized the Women's defense. Last season, the Rams finished 7-22, winning only four Atlantic 10 games. The season ended in the first round at the hands of Saint Joseph's in A-10 tournament at the Richmond Coliseum.

With no seniors on the roster last year, sophomore guard Tera Reed led the team in scoring, averaging 13.8 points. Bria Gibson, who led the team in rebounds, transferred to High Point.

There were some bright spots in the 2017-18 season for a team that only won seven games, such as Reed's strong first season and an intense A-10 win against the regular season champs Saint Louis. But it was unknown to fans which direction coach Beth O'Boyle would take the team after a disappointing season.

“Our offseason development was a lot about trying to get our players better,” O'Boyle said. “We actually did more offense in the summer and in the spring than we did defense. It's just a lot of individual skills being broken down. We spent a lot of time this summer working on that.”

Women's Basketball has grown this season, reigning victorious against top programs like Wake Forest and Georgetown.

Robinson is a key force behind that success — last year, she averaged 9.1 points and finished with 91 rebounds in 21 games. Currently recovering from a knee injury, Robinson now averages 9.8 points but has already tallied 80 rebounds in 18 games. She has also tied her personal season-high of 17 steals so far.

“We were talking about that during the summer workouts. [O'Boyle] said she wanted to cause chaos,” Robinson said. “And we have.”



Redshirt-sophomore guard Niya Johnson has played 54 minutes this season. Photo by Shayla Bailey



Junior guard Jailyn Maddox shoots 83 percent from the free-throw line this season. Photo by Shayla Bailey

Women's Basketball coasts to victory



Sophomore guard Tera Reed scored 16 points in the Jan. 20 win over Rhode Island. Photo by Erin Edgerton

NILE MCNAIR

Contributing Writer

Women's Basketball cruised past Rhode Island Sunday 78-39 behind sophomore guard Tera Reed's 16 points.

The Rams extended their win streak to eight, including five in a row in the Atlantic 10 — the first time in history that VCU has gone undefeated in conference play through the first five games.

After a sluggish start, VCU went on a 21-0 scoring streak lasting until early in the second quarter.

Threes were the focal point of VCU's scoring. The Rams finished the day 10-17 from three, as Reed led the way with a career-high four 3-pointers.

"I would say I was just feeling it tonight," Reed said.

Dominating on both offense and defense, the Black and Gold took a comfortable 38-12 lead into halftime.

Maintaining a large lead, all 14 Women's Basketball players got on the court against Rhode Island, and 13 of them scored. Coach Beth O'Boyle said she was pleased with her team's performance.

"Great overall team effort," O'Boyle said. "Even better that we got the win here at home with these great fans."

All season, the Rams have been one of the nation's best on the defensive side of the ball — that continued Sunday, as the team held Rhode Island to 39 and 0-13 from the 3-point line.

"I think our players are really buying into our identity of defense and [it] shows on the court," O'Boyle said.

VCU will take its seven-game win streak on the road Jan. 23 against George Washington and will then host Saint Louis Jan. 27.

Ram in Action: *Danielle Hammond*

JARON NUTTER
Contributing Writer

Women's Basketball center Danielle Hammond finished in the top five for blocks in the Atlantic 10 conference last season, and she doesn't plan on stopping there.

"By the time I graduate I would like to hold the record for most blocks at VCU," Hammond said.

Hammond has totaled 68 blocks throughout her collegiate career and ranks in the A-10 top 10 for blocks this season. This season, she averages a career-best 7.2 points and 61.8 shooting percentage.

But the junior center's basketball journey did not begin at VCU. Hammond attended the all-girls independent Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where she averaged 13 points, eight rebounds and three blocks.

RAM STAT

Hammond has appeared in 18 games this season, averaging seven points per game and 1.2 blocks per game.

She starred as a two-sport athlete in basketball and volleyball at Baldwin — but she ultimately decided to continue her basketball career.

"I chose basketball over volleyball because basketball brings me more joy," Hammond said. "Once I started playing basket-



Junior center Danielle Hammond scored a career-high 17 points in the win over Fordham Jan. 16. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics

ball, there was no other choice for what I wanted to do, although volleyball was a lot of fun."

Her decision to continue playing basketball led her to VCU. Now in her third season, she has played 57 games and started 16. Even with her collegiate experience and development, she said she actively looks to refine her game with hopes to play professionally one day.

"The part of my game I would like to improve the most is my defense," Hammond said. "Our team really takes pride in being a good defensive team, and I want to contribute to that in any way possible."

Taking pride would be an understatement — Women's Basketball ranks second in field goal percentage and scoring defense in the nation. Hammond anchors the VCU defense with 1.3 blocks per game, ranking 10th in the A-10 conference.

Women's Basketball currently sits at 13-5 with an undefeated A-10 record through five games. The team is primed not only for an A-10 championship, but an appearance in the NCAA Division I Women's Tournament. Women's Basketball has not made an appearance in the tournament in 10 years.



Junior center Danielle Hammond has logged 68 blocks during her career at VCU. Photo by Shayla Bailey



Senior student manager Tyrone Green (right) has been a part of the Men's Basketball program since May of his senior year of high school. Photo by Erin Edgerton

The team behind the team **STUDENT MANAGERS**

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Usually, Men's Basketball student managers spend their long working hours coordinating and assisting the team. But one time, they got to play basketball with Adam Sandler.

Last April, Men's Basketball Director of Operations Jimmy Martelli asked senior head manager Tyrone Green if he wanted to play with Sandler when he was in town for a show at the Altria.

"It was just cool, he's just a normal guy, very friendly and he left us tickets to the show," Green said. "He shouted us out at the show, which was pretty cool. It was a great opportunity and that's some of the things that being a manager is about."

The day-to-day tasks are a bit less glamorous than meeting a renowned comedian — manager responsibilities can range from picking up lunch to making sure towels and water are set up and helping players work-out, Green said.

"I call it a 24/7 job," Green said. "You've got to be on call whenever the coaches need, whenever the players need."

There are four student managers that assist with the program's day-to-day functions. Green and junior manager Michael Mann are always talking about basketball and what needs to be done.

"It's a really big time commitment, he and I communicate constantly at all hours, whether it be about laundry or travel," Mann said. "It could be 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night, but we're always ready to go."

Balancing schoolwork and a job is hard for a student manager, Green said. He's taking all online classes in his final semester at VCU as he works toward a sociology degree. Mann wakes up early to attend his 8 a.m. class so he can get ready for practice at 2 p.m.

Both Green and Mann got involved in the program because their high school

coaches knew coaches within the program, but Green had a jump-start compared to the other managers on staff.

"I started being a manager before I even graduated high school because I'm from Richmond," Green said. "I started in late May with coach [Will] Wade's staff. I was hired because in high school I played for Kendrick Warren, his jersey is hanging in the rafters [at the Siegel Center]. He made a phone call down here and I was like 'Yeah, I would love to work with the program.'"

Warren played at VCU from 1990-1994, finishing as the Rams all-time leading scorer with 1,858 points — a mark that has since been surpassed by Eric Maynor — 1,953 — and Treveon Graham — 1,882. The university raised his number 23 to the rafters in 2005, but it is still worn on the court today by redshirt-junior wing Issac Vann.

Before games at the Siegel Center, the managers set up shootaround and perform other necessary tasks to get ready for that night's contest.

"During shootaround, I usually go back and set up the uniforms and things like that for the players to make sure all the gear is correct for the game," Green said. "By the time tip comes around, we help rebound on the court, then we are ready to go."

When the game is in action, the student managers are just as engaged in the action as the players on the bench in front of them.

"They're so much fun to have around and they're so into it," coach Mike Rhoades said. "They're as excited as the players when we win a game and as bummed out as the players if we don't win. They're all in — they are so into it."

And when the game ends, the student managers' nights are just beginning.

"After the game we have responsibilities like cleaning up the bench, making sure everybody's jersey gets turned in to be washed, going back to put film on coaches' computers," Mann said. "If they want to stick around the office and eat dinner late nights,



Junior student manager Michael Mann and other student managers set up the bench and make sure the water is set up. Photo by Noah Fleischman

you want to go get them some food — you do that after the game as well."

Last year the Rams' managers competed in the national manager games and took the crown, as they defeated former VCU coach Shaka Smart's Texas staff in San Antonio, Texas.

