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## Flashback Friday: Family atmosphere creates legacy for Warren County's 2010 squad

By Tommy Keeler Jr. The Northern Virginia Daily  
Oct 2, 2020



Members of Warren County's 2010 team, from left: Ryan Molka, John Hare, Steve Crist, Tyler Post, Sam Eshelman, Adam Orndorff, Tony Tallent, Jayme Perry, Logan Hibbs, Sean Hayes, Gage Steele, Jeremy Vogt, Mike Ford and Damien Caison.  
Tommy Keeler/Daily

### FRONT ROYAL – Family.

That's the one word that was brought up again and again when Warren County players and coaches were talking about their 2010 football season. A group of 16 players and coaches had a 10-year reunion of sorts as they lined up for photos and reconnected with one another at Warren County High School on Sept. 5.

"This group of kids is always going to be special," Former Warren County coach Tony Tallent said. "Ten years later, it feels like we just walked out and put the band back together right now. Just seeing them probably at least takes some of the age off of me that COVID's put on me so far. I almost feel younger just being around them."



Warren County hadn't made a playoff appearance since 1952, before Tallent, now the athletic director at Tuscarora High School, arrived in 2007. Tallent said that the first three years helped build the season that took place in 2010.

"We had some great kids that built this foundation," he said. "Because that 2010 season doesn't happen without the 2009, 2008 all the way back. So when you look at that piece, I've got to credit the years before for the years that came after. Because there was no way we could have created the culture, the expectations and the love of the brotherhood of Warren County football without those first teams that we started when we started out. I think there has to be a lot of credit that's given back to those guys as well as the coaching staff."

Jeremy Vogt, who was a senior on the 2010 squad, said that he realized things were changing in his freshman season and it involved something that happened off the field.

"I think probably our freshman year there was a French fry (left) in the hallway and coach Tallent found out it was from us or it was from the cheerleading team – nobody still knows," Vogt said. "But we had to do a ton of conditioning after that, and that really set the tone for the culture of the program."

Jayne Payne, a senior on the 2010 team, said that for him everything started with the coaching staff and the culture that was created.

"The longer coach Tallent was there the longer everything was growing," Payne said. "So we just kind of fed off of that energy and just worked really hard that summer. We might have had two guys on the whole team that weren't doing the lifts and they had other obligations. We just had everybody here going full go. So that was a major part of it."

Tallent said that when he first started he expected it to take a few years to get the program going strong and 2010 is when things took off.

Damien Caison, who was a senior on the 2010 team, said one of the things that motivated and led to success in 2010 was a loss to Handley the year before.

"We played Handley on this field (in 2009)," Caison said. "Handley was a top team with Jeremiah (Wilson), Leonard (Grant) all them. We took them to overtime and ended up losing on a missed extra point when coach Tallent was trying to call a timeout. We lost 31-30. Handley ended up doing pretty good in the playoffs that year. We all talked over the summer, 'why can't that be us?' We played right there with Handley should have won, could have won. Why can't that be us?"

### **Strong start**

The Wildcats started the season 4-0 with impressive wins over Strasburg, Tuscarora, Woodgrove and James Wood.

Gage Steele, a junior on the 2010 team, said that he knew the team would be good that year, but it was still nice to go out and start the season off well.

"I felt we were loaded from the beginning of the season," Steele said. "We kind of knew that we had players all over the field. ...We knew if we put our head down and focused on our game plan and executed well and stuck together as a team, as a family, we could definitely do something special that year. From the very beginning we seen that we were executing very well out on the field."

Tyler Post, a sophomore quarterback on the 2010 team, said that one thing that helped the squad from the very beginning was the leadership the team had from the seniors.

"I look back and I'm just thankful for the leadership that we had," Post said. "It was just easier for me being a little bit younger. You had some talented seniors. You got good coaching. So for me, it was just a blessing to fall into that position and to kind of carry those first few games into some momentum."

One of the keys to success for the Wildcats that season was its defense. Warren County allowed only 11 points a game over the first four contests and had two shutouts throughout the season.

Steele, who would go on to be a standout linebacker at James Madison University, said the Wildcats' mentality played a role in the success they had on the defensive side of the ball.

"We were fast," Steele said. "We were smaller as a team, but we were fast. We swarmed to the ball. As long as we all played our position right and executed well, there wasn't a lot of teams that could outrun us as far as that goes. Then we were hard-nosed. That toughness, that get it done mentality that's what I loved about the defensive side – just hitting people. I loved that part of it. We all just vibed off of each other and fed off of each other when we were all out on the field. It was awesome."

After the 3-0 start, Caison said that the Wildcats still felt like they weren't getting the respect they deserved heading into the James Wood game. The Wildcats dominated the game and won, 19-0.