"Honestly it was kind of unbelievable," Green said. "We started the manager games my freshman year, we thought we were just playing and it built into this huge thing."

The championship was a "brotherhood type of game," Green said. Men's Basketball Director of Player Development Darius Theus was on the Texas staff last season, so he played against one of his former teammates Joey Rodriguez. Theus and Rodriguez both played at VCU and were part of the 2011 Final Four team.

The teams in the manager games can be comprised of any staff member associated

with the team, including coaches, except for the head coach.

The student managers returned to Richmond in 2018 not knowing that students and faculty at VCU would recognize them for their run to the national championship.

"[It] was a great experience even afterwards, people on campus would be like, 'oh, you're a manager on the team, you guys won a national championship,'" Mann said. "You didn't think that people pay attention to, but you got noticed."

Even though most fans do not notice what the student managers do on the court, they continue to influence the program every day.

Mann said his favorite part of the job is "being a part of something that's bigger than yourself." "Though the work may be behind the scenes," he said, "you know that you're making a great impact."

PRESS BOX



Illustration by Sammy Newman

NFL: A diversity crisis

ANDY RIDDLER
Contributing Writer

The next Sean McVay. That's what teams are using as a motivator to find their next head coach, and why wouldn't they? McVay is a football mastermind who took the Los Angeles Rams from a laughing-stock to a Super Bowl appearance in two seasons. But nobody is looking for the next Anthony Lynn, the man who helped the Los Angeles Chargers win 18 of their last 25 regular season games and one play-off victory. So what has McVay done that Lynn hasn't?

Lynn's Chargers ranked top 10 in offense and defense this season, while McVay's Rams struggled to build an average defense this season with a roster full of pro-bowlers and the likely Defensive Player of the Year, Aaron Donald. McVay was expected to already have a coaching tree when his offensive coordinator, Zac Taylor, was introduced as the Cincinnati Bengals head coach following the conclusion of the season. What else does Lynn have to do to get to the praise he deserves for turning the Chargers around?

The NFL knows there is an issue with ensuring equal opportunities for racial

minorities to serve as head coaches — in 2003, it established the Rooney Rule, which requires NFL teams to interview at least one minority for a vacant head coach position. Even with the rule, owners frequently interview a candidate of color just to check the box. For example, the Washington Redskins and the Oakland Raiders used Jerry Gray and Bobby Johnson, respectively, as sham interviews to help fulfill the Rooney Rule without having any real chance at being awarded the position.

Over the last few weeks, eight head coaching jobs — five of them previously held by black men — have opened up in the NFL, but only the position with the Miami Dolphins will be filled by a black man, current New England Patriots Linebackers coach and defensive play-caller Brian Flores. That would leave the league with only four minorities out of the 32 total coaching positions — Flores, Lynn, Mike Tomlin with the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Carolina Panthers' Ron Rivera. By comparison, over 70 percent of all league players are racial minorities. Owners are comfortable with non-white players, but God forbid a black man leads the team.

Nobody can certifiably say whether the league owners are racist or if this is just a result of implicit bias that pervades the front offices of the 32 teams. But one thing is very clear: black men have significantly fewer chances to reach the highest point in their coaching careers.

The Arizona Cardinals have raised many questions about the league with their firing of Steve Wilks. Wilks, a black man, only coached for a year, inheriting an aging roster — the eighth oldest according to a PhillyVoice article — and starting a rookie quarterback for almost the entire season. There may have been only a handful of coaches in the history of the league who could have handled that, and yet the Cardinals fired him. Losing 13 games did not help his case, but the Cardinals fired him in favor of a young, offensive mind — Kliff Kingsbury — a friend of McVay's.

Kingsbury coached Texas Tech for the last six years, accumulating a record of 35-40. Following the 2018 season, he was fired and subsequently hired to be the offensive coordinator at Southern California, where the team expected him to help bring back a championship. Instead, he left after 34 days because he was offered the job with the Cardinals. Sports anchor

Dale Hansen said on WFAA in Dallas that, "Kingsbury fits all the criteria to be an NFL head coach. He's an offensive genius, he's young and he's white — and not necessarily in that order."

A man who won less than half his games at Texas Tech, including years when he had Patrick Mahomes, the likely NFL MVP for 2019, received one of the 32 most prestigious head coaching jobs in American sports. Why? What had he done to warrant it? He is certainly an offensive genius — his teams have averaged 42 points since 2011 — but he never proved to be a coach who can win football games. Isn't that what being a head coach is about? Apparently not, but it certainly helps to be white.

"You work your way up the ladder, become a defensive coordinator," said ESPN NFL analyst Damien Woody in a video he posted on Twitter. "Finally get your chance [to be a head coach], and you get fired after one season ... and get replaced by a guy who was the USC offensive coordinator for all of what? 30 days?"

Everybody wants the next Sean McVay, but the future for black coaches in the NFL may hinge on who can become the next Anthony Lynn.



Redshirt-senior Nicholas Buckingham was a part of the 4-x-400 meter relay that finished sixth with a time of 3:20.61 at the Keydet Invitational. CT file photo

Track and Field continues success at VMI

ADAM CHEEK
Staff Writer

Track and Field continued the indoor season at the VMI Keydet Invitational this weekend, taking home an array of results, a quartet of top-five finishes, over the course of the two-day event.

The 4x400 relay team posted a second-place result with senior mid-distance runner Ashley Greenlee and senior sprinter Taylor Watkins leading the way. They teamed up with junior sprinters Kayla Smith and Kara Lyles to finish with a time of 3:49.55. Lyles also set a new personal best in the 400-meter, with a new time of 57.68.

Redshirt-senior mid-distance runner Nichelle Scott brought home a bronze finish with a 5:06.36 time in the one-mile run, while junior jumper Janelle Cheatham recorded a fourth-place long jump effort with a 5.53-meter jump, a personal best.

Men's track and field ended the weekend on a high note as well, recording a number of top-10 results. Freshman thrower Jakob Vollbrecht finished with a third-place effort in shot put with a 16.93-meter throw, while sophomore high jumper Xyan Xrich-

ardson took home fifth in high jump with a two-meter leap.

The 4-x-400 meter relay squad recorded a sixth-place effort with freshman hurdler Daiqwaun Faircloth and three sprinters — redshirt-senior Nicholas Buckingham, junior Chukwuezo Aguolu and freshman Emmanuel Waller — combining to clock in just under 3 1/2 minutes.

Junior distance runner Lucas Sidle set a personal best and a seventh-place effort in the one-mile run with a time just under 4 1/2 minutes, while freshmen distance runners Archie Blaes and Paul Rosacia recorded new bests in the 3000. Blaes recorded a time of 9:01.69, while Rosacia was just two seconds behind.

The women's team kicked off the weekend with some podium finishes, including junior distance runner Emily Mulhern, who brought home a victory in the 5000. Mulhern clocked in at 16:57.60, a full minute quicker than the runner-up in the event.

The Black and Gold 4-x-800 meter squad won the event with a time of 9:07.27. Junior mid-distance runners Ashley Brown and Judith White, as well as seniors Greenlee and Scott, teamed up to get the victory.

Redshirt-junior thrower Samantha Yankson recorded a 14.72-meter toss in the weight throw, good for 11th place, while sophomore jumper Aliyah Newman took home second in the triple jump with a 12.09-meter leap.

The men's team also started out strong at the invitational with a solid start. Senior sprinter Jamik Alexander and junior distance runner Bryce Catlett each recorded fourth-place efforts in their respective disciplines, Alexander in the 60 semifinals and Catlett in the 5000. Alexander recorded a 7.11 time in the second heat, while Catlett came home with a time of 15:19.52.

Redshirt-senior sprinter Devon Thompson placed ninth out of 32 in the 500 with a time of 1:06.04, while Vollbrecht also finished ninth in the weight throw with a new personal best of 16.01 meters.

The 4-x-800 meter team — composed of distance runners Sidle, freshman Jacari Jennings, freshman Alvin Hamilton and sophomore Jordan Fountain — came home in third with a time of 8:02.14.

Track and Field will travel to Fairfax Jan. 25 for the George Mason Invitational.

Tennis sweeps over the weekend

DANIEL PURYEAR
Contributing Writer

Tennis hosted a three-day weekend of home matches Jan. 18-20 as both the Men's and Women's teams faced off against Drexel, Campbell and Georgetown.

WOMEN'S TENNIS V. DREXEL

Women's Tennis played Drexel at 9 a.m. and Campbell on 4 p.m. Saturday. The team had no issue defeating their first match play opponents.

VCU used senior captain Anna Rasmussen and sophomore Melissa Ifidzhen in its No. 1 doubles match. The European team had a tight match against the Dragon's Cristina Corte Gonzales and Ghita Benhadi but secured the doubles point for the Rams with a score of 7-5.

RAM STAT

Sophomore Kanako Yano only allowed three sets only gave up three games between two matches against Drexel and Campbell.

Sophomores Marina Alcaide Bakkari and Sofia Sualehe also cruised by their Drexel match-up, finishing first in doubles with a score of 6-1. Sophomores Paola Exposito Diaz-Delgado and Kanako Yano fell short to the Drexel team of Salma Ziouti and Tara Veluvolu, 6-4.

Singles play came with a Rams sweep as Diaz-Delgado only allowed one point in her match-up, and Ifidzhen fought to the end with a 6-3, 4-6, 10-6 win against Drexel's Marta Martinez. The 5-0 sweep of singles and wins in two of three doubles matches gave the Rams a 6-0 win in their first match play.

WOMEN'S TENNIS V. CAMPBELL

The Rams defeated Campbell after taking down the Dragons 7-0 earlier in the day.

Rasmussen and Ifidzhen battled again in the No. 1 doubles play match-up and came out on top of their Fighting Camels' opponents, 6-1. Sualehe and junior Noumea Witmus also needed little effort to defeat Campbell's Lou Regen and Inma Ramon, winning 6-0.

Witmus fought till the end in singles and defeated her opponent, 6-1, (4)6-7, 10-4. The long-fought match for Witmus allowed for Sualehe to come onto the court also fighting past her opponent in a close one, 6-2, 7-6(4). The singles play gave the Rams six point in addition to their doubles point.

Director of Tennis and Women's Tennis coach Paul Kostin was pleased with the performance of the team on Saturday and wanted to get back into the rhythm of matches.

"Just comes down to getting everybody to play. Next week, we play in the National Indoor, [UNC-Chapel Hill]," Kostin said. "It's going to be a little tougher. This is a good warmup."

MEN'S TENNIS V. GEORGETOWN

Men's Tennis defeated Georgetown 7-0 Jan. 20 at the Thalhimer Tennis Center.

The Hoyas did not let much get past them in doubles and kept up a strong play all the way until the last serve. Junior Javier Amantegui and sophomore Rayane Alami matched up against the Connor Lee and Luke Ross team of Georgetown, leading to a nail-biter, but VCU fell short, 7-6 (4).

Senior Arvid Noren and sophomore Inigo Torre Martin kept it close as well and were able to slip by Michael Chen and Charlie Sharton, 7-6 (5). Senior Philip Mobius and Inaki Rivero Crespo also mopped up their Hoya opponent with a 6-1 win.

Singles continued to be close with another strong showing by Noren with a 6-0, 6-1 win and Amantegui came back from his double's loss with a 6-0, 6-3 win against the Hoyas' Carlos Grande.

Sophomore Rayane Stable battled Chen, the strong doubles player for Georgetown, going into three sets and getting to 12-10 for the final. Freshman Stefan Petrovic faced off against Chen's doubles partner, Connor Lee, and slipped out with a 7-5, 3-6, 6-2 win.

Martin and Crespo beat their Hoya opponents 7-5, 6-0 and 6-2, 6-2 respectively.

Women's Tennis heads to the Intercollegiate Tennis Association National Indoor Tournament Jan. 26 to play North Carolina at noon. Men's Tennis will host Richmond, its across-town and conference rival, at the Thalhimer Tennis Center, Jan. 24 at 2 p.m.



Senior Anna Rasmussen and her sophomore doubles partner Melissa Ifidzhen went 2-0 in their doubles matches against Drexel and Campbell Jan. 19. Photo by Michel Maulding



Senior Philip Mobius and sophomore Inigo Torre Martin defeated their Drexel counterparts in the No. 2 doubles match to earn the doubles point for the Rams Jan. 18. Photo by Michel Maulding

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Stat of the week

Coach Mike Rhoades earned A-10 Coach of the Year honors this week, making VCU the first school since 1987 to have both the Men's and Women's A-10 Coaches of the Year.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Rams share the stories behind their jersey numbers



Photos by Jon Mirador and Erin Edgerton

RAM STAT

Five jerseys hang in the rafters of the Siegel Center — Eric Maynor (No. 3), Calvin Duncan (No. 5), Bradford Burgess (No. 20), Gerald Henderson (No. 22) and Kendrick Warren (No. 23). Players are still allowed to wear the numbers hanging.

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

SOME JERSEY NUMBERS HONOR A FAMILY member, while others pay tribute to the wearer's favorite player. But each Men's Basketball player has his own story.

No. 0 DE'RIANTE JENKINS

"Growing up as a kid, you're always trying to blame stuff on other people like, 'this person did this or this person had a bad grade on a test.' My dad always told me there's no excuses, you gotta find a way. Since I got here, it got me through that. It keeps me grounded knowing that I control what I can control.

I come from a small town, and another part of it is no one ever made Division I basketball. So I'm the first. Before this it was zero, so it all keeps me grounded. A lot of dudes in South Carolina has been wearing zero. Every year, somebody has been wearing zero in college basketball. So I'm just trying to be somebody to keep it going.

It always used to be 11, 15 or five since I was a little kid — those were the numbers that followed me. Then, my dad died before I got to college. And when I came on my visit, it all came in my head, and I was like 'yeah, I'm going to wear No. 0.'"

No. 1 MIKE'L SIMMS

"I chose one because I couldn't have five — Sean [Mobley] took five. Five was my favorite number ever. When I first started playing, I had the No. 5, so I've been trying to wear it ever since. But when I committed here, [Mobley] had taken five so I had to go with one. I try to resemble Tracy McGrady."

No. 2 MARCUS EVANS

"When I first got to Rice, one of my friends, Quez, called me [Deuce] and that's where the 'Deuce' came from ... I knew Briante [Weber] for two too. So it's like that a little bit, but there's no main reason for wearing it."

No. 4 COREY DOUGLAS

"My dad wore it in college, and it was my senior year number in high school."

No. 5 SEAN MOBLEY

"It was just a new number. I really wanted a single digit number because I've never had a single digit number. It was a fresh start."

No. 10 VINCE WILLIAMS

"I used to wear [No. 10] back in my fifth and sixth grade tournaments, so I just like it. I used to wear five in [Amateur Athletic Union] last year. It looked good on me — at least in AAU it did."

No. 11 KESHAWN CURRY

"No, not really. [In high school I wore] two because Kyrie [Irving] is two. I always wear his shoes, so I was like why not. I picked 11 once I got here when [Issac Vann] decided to get 23, so I was like I'll get 11 ... Kyrie's got 11."

No. 12 DYLAN SHEEHY-GUISEPPI

"It was given to me, nothing in particular. A lot of great players have worn 12, it's a great number to follow under. They gave me 12, so I stuck with it."

No. 13 MALIK CROWFIELD

"I've worn 13 since I was a little kid. When I first started playing basketball it was my favorite number. Then I started wearing it throughout my high school career and then in my college years."

No. 14 MARCUS SANTOS-SILVA

"I thought I was going to be able to get seven. But then I realized they don't do seven here, and everything with seven revolves around me. I was born June 7, 1997, and that was just my favorite number. So then I picked 14 because seven plus seven is 14."

No. 15 XAVIER JACKSON

"I picked a random number. Some people are superstitious and [stuff] like that, but I don't have anything like that. They gave me a couple of options, and that was the best option out of the numbers they gave me."

No. 22 MICHAEL GILMORE

"In my eighth grade year, a guy went to high school at Arlington Hatcher Day, where I went to school at, named Rodney McGruder. He was one of the guys I really connected with on the Varsity team and he wore 22. All throughout my high school years I looked up to him. He left after his senior year, and I had the opportunity to wear 22. I wore it the rest of my high school career. My freshman year at VCU, Terry Larrier actually ended up getting the No. 22, so I stuck with 11. Upon my return [to VCU], 22 was available so I took it. Just a little homage to Rodney and it's something that I really identify and associate myself with."

No. 23 ISSAC VANN

"One of my favorite players is Michael Jordan, so I've been wearing it since about high school. I changed it when I first got here because [Ahmed Hamdy-Mohamed] had it, but once he left I seen the opportunity to go back to it. I think it's one of my luckiest numbers. So, I mean, I stick with it."