"We felt like we had something to prove going into that James Wood game, just because we were always hearing the 'oh you haven't played anybody yet' type of thing," Caison said. "I remember going into that game and just the energy from us, like we felt disrespected. The one thing I remember the most about that game was big hits."

Caison said that was the game that they found their identity as a team.

"After that, it was like 'OK this is what the team's going to look like,'" Caison said. "We're going to be physical we're going to punch you in the mouth and we're going to hit you all game long. We were happy with being 3-0, but we were still figuring out our identity. We were new to this whole winning thing. James Wood, from what we've always known from the Brock Lockhart's, the Trae Tinsman's that were at James Wood, they're physical. They're going to shove it down your throat. Handley's got the athletes. Sherando's got a mixture, but James Wood is physical. They're going to punch you in the mouth. So the fact that we could go out there and beat them at their own game and punch them in the mouth first and just keep doing it let us know 'hey we can be just as physical as anybody out there.' And now we sort of caught onto our identity. So that game was really big for us."

As the wins started to come so did the fans each and every week. Vogt said the community support was stronger than it had been during his years at Warren County.

"The stands were packed full of people," Vogt said. "People were tailgating out in parking lots and before our senior season that had never happened before. So I think for a lot of players seeing that, having that community support behind you really makes a big difference for believing in what you're

doing. And you give people that are working 9-to-5 every day a little escape from that, to come cheer on the boys from your hometown. High school football is just such a good thing for each community and if you can get a good culture and rally behind that it does a lot of good."

## Overcoming adversity

The Wildcats stumbled a little after their first four games. They lost the next three, to Handley, Liberty and Fauquier.

Steele said that the three-game losing streak may have been a good thing when all was said and done.



"It's almost like if you start off a season that strong, it's almost like you need a reality check," Steele said. "So that's what we definitely got. We got a reality check and that lets us come back down to Earth, really focus on our scheming, our playmaking abilities. Working on our mistakes as far as practice goes and being able to execute to our fullest potential from there on out. I think we finally started clicking. We had that five-game winning streak there. It all comes down to a group of guys realizing that we needed to focus and really looking at how we were doing things. And if we really wanted to make the season special that's what we needed to do."

After back-to-back wins over Brentsville and Kettle Run, the Wildcats faced cross-town rival Skyline in the regular-season finale.

Caison said that he didn't think he was going to play in that game, but he got a little extra motivation the day before the game.

"I was banged up from the Kettle Run game and technically I wasn't going to play," he said. "There's a little backstory behind that, on why I played. That Thursday night, I used to live right down the road from the high school, I went home and there was a Skyline Hawks sign in my yard and another sign that said 'Warren County sucks.' I walked in (my house) and I told my mom 'I'm taping my ankle up.' It was a high ankle sprain from the Kettle Run game. 'I'm taping my ankle up. I'm playing.' So in a cross-town rivalry, there doesn't need to be any extra fuel, but when you have that it adds to it. And then we pulled up to our high school (the day of the game) and there were Skyline signs in our high school. So it was like 'OK we didn't need any extra fuel to the fire, but that's definitely going to help us.' That definitely turned it up."

The game was a battle from start to finish. When Steele, the team's top running back, had to come off the field due to injury late in the contest things didn't look good for Warren County.

However, Post stepped up and completed some big passes. Most of the season the team had relied on the running game, but when they really needed it Post delivered and helped the team pull out a 16-13 win. Post threw a touchdown pass to Logan Hibbs, a senior on the 2010 squad, with 56 seconds left to give Warren County the win.

"Logan Hibbs had never played football before (his senior year)," Vogt said. "This was his first year coming out for the team. Obviously he was accepted by the culture, everybody loved him. I think he ended up catching a post (route) down here at one of the end zones and scoring. That was probably one of the most memorable moments of the season. Having someone new come in and get acclimated with the culture and blend right in with everybody and end up making a really big play in a really big game."

Caison said that the Hawks did a good job of taking away the running game, and that was the contest where they realized they could trust Post in a big situation if needed.

Trailing 13-8 late in the game, Post led the Wildcats to the winning score. The key play of the drive was a 27-yard pass from Post to Caison on third down, which took the ball to midfield.

"It was like 'OK we can trust him,'" Caison said. "At that point that Skyline game, I think that's the momentum that carried us into the Dominion and Park View games in the playoffs because we saw we can trust this kid. He wants it just as bad as all of us seniors and he's got big enough shoulders

(to carry us) even though he's a sophomore. And the spotlight's new to him, but it's not too big for him. So that game I think was really what drove us and gave us that momentum heading into the playoffs."

The Wildcats were the second seed in the Region II, Division 3 playoffs and hosted Dominion in the first round. Dominion was led by running back Deandre Reaves, who went on to play at Marshall University.