No. 24 P.J. BYRD

"I've been 23 all my life, but since I got here [Issac Vann] wanted to change his number from 11 to 23. So I was like, 'OK, I'll take 24,' because I was always a Kobe [Bryant] fan growing up. It was the next best thing."

**No. 5 MIKE RHOADES
(LEBANON VALLEY COLLEGE)**

"It was my little league number. The first number I ever had on a team was my Little League baseball number, five. In high school, I was 35 because that was my brother's football number. When I got to college, coach [Pat] Flannery said 'you can't wear 35, that's not a point guard's number.' So that was when single digits started getting popular, so I picked five. Now it's in the rafters at Lebanon Valley — No. 5."

RAM STAT

The most commonly worn jersey numbers in the 51-year history of the program are No. 12 and No. 22, both sported by 16 players. The least-used jersey number is No. 43, which was worn by only two players.



Will Wade. CT file photo.

LSU suspends Wade after wiretap

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Former Men's Basketball coach Will Wade was suspended indefinitely by LSU March 8 after being caught on an FBI wiretap.

Yahoo Sports reported that a 2017 phone call by Wade to Christian Dawkins — the middleman between Adidas and the universities — was a part of a FBI wiretap on Dawkins' phone about former top-50 recruit Javonte Smart.

"I went to him with a [expletive] strong-ass offer about a month ago," Wade told Dawkins on the phone according to Yahoo Sports. "[Expletive] strong."

Smart was held out of the Tigers' final game of the regular season against Vanderbilt March 9.

Dawkins talked with Wade three times between June 19 and June 30, 2017, and Smart announced his commitment to LSU on June 30, 2017. Dawkins was convicted of conspiracy to commit wire fraud in the first trial tied to the pay-to-play scandal. He is currently serving a six-month sentence for the charge.

Wade has been subpoenaed by the defense for the second trial on April 22. Dawkins is being tried for charges similar to those he faced in the first.

"Specific to our previous coach's tenure, Athletic Compliance has reviewed all recruiting activity during his tenure to determine whether any inaccuracies or red flags existed," VCU Athletics said in a statement. "An independent review was also conducted. We found no red flags or causes for concern."

Because Wade left Richmond to coach the Tigers, the Rams were slated to play LSU in a home-and-home series over the next two seasons. His VCU contract included a clause that if he left to coach another team, the two teams would have to play a home-and-home series within three years of him leaving.

Women's Basketball falls in A-10 Championship

RYAN GRUBE
Contributing Writer

During a stretch that spanned 8 minutes and 37 seconds, the Rams went without a point. It proved too much to overcome for the top-seeded Black and Gold.

After winning their first two contests over Saint Joseph's and Dayton to advance to the Atlantic 10 title game, the Rams were unable to capture their first conference championship.

VCU (23-9, 13-3 A-10) was defeated, 62-47 Sunday, by the second-seeded Fordham (25-8, 13-3 A-10). Fordham, with the win, punches its ticket to this month's "Big Dance."

Women's Basketball coach Beth O'Boyle, the 2019 A-10 Coach of the Year, said the matchup was concerning given Fordham's hot 3-point shooting.

"You look at yesterday's game and their 3-point shooting," O'Boyle said. "That was one of the things that we talked about from the get-go, that we had to defend the 3-point line."

Although VCU held Fordham to 37.5-percent shooting from the field, the NCAA tournament-bound team connected on six of 16 3-pointers.

Junior center Danielle Hammond led the way for the Black and Gold with 13 points off the bench, while sophomore guard Taya Robinson added 11. Both Hammond and Robinson were selected to the A-10 All-Championship Team.

Sophomore guard Tera Reed — who entered Sunday as VCU's leading scorer at 12.2 points — was held to just 4 points.

The Rams used strong defensive performances down the stretch to close out their

first two games of the tournament. During Sunday's championship game, they got a taste of their own medicine.

Fordham held VCU to 38.8 percent from the field and 23.3 percent from three.

O'Boyle said Fordham's stifling defense made it tough to hit shots down the stretch. "Their switching defense was one of the things I think we struggled a little bit with today," O'Boyle said. "That was hard for us to get some baskets that we needed."

After falling behind early — 11-6 in the first quarter — the Rams cut their deficit to two, 13-11, to close out the quarter.

Two 3-pointers from Fordham's Mary Goulding to open the second quarter propelled the team's lead to eight, 19-11. Fordham entered the half with a 30-23 advantage.

VCU attempted to cut into Fordham's lead with a 3-point play from Hammond, followed by a triple from junior guard Nyra Williams.

The quick run helped the Rams get back within seven of Fordham, 38-31, as the two teams entered the fourth quarter.

But VCU didn't get any closer. With every bucket from the Black and Gold, Fordham had an answer.

Breanna Cavanaugh scored 13 of her game-high 22 points in the final quarter to seal the game for Fordham.

Goulding and Cavanaugh, who were also selected to the All-Championship Team, combined for 41 points for Fordham coach Stephanie Gaitley's bunch.

VCU committed 18 turnovers and 22 personal fouls, which allowed Fordham to convert 92.3 percent (24-26) of free throw attempts.

Following Sunday's loss, VCU is likely headed to the National Invitation Tour-



Sophomore guard Taya Robinson was named to the All-Championship Team after logging nine points and eight rebounds in the championship game.

Photo by Shayla Bailey

ament, according to Charlie Creme, an ESPN bracketology expert.

The Rams will await the release of the NCAA tournament and NIT brackets on March 17, where they will continue their turnaround season.

RAM IN ACTION

Veteran leadership helps Byrd develop

BEN MALAKOFF
Contributing Writer

Leading up to the 2018-19 season, Men's Basketball fans were unsure who would be the second point guard to redshirt-junior guard Marcus Evans. All signs pointed to an incoming recruit, but a freshman playing essential minutes could be risky.

The Rams sit in first place in the Atlantic 10 — bench play contributes to that success, including freshman guard P.J. Byrd.

The Houston, Texas, native is one of three freshmen on the team and one of two who has played in every game. When Byrd was recruited out of high school, Coach Mike Rhoades and his staff showed a particular interest in his playing style.

"I already had a great relationship with him," Byrd said of Rhoades. "By him moving to VCU, it was an easy decision for me. And it really helped me decide that I wanted to be part of this VCU program."

But Byrd's collegiate career start was rocky — he turned the ball over 10 times in seven games in November.

Veteran leadership has a place on every team. In this case, Byrd has a fellow teammate — who was also once a young point guard — to guide him.

"[Marcus Evans is] always hard on me,"



Freshman guard P.J. Byrd has appeared in all 31 regular season games for the Rams. Photo by Jon Mirador

Byrd said. "In practice, we go at each other, and I really enjoy learning from him. He's a great [point guard]. I look forward to being his backup, and when he leaves making sure the VCU program is up to par."

Evans, who Byrd typically replaces off the bench, has witnessed and helped the freshman's development.

"I think it's starting to click now," Evans said of Byrd. "He's always had talent but it's just about getting a feel for the game."

Since November, Byrd has played nine games with no turnovers, including a major win Jan. 16 in which he played 10 minutes against Dayton. In a short amount of time, he gave Evans — who logged 28 minutes and was on the verge of fouling

out with four personals — a much-needed rest.

"I think now [Byrd] is starting to get comfortable, his minutes have increased a little bit and he feels comfortable with the guys he is playing with on the court," Evans said. "With all that coming together, you're seeing him playing at a high level."

Other freshmen get caught up with mistakes like bad turnovers similar to Byrd's, but his work ethic keeps him from making the same error twice.

"[I'm] trying to keep my confidence up," Byrd said. "Never get too high, and never get too low. Staying focused and listening to my coaches is going to help me a long way."

In terms of improvements, Byrd said he wants to "take care of the ball better" and create more shot opportunities for himself and his teammates. As the A-10 tournament approaches this week, he said those improvements will help the team continue to succeed.

Since becoming a Division I athlete, Byrd has learned to value his opportunity at VCU and not take it for granted.

"Being a college basketball player at VCU is an honor. It's great," Byrd said. "I work really hard to get what I want, and this has been a beyond unbelievable experience."

PRESS BOX

Baseball's pace of play can be improved

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

Baseball, America's pastime. A sport that was once the most-loved in the U.S. has lost popularity in recent years because the games are too long and, at times, quite boring.

During the 2017 MLB season, the average time it took to complete a nine-inning game was 3 hours, 5 minutes and 11 seconds. The average NFL game in week two of the 2017 season was 3 hours, 4 minutes.

Football games take over three hours because of the commercials that plague the television broadcasts. There are commercials at practically every stoppage in play, at times. Baseball games take three or more hours simply because of the slow pace of play. A baseball game with fewer ads should not take longer to finish than a commercial-ridden NFL game.

The MLB introduced a pitch clock in minor league baseball in 2015 in the Double-A and Triple-A levels. This rule implementation was aimed at minimizing the slow pace of play caused by both batters and pitchers.

The pitch clock runs for 20 seconds for each pitch, except for the first pitch of an at-bat. A pitcher does not have to throw the ball by the end of the allotted time, but they do have to start their windup.

This rule was put in place in this year's MLB Spring Training for the first time at the major league level — to the displeasure of many star players.

"As players, it just shouldn't be in the game," Washington Nationals star pitcher Max Scherzer told ESPN. "Having a pitch clock, if you have ball-strike impli-



Illustration by Steck Von

cations, that's messing with the fabric of the game. There's no clock in baseball, and there's no clock in baseball for a reason."

But there is a reason to put a clock in baseball because of the sheer fact that a game takes just as long as an NFL game.

The pitch clock would also force batters to get into the box in a timely manner. Currently, many batters leave the batter's box after every single pitch and adjust their gloves or helmet. This slows down most MLB games.

Minor league baseball introduced the pitch clock in 2015 and saw shorter games

immediately. In the International League, one of two Triple-A leagues, games were shortened an average of 15 minutes. The length of games went from 2 hours and 56 minutes in 2014 to 2 hours and 41 minutes in 2015.

Though 15 minutes may seem like a small difference, it proves the pitch clock does indeed move the game along faster. If this were introduced in the MLB regular season, pacing would improve in a similar way.

The MLB has already shot down the idea of implementing the pitch clock into major league games until 2021 — at the

earliest — when a new collective bargaining agreement will be needed. The owners could put the pitch clock in place without the approval of the players union, but it would not go over well. So, when the new agreement is needed, the pitch clock will be brought up during the meetings. The owners are likely to favor the clock, unlike the players — the owners want to grow their brands and make more money.

The pitch clock is needed in the MLB and it will shorten the length of each game, bringing new fans to baseball and growing the sport as a whole.

Baseball wins 3 in a row over Lafayette

ADAM CHEEK
Staff Writer

Baseball swept Lafayette over the weekend homestand, scoring 20 runs on the way to improving its record to 11-3. The Black and Gold had two clear-cut wins — winning by three and four runs on Friday and Sunday, respectively — but had to battle Saturday to edge out a 7-6 victory.

SUNDAY

The Rams' Sunday win marked their seventh in a row and their 10th victory in the last 11 games. A 7-3 victory completed the sweep of the Leopards, as VCU lit up Lafayette's pitching in the bottom of the first.

With the bases loaded, junior infielder Paul Witt singled, scoring senior infielder Zac Ching and sophomore utility player Hogan Brown to give VCU an early 2-0 lead. Junior infielder Steven Carpenter was hit by a pitch, loading the bases for a second time. Junior catcher Josh Simon then lined a single into left-center, scoring Carpenter and Witt, while junior infielder Brett Norwood was thrown out at third.

Lafayette recorded runs in the top halves of the second and third, cutting the deficit in half, but the Rams added two more in the bottom of the third. Witt reached base on a fielding error, while sophomore infielder Liam Hibbits singled and got to second on a wild pitch. Simon then doubled down the line in left, scoring both runners.

After a Brown double, VCU loaded the bases once again in the fourth inning. Brown stole third, Norwood walked and



Junior infielder Paul Witt had accumulated six hits and six RBI over the three-game series against Lafayette. Photo courtesy of VCU Athletics

Witt was hit by a pitch, setting up a potential VCU breakthrough with Hibbits at the plate. Hibbits was also hit by a pitch, forcing in a run and giving VCU a 7-2 advantage.

Lafayette scored in the top of the seventh, but the Rams held the Leopards scoreless otherwise, recording a 7-3 victory.

SATURDAY

VCU rallied to beat Lafayette 7-6 on Saturday, with the Rams battling back against a four-run sixth inning by the Leopards.

Witt doubled to right to score Ching in the bottom of the first, allowing VCU to strike first. The Rams added to their lead the next inning, as Ching doubled down the left

field line to score junior outfielder Alex Taylor and freshman outfielder Tomas Sanchez.

After a Lafayette two-run outburst in the opening half of the fourth, Witt drove home Brown to create a two-run advantage. After a scoreless fifth, the Leopard offense exploded in the top of the sixth, plating four runs and taking a 6-4 lead.

Ching then doubled home Taylor to cut the deficit in half in the bottom of the sixth, and a scoreless seventh beget a Rams rally in the very next inning. With Ching and Brown on base, Witt laced a double down the line in left, scoring both runners and giving VCU a 7-6 advantage. The Rams held on, shutting out the Leopards in the top of the ninth to secure the win.

Witt went three-for-five with four runs batted in, while Ching went three-for-four

with three RBI and two runs. Junior right-hander Sam Ryan earned his second win of the season, with the bullpen striking out 12.

FRIDAY

The Rams held the Leopards to three runs in Friday's matchup, scoring six of their own to win the first game of the series. Junior right-hander Connor Gillispie started for the Rams, throwing four shutout innings and only giving up two hits. Norwood scored the first run for VCU in the bottom of the fourth, but Lafayette rallied for a pair of runs in the top of the sixth.

VCU answered with two of its own in the latter half of the inning, with Carpenter getting hit by a pitch with the bases loaded to force in a run. Witt then scored to reclaim the lead. Three more Rams crossed the plate the very next inning, with Ching doubling home Brown to start a three-run frame. Hibbits sacrificed Ching home, and Carpenter then singled home Norwood to take a 6-2 lead. Lafayette only managed one other run — VCU held the Leopards to that single run and took home its first victory of the series.

Norwood crossed the plate three times. Senior right-handed pitcher Benjamin Dum picked up his second win of the season, while senior right-handed pitcher and infielder Mac McCarty recorded his fourth save.

VCU will next host Marist at the Diamond March 13 at 3 p.m. The Rams will then travel to UCF for three games March 15-17.

THE
BASKETBALL
ISSUE



FINAL CHAPTER

Redshirt-senior guard Marcus Evans and coach Mike Rhoades are in their last season together. Photo by Alessandro Latour

From Rice to VCU, Rhoades and Evans make no excuses

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Sports Editor

THEY STEPPED OFF THE PLANE in Columbia, South Carolina, last March and something felt different: Coach Mike Rhoades and redshirt-senior guard Marcus Evans were in town for the NCAA tournament.

The two looked at each other. No words were said, but the message was clear: “We made it.”

Evans and Rhoades had talked about this moment since their days at Rice and had finally achieved the goal of making the big dance.

It was a long road to the tournament — especially for Evans, who overcame two Achilles tears and a postseason injury — but their goal was fulfilled.

Now, after four years on the court and about six of knowing each other, Rhoades and Evans are entering their final season together.

RICE

After being recruited by VCU when Rhoades was an assistant in Richmond, Evans followed him to Rice after Rhoades received his first Division I head coaching job.

When Evans arrived in Texas, he and Rhoades set a goal.

“I told him we were going to play in the NCAA tournament and I said that when we were at Rice,” Rhoades said. “From our first day at Rice ... that’s what we were pushing towards and we were getting closer.”

Evans had a breakout freshman season for the Owls, being named C-USA Freshman of the Year and First Team All-C-USA. He followed up his freshman season with another All-C-USA selection his sophomore year.

“We threw him in the fire as a freshman at Rice and said that we were going to build a program at Rice on him and his class,” Rhoades said.

VCU

When Rhoades accepted the job to coach the Rams, Evans said the team at Rice knew he was leaving for his dream job.

For Evans, who followed Rhoades to Richmond, it was a chance to play closer to home and for a coach who had been by his side since the beginning.

“I was up in the air about where I was going, but I knew I kind of wanted to be closer to home and I wanted to play in a program that was making the tournament,” Evans said. “As I went throughout the process, it kind of made sense that VCU checked all those boxes.”