The game was back and forth and once again it was Post who made big throws down the stretch. He threw a 46-yard touchdown pass to Damien Wright for the game-winning score for a 29-26 victory. The defense made a big stand at the end of the game to preserve the win.

Vogt said that it was a great feeling to get the school's first-ever playoff win.

"After we played our first playoff game and ended up winning that – that was just a surreal moment for all of us, because it was the first time we had been to the playoffs and it wasn't just a one-and-done thing," Vogt said. "We knew we had some momentum and could make a little bit of a run at things. Probably that game was one of the most memorable for me just because you got to play another week. It was do or die and we did it."

The Wildcats followed up the win over Dominion with a victory over Park View, 14-0.

Warren County led 7-0 in a defensive battle when Caison made a big play in the final minutes to seal the win. He intercepted a pass one-handed and returned it deep in Park View territory.

"It was about three, four minutes left in the game and I was on the sidelines catching a breather," Caison said. "I remember it like it was yesterday. Coach Tallent tells me go on the field, put your stamp on the game. A play goes by they go to the other side, then they run back to my side. It's a screen pass, I bite on the screen. I realize it's too easy, I take three steps back and and I catch it one-handed. I take it back to about the 20-yard line."

Tallent said that walking off the field after the win over Park View he knew his team had accomplished something special.

"I remember walking off this field because we were going to be on the road after that," Tallent said. "But that was one of those moments in your life where you're like these are the days, these are the days that you remember. That was just one of those times where I walked out of the stadium and

said 'that was something that I'll look back on and remember.' It was just special."

## **Family legacy**

The Wildcats lost to Handley, 49-20, in the regional final to finish one win short of a state berth.

Despite the loss, the players said they were happy with the season that they had.

Vogt said the memories that were made that season were priceless.

"I used to coach down at Blacksburg High School and I would text (the former Warren County coaches) before games and talk ball with them, Vogt said. "So really, this was an instrumental part in making me the person that I am today. And I think these memories you can't create them anywhere else and you'll never have memories like you do with your high school football team. I just wouldn't trade these guys for the world, and I think today we're all out here (for a reunion) and it's like no time has passed. Ten years later and we're all cutting up and having fun."

The Wildcats made the playoffs the next four seasons and there's no question that the 2010 team helped set the tone and start a winning tradition.

The players said that they will never forget the season they had and the friendships that were created.

"The biggest thing I take away from that team is people preach family and stuff, but we hadn't seen each other for years and you can tell right now we're talking like we never missed a beat," Caison said. "And I love that about the team, and like I said it's probably the family aspect that really took us to where we needed to go."

Tallent said he was proud of the men that his players became and the legacy they created.

"Somebody asked the other day about what a legacy is, and I think 10 years later when you come back and you're able to have these kind of people and these kind of feelings, that's what it should be. I'm just as happy as I can be just to be here with them and proud of the lasting memories that this team created."



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## Flashback Friday: Generals created bonds that lasted a lifetime in 1996 season

By Tommy Keeler Jr. The Northern Virginia Daily  
Sep 18, 2020

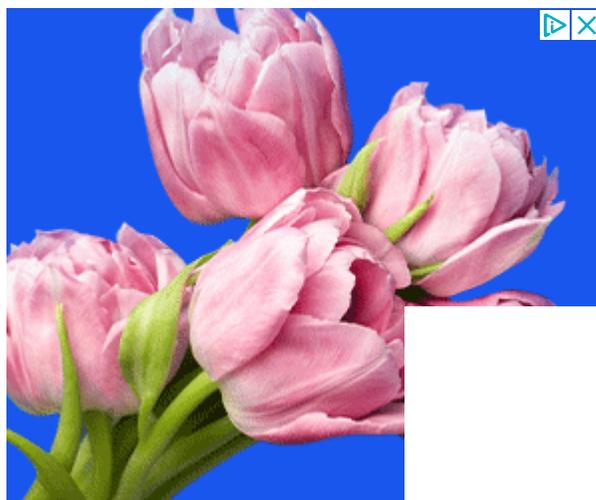


Members of Stonewall Jackson's winning team of 1996 include, from left, Jimmy Woods, Jason Lutz and Seth Coffman.  
Rich Cooley/Daily

QUICKSBURG — Bonds that lasted a lifetime.

That's what Stonewall Jackson's football team created in 1996 when they had one of the most successful seasons in school history. The 1996 team advanced to the state semifinals for the first time in program history and went 10-3 on the year. They did it with a strong combination of seniors and juniors and led by a coach who would go on to become a legend in the area.

Stonewall Jackson was coming off a 5-5 season and even though some may not have expected the Generals to have success in 1996, the team knew it was capable of doing well. Seth Coffman, who was a junior on that squad, said that the team felt like it had been working toward something the previous years.