Playing in the Siegel Center last season was not the first time Evans stepped foot on the floor on the Rams’ home court. The two met on the floor of the Siegel Center during Evans’ sophomore year of high school at a team camp.

“He had a lot of energy,” Evans said. “It was early in the morning and he was hyped up so I knew he was a crazy guy in a good way. I just knew he was a guy that a lot of players connected with.”

ONE AFTER ANOTHER

The Chesapeake native transferred to VCU after his sophomore season and had to sit a year per NCAA transfer rules. During his redshirt season, Evans tore his left Achilles, but he used the year to recover and didn’t miss a game.

In June 2018, Evans tore his right Achilles playing pickup basketball, putting in jeopardy the beginning of his junior season.

“It was now he was going to miss games,” Rhoades said. “All he wanted to do was play and put on a VCU uniform, he was so excited to do that. That really took everybody for a loop, but man he came back so quick and he didn’t miss a game.”

To everyone’s surprise, Evans returned for the Rams’ season opener last year against Gardner-Webb, a mere five months after his injury. He played nine minutes and logged 9 points in the contest.

Evans said the support from Rhoades took off the pressure to return to the floor.

“The biggest thing he did was giving me reassurance,” Evans said. “I was fighting so hard to get back for the first game, and he just kind of helped take the pressure off of me basically, saying ‘take your time, we’re going to be fine.’”

Rhoades said Evans leaned on his faith, his family and the team to return so quick last season.

See **EVANS** on page 6

“To beat Marcus Evans, you’ve got to kill him.”

Stat of the week

Men's basketball was ranked No. 25 in the AP preseason top-25 poll on Monday.



Freshman guard Bones Hyland was the highest-rated recruit VCU signed since senior guard De'Riante Jenkins in 2016.

Photo by Alessandro Latour

After a life-altering house fire, Bones Hyland draws strength from losses

RYAN GRUBE
Staff Writer

WHEN HE SMELLED THE SMOKE, Bones Hyland was lying on his bed, watching the Kansas-Duke Elite Eight game on his laptop and FaceTiming a teammate. That Sunday, which he spent with family and friends like any other, Hyland's Wilmington, Delaware, home was engulfed in flames.

He had to act quickly as black smoke filled the house. Hyland was forced to jump out of his second-floor bedroom on March 25, 2018, as his grandmother and two baby cousins remained trapped inside.

Although a neighbor and his friend were able to catch the top half of Hyland's body, his right knee slammed into the brick stairs below.

Hyland's grandmother and cousins were rushed to nearby hospitals, where his "Mom Mom," Fay, and cousin Maurice later died.

The months that followed were some of the toughest times for the freshman guard. Doctors feared his playing career could be over, and he couldn't stop thinking about the losses to his family. He couldn't even bring himself to attend his grandmother and baby cousin's funerals.

Luckily for Hyland, he was only diagnosed with a torn patellar tendon. But, the six-month recovery process still took a toll on him.

"They [the doctors] came back into where I was in the room, and they said it was going to be six months, and I broke down," Hyland said. "When they told me

that, I broke into pieces because it was the game I loved."

Hyland said his determination powered him through his recovery. The idea of not returning to his old form never crossed Hyland's mind.

"Just being able to bounce back from that, and get back on the floor when people thought I was done, it proves a lot," Hyland said.

Hyland's first return to the court was a memorable one. He showed out in an event he hosted called Tressi Day, a streetball game named after his group of friends, at Prince's Park in Wilmington.

Hyland called the experience a huge stress relief because the fans who attended weren't expecting him to suit up.

"It felt really good out there. There were a lot of people who came out," Hyland said. "It was just like a surprise — I came out and I played. It felt like I was myself again."

Hyland has used the tragedy to improve himself on and off the court. He said the fire and its aftermath gave him a better outlook on life.

"It made me become a better man because it helped me visualize things better, as far as what I was doing and what I was playing basketball for," Hyland said. "It really helped me grow and become more mature, and just help me become a leader."

A few months later, in September 2018, Hyland narrowed his list of colleges to seven. Hyland committed to the black and gold on June 4. Listed as the No. 64 ranked player in the 2019 class by 247Sports, Hyland became VCU's highest-ranked recruit since senior guard De'Riante Jenkins in 2016. For

Hyland, the decision to pick VCU was an easy one.

"I came on a visit, and it was just the love and the energy they had towards me," Hyland said. "I had almost every school in the country contacting me, but VCU always stayed around and always stayed loyal to me."

There's no telling what Hyland's ceiling is for the black and gold, or what his exact

“

It made me become a better man because it helped me visualize things better, as far as what I was doing and what I was playing basketball for.”

Bones Hyland, freshman guard

role will be for Rhoades this season. But, if one thing is for certain, Hyland will be playing for his grandmother and cousin whenever he is on the floor.

"I actually got a tattoo just as a reminder for them. Every time it feels as if I can't go anymore, I look at my tattoo," Hyland said. "That's the reason who I am doing it for. They're just always in my heart."

MEET THE PLAYERS

This season's men's basketball squad brings experience and youth to the Siegel Center

ADAM CHEEK
Staff Writer

TRENTON FISHER
Contributing Writer

Illustrations by Sammy Newman



DE'RIANTE JENKINS
0 - SENIOR G

Jenkins heads a returning class of nine players, with the senior guard coming off a season in which he started all 33 games. The 6-foot-5 Jenkins racked up 20 double-digit scoring games and led all black and gold players with 63 buckets from beyond the arc. His average of 11.3 points makes him a solid player to have on the floor at any time — he's started all of the Rams' 66 games since he was a sophomore.



MIKE'L SIMMS
1 - SENIOR G

The Richmond native returns for his third season of play with the Rams. The 6-foot-5 guard has appeared in all 66 games since he arrived at VCU. He scored double-digit points four times last season, including 15 in 18 minutes during the Rams' Dec. 30 win over Rider.



KESHAWN CURRY
11 - SOPHOMORE G

After the Jacksonville, Florida, native made 15 appearances off the bench for the Rams in their 2018-19 campaign, he's solidified his place on the roster as a solid shooter and a quality guard. Curry's season-high 8 points in December came off a 3-for-3 shooting day from the paint, and he racked up a shooting average well over .500 in almost 30 attempts. Look for Kyrie Irving-esque antics from the guard who wears the same number as the NBA star.



TRE CLARK
12 - FRESHMAN G

One of four freshmen on this year's team, a combo guard, Clark brings dynamic scoring ability and adds depth to VCU's roster. Following his breakout summer of 2018 playing AAU, recruiters began to notice Clark's skill. During his senior year in Covington, Georgia, playing at Newton High School, he averaged 20 points, six rebounds, and three steals. He led his team to a 22-8 record and a run in the State Tournament.



MALIK CROWFIELD
13 - SENIOR G

Last year, Crowfield averaged 3.7 points and 1.6 rebounds and shot a team-best 37.6% from 3-point range. He posted double figures on four occasions, including his best game against cross-town rival Richmond, where he finished with 14 points. His development over the past three seasons has seen an already gifted shooter expand his skillset. His biggest asset is the sneaky athleticism he poses at 6-foot-4 and his ability to drive to the basket at any time.



MARCUS SANTOS-SILVA
14 - JUNIOR F

In 2018 Santos-Silva proved to be the Rams' most improved player. Starting all 33 games, he also posted double-double numbers a team-high six times. One of the most skilled left-handed players in the nation, Silva's rebounding ability and his excellent passing make him one of VCU's key players.

EVANS

After adversities, the Rhoades-Evans duo begins their final chapter

Continued from front page

"When you have adversities like that, you have to lean on something," Rhoades said. "For him to be ready and be even stronger this year it's just an acknowledgement for him to know that hey, 'I got through a lot of stuff, we can do this and now we can do it together.'"

Evans played in all 33 games last season despite being in recovery from the Achilles injury for most of it. Just when he was almost 100%, he got injured again, and this time it was his knee.

In the Atlantic 10 tournament against Rhode Island, Evans rose up to attempt a layup and came crashing down to the court. His screams silenced the Barclays Center in Brooklyn as training staff tended to him.

The injury was diagnosed as a deep bone bruise and hyperextension, but it was painful for Evans to put weight on his knee.

Less than a week after he sustained the injury, Evans suited up and played in the NCAA tournament against UCF.

"In the A-10 tournament when he went down, I really thought it was a major knee issue," Rhoades said. "He wasn't 100% in the tournament, but just to see him fight back and say 'We're going to play in the tournament together, coach' was a tribute to him."

Evans wore a padded knee brace in the game he worked toward his entire collegiate career, playing 26 minutes and recording 6 points.

"It was hurting from the jump, damn near every step I was taking," Evans told The Commonwealth Times in March. "But we worked so hard to get to this point, I wanted to try to give whatever I had to help this team win."

**'TO BEAT MARCUS EVANS,
YOU'VE GOT TO KILL HIM'**

If nothing else, Evans and Rhoades have one thing in common: competitiveness, as individuals and with one another.

For Evans, it's winning every play at practice like it's a game, Rhoades said. For Rhoades, it's his persistence and dedication with everything he does, Evans said.

"Everything he does, he wants to win — he wants to beat you," Rhoades said. "I always say to beat Marcus Evans, you've got to kill him because he's going to keep coming at you."

Rhoades' dedication is just like the players' on the court, Evans said. It's easy for them to connect with Rhoades because he has the "fight in him" like the players do.

"He's a guy you kind of have to give some respect for because in his way, he's not going to be told no, he can't do it or his way doesn't work," Evans said. "In his mind, if he believes in his team and the system he has, it doesn't matter what the media says."

Rhoades has not kept Evans on a leash

at all during their time together. Instead, he allows him freedom on the court, which Evans said helped him grow as a player.

"I think after that it was kind of understanding," Evans said. "I knew the level of trust he had for me, and I knew what he expected from me."

The trust and freedom that Rhoades bestowed to Evans in their first two years together resulted in Evans scoring 1,000 points before coming to Richmond.

Although Evans suffered multiple injuries last season, he fought through both and accomplished the goal of making the NCAA tournament that he and Rhoades set for themselves years ago. For Rhoades, it demonstrated his attitude and coaching philosophy of not making excuses for anything.

"You go through a lot of tough ups and downs, and we did it at Rice and we did it at VCU," Rhoades said. "But we're going to make no excuses, don't complain about it, just keep finding a way — and we made it."



MARCUS EVANS
2 - REDSHIRT-SENIOR G

The comeback story of 2018, Evans bounced back from two Achilles tendon tears — barely a year apart — to lead the Rams to the Atlantic 10 tournament and an NCAA tournament berth. Evans was named to the All-A-10 Conference First Team, averaging 13.6 points, 3.2 assists and 1.9 steals last season. He drained at least 20 points five times on the season and had four or more steals three times. Keep an eye on that No. 2 jersey. Fans will be seeing a lot of it this year.



COREY DOUGLAS
4 - JUNIOR F

The 6-foot-8 Louisville, Kentucky, native is the second-tallest player on the roster, and he makes the most of his height advantage. A prolific shot blocker — he led the team with 51 last year — Douglas made 10 starts in 33 appearances, shooting .511 from the field. He continues to play under Mike Rhoades after beginning his college hoops stint with Rhoades at Rice. Douglas produces well off the bench and is a quality starter. Expect him to start more games on the floor in 2019-20.



NAH'SHON "BONES" HYLAND
5- FRESHMAN G

Hyland is a four-star recruit who arrived in Richmond electing to play for VCU over suitors such as UConn and Boston College. The Wilmington, Delaware, native averaged almost 30 points in his junior and senior years at St. Georges Tech and led his team to the DIAA Boys Basketball Tournament semifinals. Hyland's impressive resume also features his title of 2019 Delaware Player of the Year and two selections to First Team All-State.



VINCE WILLIAMS
10 - SOPHOMORE F

A southpaw sophomore from Toledo, Ohio, made an immediate impact last season. Williams' 34 steals ranked third among all VCU players, and he drained a season-best 13 points against Charleston in December. Three of those steals came against rival Richmond in March, and Williams added 6 points, five assists and five rebounds for an impressive slash line. The three-time Toledo Blade Boys Player of the Year led St. John's Jesuit to a 90-17 record during his high school career.



ARNOLD HENDERSON VI
15 - FRESHMAN

Henderson didn't have to travel far to find a good collegiate fit for his skill set. A Richmond native, Henderson averaged 10 points as a senior at St. Christopher's and made 34 3-pointers for the Saints. He converted on 88% of his free throws. As a preferred walk-on, Henderson will add depth to VCU's skilled guard corps.



HASON WARD
20 - FRESHMAN F

Another freshman, Ward, brings two high school state championship titles to Richmond all the way from Massachusetts. Last year as a senior at Springfield Central, Ward averaged 10.5 points, 6.3 rebounds and 2.2 blocks. His 7-foot-4 wingspan allows for an excellent set of skills on both sides of the ball. His elite shot-blocking ability will be one of the best attributes he brings to the Rams.



JARREN MCALLISTER
21 - FRESHMAN F

As a three-star recruit in 2018, McAllister was known for his high motor and athleticism. McAllister chose VCU over the likes of Virginia Tech, Wake Forest and others. Along with being a two-time all-state selection and 1,000-point scorer, he led Massanutten Military Academy to a state championship game appearance in 2017. His skills will fit in well with VCU's up-tempo system.



ISSAC VANN
23 - REDSHIRT-SENIOR F

As a 33 game starter for VCU last season, Vann posted 10.8 points, third-best on the team, along with about four rebounds per game and swiping 40 steals. He also posted double figures on 16 occasions. His physical style of play makes him a huge asset for VCU's rebounding ability. He also can connect from long range, making him someone every opposing team will have to plan for.

Rams in the Pros

ANDY RIDDLER Contributing Writer

TROY DANIELS

Daniels enters his seventh season in the NBA and his first with the Los Angeles Lakers. He just finished a two-year stint with the Phoenix Suns where he averaged 8 points and shot almost 40% from 3-point range. He appeared in two preseason games this season and looked sharp for the new-look Lakers, averaging 9 points with two 3-pointers.

TREVEON GRAHAM

This offseason, Graham was part of a slew of deals that sent him to the Golden State Warriors and then to his current team, the Minnesota Timberwolves, the next day. Graham has a chance to start for the

Timberwolves on opening day after averaging 10 points and shooting 50% from 3-point range.

BRIANTE WEBER

After working out with NBA teams this summer, Weber opted to head overseas and sign with the Boulogne-Levallois Metropolitans in France. Through four games, he is bringing to them what he brought to VCU every time he put on the black and gold — hounding defense. Weber is averaging more than four steals per game so far, including two games in which he recorded five steals.

JUSTIN TILLMAN

In January, Tillman signed with the Memphis Grizzlies G-league affiliate, the Memphis Hustle. He appeared in eight games for them and averaged al-

most 9 points. Then, Tillman took his talents overseas this summer and signed with Hapoel Galil Gilboa in Israel. They have only played one game, but Tillman helped carry the team to victory by scoring 24 points on 12-15 shooting and 11 rebounds. He looks to be a key piece for them this season.

MICHAEL GILMORE

This summer, Gilmore found a new home to take his talents to after his return to VCU for his senior year: German professional team Phoenix Hagen. Gilmore is already making an impact for his new team with 11 points in 20 minutes against the PS Karlsruhe Lions on Sept. 28.

JEQUAN LEWIS

Lewis started for the Goyang Orions in the Korean league last year, where he averaged 14.5 points and 5.8 assists. He then

moved to Greece to play for Kymis where he averaged almost 13 points and 5.7 assists. At the end of August, it was announced that he was going to be joining his third team in less than a year when he joined PAOK in the same Greek league he was previously in. He is averaging 8 points and six assists so far with a game-high 10 assists in their first win of the season.

MO ALIE-COX

The continued growth of Alie-Cox is apparent with every snap he plays. He has become a dynamic run-blocking tight end for the Indianapolis Colts in his third year with the organization. Last year, he saw his first snaps during a regular-season game and was quickly making highlight-reel grabs, including a one-handed touchdown catch against the Oakland Raiders in his fourth career game. This year, he has logged four catches as the third-string tight end for the Colts.

Rams gear up for 2019-20 campaign

JOE DODSON
Contributing Writer

After posting the biggest turnaround in D-I last season, women's basketball is still hunting for more.

Last season, the focus for the Rams was defense as they ranked nationally in multiple categories. But this offseason, the focus was on something else: offense.