“I think we knew we had something good,” Coffman said. “(We) had a real good group of seniors and we had been all playing together for a couple years, working out a lot during the summer together, throwing the football, hitting the weight room. It just felt like we had a pretty good group of folks, that we had an opportunity to win some games and be competitive.”

There hadn't been a whole lot of winning at Stonewall Jackson until Dick Krol arrived in 1987. In 1994 the Generals advanced to the playoffs for the first time after a 7-3 regular season but lost in the first round of the postseason.

After missing the postseason in 1995, quarterback Jason Lutz, who was a junior on the 1996 team, said that they felt like the next year was going to be a good one.

Part of that success came from the offseason workouts and lifting weights during the summer. Josh Mason, who was a senior on the 1996 squad, would take players to and from the workouts in his tiny car so they could lift weights.

“There was a group of probably a half dozen to a dozen of us that worked about every day all the way through the summer and even practiced our offense without the coaches, because back then you couldn't do that type of thing,” Mason said. “But I had a little Subaru Justy. That nowadays I

would probably get in trouble with law enforcement with the number of kids that I would pile into that car, and take back and forth to the weight room to make sure everybody had an opportunity to get in there. But I was a little chauffeur back in those days.”

Coffman said that the leadership of Mason and the seniors really helped the junior class understand what they needed to do in future years.

“I think that went back to the kind of leadership of Jimmy (Woods) and Josh’s (Mason) class of recognizing that we have a chance to be good,” Coffman said. “But there’s also a lot of players underneath that, that we need to make sure they understand the work ethic it takes. So their leadership, I think, bled down. So you end up having several years of success coming off of that ‘96 season.”

## Defense matters

The Generals started the season well, going 7-1, the only defeat a six-point loss to a solid Wilson Memorial squad.

One of the things that stood out about the first eight games was the defense. Stonewall Jackson was allowing only an average of eight points a game for the first eight games of the year. They had three shutouts, and entering a key matchup against rival Strasburg, they had allowed just 12 points in their last four contests.

A big key to the success of the defense was Stonewall Jackson’s defensive line, which consisted of Jimmy Woods, Darren Steadman, Jon Ford and Stanley Ryan.

“We were really quick for linemen, but we were really small,” Woods said. “I gave up 100 pounds (to my opposing linemen) on a lot of games. We just all had that confidence we would make it somehow, and we would all get on the same page somehow.”

Mason said that the success and mentality they had on defense came from Krol, who loved defense.

“Coach Krol, that was his specialty,” Mason said. “He drove the mentality with the kids on just hard-nosed football and making sure you knew your assignments, making sure that we were all in it together. So every team that coach Krol ever had, had a good defense. We just had kids with a nose

for the ball, a really good line that was able to get a lot of sacks. We were able to put a lot of pressure with the defense up front and then we were pretty talented defensive backs. Top to bottom, we didn't have a whole lot of weaknesses on defense.”

As the success continued throughout the season, the excitement grew and grew at Stonewall Jackson High School and in the community.

Lutz said that it was special seeing how much support the team was getting as the wins started piling up.

“You always hear these stories about these towns that shut down on Friday nights, and I really think that back in those days that actually really happened — like everybody was here,” Lutz said.

The Generals rolled through Bull Run District competition and that set up the biggest game of the regular season on Nov. 1 against Shenandoah County rival Strasburg.

### Turning the tide

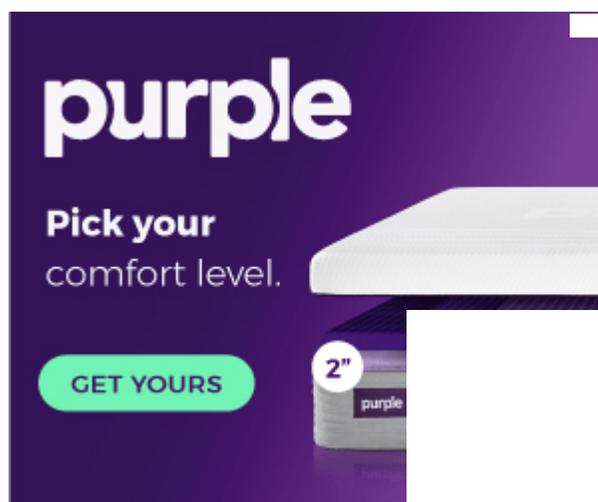
Woods said he could remember vividly the moment he realized how good the Generals could be in 1996. He said it was during the defensive practice day for the regular-season meeting against Strasburg.

“We lined up on defensive day for the first Strasburg game and we did nothing special,” Woods said. “And I was like we're good and (Krol) wants to see how good we are, because he knows we're going to see them again. (We didn't) throw in all the wrinkles and all of the stunts and ‘you follow this guy,’ and all the special things we've done against Strasburg every year that I could always remember. I'll never forget when we lined up in defensive practice and we didn't do any of that and I was like he knows we're good and he wants to see how good we are from just playing and then we'll go from there.”

Strasburg had a powerhouse football program at the time. The Rams were undefeated on the season and had made it to the state finals the year before. Strasburg had been in the state finals four times in the previous nine years.

Things didn't go Stonewall Jackson's way in the 1996 regular season contest against Strasburg. The Rams won 38-18, but despite the loss, the Generals had confidence and believed they would see the Rams again — and they did.

Three weeks later in the Region B final the two squads would meet again. This time a state berth was on the line.



Woods said as soon as they started the defensive practice that week for the Rams, he knew they were going to be OK.

“As soon as we did defensive practice that week and I saw how different it was than the first time we played them,” Woods said when asked if he thought they could win. “I walked away from our defensive practice that week and I said ‘we got this.’”

Woods said it wasn’t that the Generals changed much from their alignment, but they had different reads to make on plays than the previous time and it made a big difference.

Lutz threw a 70-yard touchdown pass to Mason for a 7-0 lead in the opening quarter and that helped set the tone for the rest of the game.

“I remember when Jason (Lutz) hit Josh Mason on that long pass down the middle and I think that one really boosted our confidence,” Coffman said. “We got out, we were ahead. We knew if we can stay ahead we can keep them on the ropes and we were able to do that.”

The Generals led the entire game. Leading 14-8 in the final minutes, the Generals put the game out of reach. One of the biggest plays of the game was almost a disaster.

Lutz said a timeout was called right before the play that sealed the win and Krol had some instructions for him.

“The whole offense went over to the sideline and coach Krol said ‘don’t drop this ball,’” Lutz said. “That’s the only thing he did the whole time. He didn’t talk to anybody else. He just talked to me. He said ‘if it’s there you take it. You do the quarterback sneak. Hold on to the ball.’ That’s what he said and I’ll be (darned) if I didn’t walk out there and fumble the ball.”

Lutz fumbled the ball, but teammate and Generals’ junior running back Freddie Rios picked it up and ran it in for a 20-yard touchdown. The play helped give the Generals a 21-8 victory and the program’s first-ever state berth.

“We knew if we got that first down it was probably going to be game over,” Lutz said. “That’s why (Krol) was so emphatic about it ‘hold onto the football. That’s all you need to do on this play.’ I did exactly what he told me not to do and it worked out good.”

The win was not only huge because it put the Generals in the state semifinals, but also because they had defeated powerhouse and county rival Strasburg.

“It kind of reset the landscape of football in the county,” Coffman said. “Where for years it had been just Strasburg, Strasburg, Strasburg, Strasburg. I think it kind of reset it and then you saw it balance out. My brother graduated in 2000 and they had a great (overtime) win (over Strasburg in the playoffs). I think that it kind of leveled the playing field between us and Strasburg after that ‘96 season, beating them in the playoffs.”

The Generals would win five of their next eight matchups against Strasburg over the next seven years.

Stonewall Jackson’s season would come to a heartbreaking end in the state semifinals. They would fall to Surry County, 15-14, on a last-second field goal.

The two programs would have a short rivalry of their own as they met in the state semifinals three out of four years.

Surry County had not attempted a field goal or extra point all season, but made a 37-yard field goal to win the game in 1996.

Mason said even as Surry County was lining up for the field goal, no one on Stonewall’s sideline really thought they were going to attempt it.

“That’s definitely something I’ll never forget,” Mason said of the Surry County field goal. “Coach Krol had given me free will that game to basically break off of pass coverage and rush at any point. I used it a couple times early in the game and when they lined up for that field goal I had a shot. I just didn’t believe that they were actually going to kick it. They hadn’t kicked all season, hadn’t even made an attempt. I just thought there was no way in the world they were actually going to kick it. I thought it was going to be a fake. So I pulled back expecting a pass and (the kick) went through the uprights.”

### A lifetime bond

Woods, who has been an assistant coach at Stonewall Jackson for the last 15 years, said the chemistry on the team was one of the things that set the team apart.

“No one was greedy,” Woods said. “No one thought of themselves first. Just like every successful story you hear in sports, it starts with a very successful, very special group of people. A very special group with a very special relationship. That’s one of the things I try to tell our kids today is you don’t read about Super Bowl champions stating everyone hated each other, ‘we never talked but we were just so good we won anyway.’ That’s never the start of a championship story.”

The 1996 team started a trend as the Generals went to the state semifinals two of the next three years.