"We always want to be really solid defensively," coach Beth O'Boyle said. "We talk about wanting to be able to create chaos on the defensive side, and really play at a high intense pace on the offensive side."

O'Boyle wanted her team to focus on raising their offensive numbers while maintaining their intensity on the defensive end. VCU ranked fourth in the nation in scoring defense, limiting opponents to just 51.1 points per game last season.

The Rams also held opponents to an average of 32.8% from the field, and just 25.5% from beyond the 3-point point line.

O'Boyle laid out a goal to have the most free-throw attempts in the league after the Rams shot 68% from the line.

"That's something we've been working on a lot, from summer into the fall and now practice," said O'Boyle. "Hopefully we see some improvement in the numbers on the offensive side."

O'Boyle said another goal for the team this year is to work on developing a self-designed culture for the team. She also said the program is player-driven, meaning the players lead the team and its expectations.

Those expectations include winning the A-10 in both the regular and post-season, along with earning a trip to the NCAA tournament.

Last season, Tera Reed earned First Team All-A-10 honors after leading the team in scoring, averaging 12.5 points. O'Boyle has seen Reed benefit the team in other ways, too.

"She's a player that has led us in scoring, but then can also rebound for us and help us a great deal on the defensive end," O'Boyle said. "She's just a multilayered player. She's just gonna fill that stat sheet because she can do a little bit of everything."

Despite having the best season offensively for the Rams in terms of scoring, Reed believes she has even more to offer this season.

"This year, I want to make all-defensive team, and all-conference first team again," Reed said. "I want to get my average up scoring. ... And my rebounding has to get up."

VCU struggled several seasons ago when it had one of the youngest teams in the conference. Now, the group is older and more experienced.

Senior center Danielle Hammond had the highest field goal percentage in the conference last year while averaging 10 points for the Rams. Junior guard Taya Robinson received A-10 Defensive Team honors last year, made the Third team All-A-10 and led the team in rebounds.

VCU only lost one home game last season, for which O'Boyle credits the fans and the Peppas. Reed feels an advantage when playing at the Siegel Center, which she has seen grow during her career.

"It's home," Reed said. "We're used to it, we love it. ... Our fanbase is growing, it gives us confidence."

That confidence will be necessary as VCU heads into a tough non-conference schedule that includes matchups against Seton Hall and Cincinnati. Reed views these games as a way to prepare for a potential NCAA tournament bid.

"It's gonna be a real challenge, and we're definitely looking forward to it," Reed said. "It'll help us in getting to the tournament."

O'Boyle looks forward to conference matchups against Dayton, George Washington and Fordham, which beat VCU in the A-10 championship game last season.

"Every week, I love the idea of competing," O'Boyle said. "In the A-10 we have some great natural rivals. When we play that school right down the street that's always a big one for us."



Senior guard Nyra Williams logged 134 points last season. CT file photo

Women's basketball prepares to replicate last year's success

RYAN GRUBE
Staff Writer

When women's basketball entered the start of last season, no one knew what to expect from the 2018-19 Rams.

VCU was fresh off a mere seven-win season, but the squad was picked to finish sixth in the 2018 Atlantic 10 preseason poll.

While the Rams returned key pieces from a young 2017-18 team — including five returning freshmen — expectations were tempered for the black and gold prior to last season.

Now, as VCU heads into its 2019-20 campaign, all eyes are on head coach Beth O'Boyle's crew.

The black and gold unleashed a 17-win improvement in 2018-19, earning the resilient bunch a share of the conference regular-season title with Fordham.

Junior forward Sydnei Archie says she and the rest of the team welcome this season's high expectations.

"I feel really good about the direction the team is headed," Archie said. "I think we had a good end of the season last season, and I think everyone is coming in hungry and ready to go."

Archie and company will be looking to avenge a disappointing end to their 2018 conference tournament run — a journey that ended with a loss to Fordham in the A-10 Championship game.

O'Boyle, who was named A-10 Coach of the Year last season, said while their season was historic, they would have liked one more win to get to the NCAA Tournament.

"We had a great run, got all the way to the championship game, and then unfortunately came up short against Fordham to get that bid," O'Boyle said. "It was an exciting year, and I was really proud of our team effort."

Archie said the team is taking cautious measures to ensure they don't replicate last year's A-10 tournament finish.



Junior guard Taya Robinson averaged 9.9 points last season. CT file photo

"We're just focusing on making sure our conditioning is up there, so we're not burning out towards the end of the season," Archie said. "Just remain strong so when that tough game comes at the end of the season, we're all going to be ready."

Archie is one of several juniors and seniors who make up a veteran-oriented roster for VCU this year. The Rams didn't graduate any players after last season.

O'Boyle said the veteran leadership is essential for her squad, given what they would like to accomplish this season.

"It's great all of a sudden to have juniors and seniors, the pace and the competitiveness that you have to come into practice

with," O'Boyle said. "To accomplish anything great, we have to make sure that we're being very consistent with that, and I think they're really motivated to do that."

The black and gold have been a popular pick to equal last year's success. O'Boyle said her staff is working hard to make sure their win total carries over from last season.

"I think it's really just a focus for us about our culture, and our players getting ready to practice really hard and intense so when we get to games, they're easier," O'Boyle said. "We just keep trying to put them in a position to make sure that we're being really competitive."

Archie says she has high hopes for the squad in 2019. The junior said she would like to see the Rams capture the A-10 title and advance to the NCAA Tournament.

As for anyone who says last season was VCU's ceiling, Archie says the team is prepared to silence the naysayers.

"Just wait on it because this season, we're not coming to lose," Archie said. "We're coming to go in and take whatever we lost last year."

The Rams open the season at home against Appalachian State on Nov. 5 at 11 a.m.

A walk down the street:

How Hason Ward was introduced to basketball

BEN MALAKOFF
Contributing Writer

He was walking down the street in a country he had never been to, basketball in tow. That's when freshman forward Hason Ward was spotted by someone in a white Lexus rolling past him down the Massachusetts road.

The car came to a stop after passing the 6-foot-9 Ward, and slowly moved into reverse.

The driver was Darryl Denson, Springfield Central High School's basketball coach. Denson asked Ward who he played for and what experience he had. Ward was never on a team in his home country of Barbados. The family vacation to the U.S. ignited his basketball career.

"[Denson and my father] were just talking and talking and he came to the house a couple of times he got turned down," Ward said. "And then he just kept coming back. Everything just went from there."

Ward returned the following year, moving from Barbados to live with his aunt in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The idea of basketball stuck out to Ward, but he had never played on an organized basketball team growing up.

"When I first moved here, I basically didn't even know what basketball was," Ward said. "I just knew that I wanted to play basketball."

Ward played for Central Springfield High School during his sophomore season, competing in the starting five.

The first practice was a shock for Ward. The drills made him tired, and Ward was not accustomed to being pushed this hard.

But Denson continued to make him work harder.

"He [kept] telling me 'run to the court,'" Ward said. "'Get the ball.' I was surprised myself that I ran there. 'Dunk it. Go back again. Dunk it.' Coach looked at one of the players and said, 'You think he will get accustomed to it?'"

Ward did, and he was known on the team as the dunker and shot-blocker, a title he earned after he blocked 22 shots in a single game during his junior year.

"That was an out of city game too, so they didn't know who I was," Ward said. "When they kept putting up the shots, I kept swatting it. And they just keep going and going, so I just keep swatting it."

A career night for Ward started to put him on the map for D-I college recruiters. But he was still unsure about how the college recruitment process worked. When his first college scholarship was extended to him, Ward said he did not understand what the offer was.

"I was on the phone with the coach and he was just talking to me," Ward said. "He's like, 'Yeah, so I'm offering you a full scholarship.' I was like, 'OK, thank you.' And it just happened."

It was Ward's mom who helped him do the research and pick VCU from other offers, which included Georgia, Virginia Tech and Rutgers. She researched what each school had to offer, Ward said.

With the college basketball season right around the corner, Ward has settled into Richmond and has become close with his



Freshman forward Hason Ward moved from Barbados to the U.S. before his sophomore year of high school. Photo by Jon Mirador

teammates. Whatever they do, they do as a group, Ward said.

"[They] try to help me feel at home," Ward said. "And I do feel at home, I feel like this is the place I was supposed to be at."

Just over three years after picking up a ball and dribbling down the street in Massachusetts, Ward still has to do some walking down the road. Only now, it's walking down Broad Street to the Siegel Center.

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