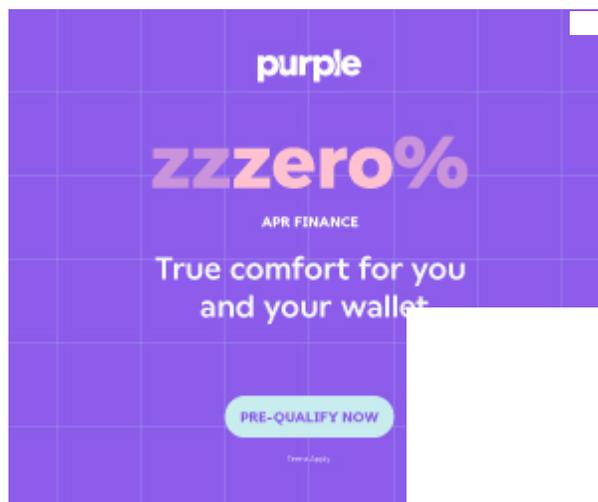
All the players agreed a big part of the success also came from the coaching staff, led by Krol. Stonewall Jackson’s football field was renamed Dick Krol Field at General Stadium two years ago.

“I’m very, very fortunate to have had the opportunity to play for him and learn from him,” Mason said of Krol. “And all the coaches that built that program — coach (Todd) Fannin (Keith) Cubbage (Dave) Sherwood. Krol, he really cared about the kids. It wasn’t just about winning on the football field, it was about us becoming better men and preparing ourselves for life later. And I continued that friendship all the way up until he passed away. Spending some time with him in the summers and still having the opportunity to talk to him whenever I had the chance. And he’ll be somebody I’ll forever miss.”

Mason lives near Denver, Colorado, but every year he makes the trip to Virginia to fish with some of his teammates from the 1996 football team. Until last year, when he passed away, Krol also joined the group of former players to fish in Rural Retreat.

Mason said the bond that the team created in 1996 has never gone away.

“It was a brotherhood,” he said. “We trusted each other. There’s still best friends that I have today from that team. Some of us from that team get together every year to fish and we used to take coach Krol every year when he was still with us. So it was kind of a lifelong thing. It wasn’t just that season. But I think we were able to create a bond and it didn’t seem like work as much it was going out and having a good time and being together and enjoying each other’s company.”



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[https://www.nvdaily.com/nvdaily/freshmen-trio-share-bond-with-each-other-siblings-and-generals-program/article\\_aeb4130a-ab46-5452-86b4-bee83e1102da.html](https://www.nvdaily.com/nvdaily/freshmen-trio-share-bond-with-each-other-siblings-and-generals-program/article_aeb4130a-ab46-5452-86b4-bee83e1102da.html)

## Freshmen trio share bond with each other, siblings and Generals' program

By Tommy Keeler Jr. The Northern Virginia Daily  
Feb 7, 2020



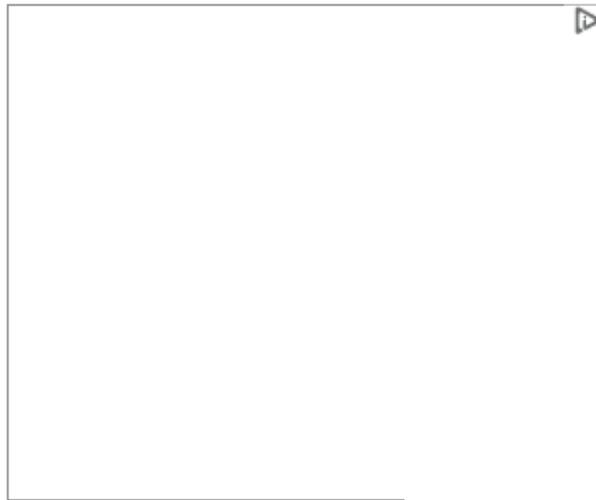
Stonewall freshmen Bree Franklin, left, and Annika Dellinger, right, take a break from the action of their Jan. 16 game against Strasburg. The pair along with freshman Mya Councilill have made a big impact on the Generals this season.

Rich Cooley/Daily

QUICKSBURG — Mya Councilill, Annika Dellinger and Bree Franklin may be freshmen but they are no strangers to Stonewall Jackson's girls basketball program.

The trio, who have been friends for a long time, have older sisters who are or have been a part of the program, and Dellinger said she is not surprised that they've had success. The trio is also a part of Stonewall Jackson's volleyball and girls soccer programs.

"I'm not that surprised, because we just have such a bond," Dellinger said. "I know what we can do, and I think we can keep doing better and better and better."



The trio started playing basketball at different ages but have been playing together since middle school. Last year they were a part of Stonewall Jackson's successful junior varsity team. They each said that the bond that they have together has helped a lot on the court this season.

"We're pretty good friends in general as well," Councilll said. "So I guess that helps on the court. We work well throughout the entire game. We really communicate with each other, let us know what we're doing right, what we're doing wrong. We don't take it personal, we just get the job done."

The trio have had strong seasons for the Generals and are averaging a combined 22.6 points per game. Both Councilll and Dellinger start and Franklin is usually the first bench player to enter the game.

They play different positions on the floor. Councilll and Franklin are guards, while Dellinger plays in the post.

"Both (Councilll and I) can be a point guard and then Annika can be in the post," Franklin said. "It's good to have us all around so we can know where each other are."

Councilll is averaging 10.4 points per game and an area-best 3.7 assists per contest. She can play at either shooting guard or point guard and is a strong shooter, especially from outside. Councilll is shooting 27.1% (36-for-133) from 3-point range.

The 5-foot-4 Councilll said she enjoys passing the ball just as much as scoring, but she admitted she does love shooting 3-pointers.

“That’s probably one of my favorite shots, because if (Stonewall Jackson junior point guard) Kylene (Franklin) or anyone that’s playing point guard just passes it I’ll try to get a shot up if I can or if I’m open,” Councill said. “(Stonewall Jackson girls basketball coach Jeff) Burner said you have to have confidence every time you shoot it, thinking it’s going in. I try my best to do that and keep that mentality in my head every time I’m shooting.”

Burner said Councill’s experience playing the game has helped her have a smooth transition to the varsity level.

“Mya (Councill) is basketball savvy,” Burner said. “She’s been around it her whole life. She’s been playing (Amateur Athletic Union basketball) forever. She’s just been in a lot of game situations that some of our other kids have never been in and it’s helped our basketball IQ tremendously. Then obviously she’s a good shooter and another good offensive threat because she’s averaging double figures as a freshman – so that’s a good thing too. ...She’s willing to give the ball up. She’s willing to lead. She’s willing to follow. She’ll do whatever she needs to do for us to be successful.”

The 5-foot-10 Dellinger got off to a late start in basketball and didn’t start playing until she was in middle school, but she’s been a quick learner of the game. This season was her first-ever experience playing in the post and she said she’s enjoyed it.

“I think it gives me a lot of opportunities and I get to work with my team there,” Dellinger said. “It’s really great because it just keeps me in the game.”

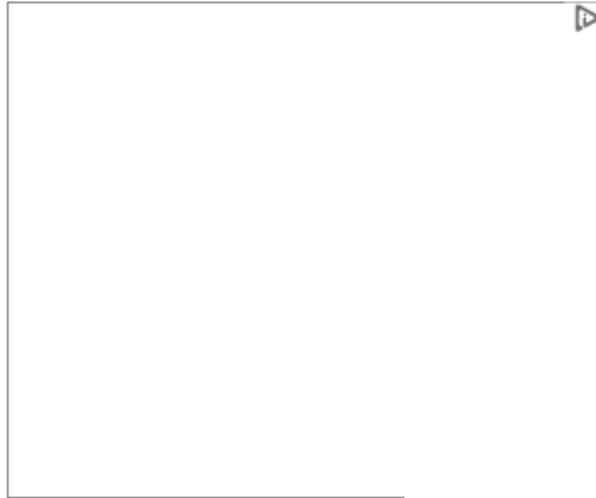
Dellinger is averaging 8.3 points and 7.2 rebounds per game this season. Burner said that the skies are the limit for Dellinger.

“Annika (Dellinger) is just an incredibly talented athlete,” he said. “She has good size. She has great touch with both left and right hands. She just doesn’t know what she’s doing yet. When she figures it all out, look out because she is so athletic inside and she’s relentless. I love her mentality. She’s a kid who will make a mistake and she just keeps on going and keeps playing and I love that about her.”

The 5-foot-6 Bree Franklin is averaging 6.7 points per game over the last six games. Her game has picked up as the season has gone on and she’s given the Generals a lift over the last few weeks. She is shooting 26% (13-for-50) from the 3-point range.

“Burner calls me the sixth man,” Bree Franklin said. “So I get kind of nervous going in, but it’s a good spot to be in. I don’t mind being in first, but sometimes it bothers me. I usually go in around the fourth minute. I get to watch how the other team plays and how we play and what I need to notice, what I need to do. It helps me a lot.”

Burner said that Bree Franklin has a different game than most players, but one that can be effective and help the team.



“Bree (Franklin) is probably one of the craftiest kids that we’ve had in a long time,” Burner said. “She is just one of those kids that does all the little things. She sneaks in for a rebound. She’ll pick up a steal when you don’t expect it. She’ll hit a big 3. I think here lately one of the things that’s helped us is that she’s been scoring again. We’ve needed her to do that.”

Burner said that the older players have gelled well with the freshmen this season.

“I think the (older) kids know that these kids have made us better,” Burner said. “Our older kids have accepted that and said ‘hey we’ve been waiting for this, come help us get better.’ So that’s a good thing. I think Kylene’s (Franklin) experience when she was a freshman certainly has helped that too, because those kids really welcomed her and were like ‘hey we’re excited to have you here now.’ Then she’s sort of been that way with them because ‘I know you can make us better.’”

Another thing that bonds the freshmen trio is they each have a sister who has been or is a part of the program. All three of their older sisters were part of Stonewall Jackson’s team two years ago that advanced to the Class 1 state semifinals.

Councill's older sister Madison is a 2018 Stonewall Jackson graduate. Madison Councill wasn't a starter and Mya Councill said she learned a lot about being a team player from her sister.

"She really got her team going, she had a lot of energy and she had a lot of teamwork," Mya Councill said of Madison. "I feel like that really showed me what a real teammate means. Even if you're not a player that's playing every game you still can be part of the team by contributing from the bench and giving each player your best support."

Even though Councill doesn't have a sister on this year's team she still has a close relative – her father Mark Councill is an assistant coach.

"He pushes me to do the best," Mya Councill said of her father. "But sometimes I get a little mad at him, but I know he just wants the best for us and every girl on the team, not just me. That really shows what a good coach he is."

Dellinger's sister Eli is a junior starting forward on this year's team. The two also ski and play soccer together.

Annika said Eli has always been a role model for her.

"I always see what she's doing, like she does soccer, I do soccer," Annika Dellinger said of her sister. "She does skiing, I do skiing. She does basketball, I do basketball. She's a good role model. ...Sometimes me and Eli will come in and shoot on our own. It's nice to have somebody else there so you're not on your own and you're not lonely. So that's really nice."

Bree and Kylene Franklin have been bonded by basketball for years. The pair have been coming to Stonewall Jackson girls basketball practices since they were in third and fifth grade, respectively. Their father Jerry is the school's wrestling coach and Burner invited them to hang out with the basketball team each day while they waited for their dad's practice to end.

The last two years Kylene Franklin has been a standout on the basketball court, earning Class 1 all-state honors both years. Bree Franklin said Kylene has always been a big role model for her.

"Watching her for the first few years was different," Bree Franklin said of Kylene. "Now since I'm playing with her sometimes I have to hold back from yelling at her, but I like the connection that we have from growing up and just coming in here and shooting around playing with Burner all these

years and seeing the other girls. ...She's helped me (this season) even though sometimes I think she's being mean, but she's actually just helping me get better with everything I do."

Burner said having so much family on the team is a good thing and helps the whole team bond closer.

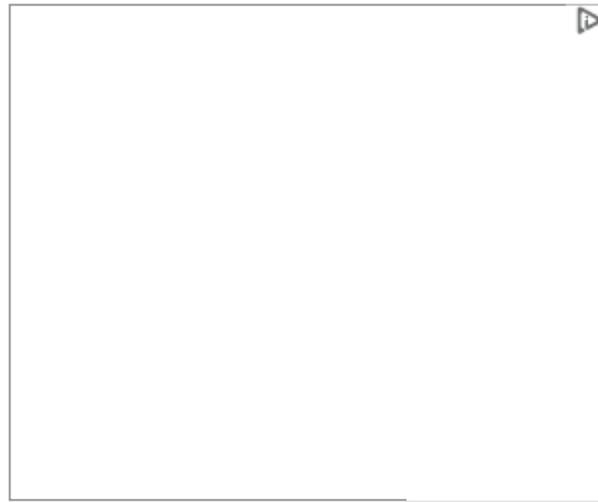
"I do think there's a bond there that – it's not like something that you can cheat on it – it's a real bond there," Burner said. "Now of course they also have their spats, which you got to be ready to diffuse sometimes too. Because you get mad at your sister and you say exactly what you think about your sister quicker than you will some other people. So that's been interesting, and to have two big sisters with their young sister is always interesting, especially when they're competitive like all of them are. But they've all competed together for so long in so many sports. There's definitely a lot of camaraderie and experience being together in athletic competition. They're a fun group though."

The Generals are 9-11 this season, after winning only one game last season. Council said that she believes the team can still accomplish a lot if they just keep working hard and together.

"I hope we can make it far in the tournament," she said. "I hope we can keep working well. We're so close to achieving every goal we have for our team, not just ourselves. I feel like if we just keep pushing every day and pushing each other we can really make something great."

Annika Dellinger said that how well the freshmen and the team are doing this season just shows how bright the future is for the program.

"Burner says 'people always say that our time is going to be in the future, but we want our time to be now,'" she said. "I think that's really good because not only do we want our time to be now, but it's going to keep going all the way up."



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