



Lifelong friends MacKenzie Wooten, left, and Madison Rountree share a moment after their final game together on Isle of Wight Academy's softball team. Now they play on opposing teams — Wooten for the University of Virginia and Rountree for Virginia Tech. (Submitted Photos)

Together since T-ball, athletes now at Tech, UVA

By Nate Delesline III
Staff Writer

Two Isle of Wight women who took the field together as T-ball toddlers are now Division I softball players.

Madison Rountree and MacKenzie Wooten were standout stars at Isle of Wight Academy. Now Rountree is part of Virginia Tech's Hokies, and her lifelong friend Wooten is part of the University of Virginia Cavaliers.

That puts them in opposition on powerful teams at rival schools, a far cry from their T-ball teammate days.

Wooten, a 5 foot-8-inch pitcher for the Cavaliers, said their on-field rivalry is strong — but healthy and fun.

"Whenever we come home for breaks, we work out or I'll throw live to [Rountree] or we'll run together. It's really nice to have a fellow Division I softball player at home because we can push each other when we're not at our schools."

Rountree, a 5-foot-11-inch first baseman and infield player, agreed, saying their competitiveness is based on mutual respect.

"I never dreamt that we would go to rival schools, one of the biggest rivalries in the country — that's crazy," Rountree said. "But honestly, there's no tension between me and her. There's always been competitiveness — we're both pretty competitive but it's always been we're pushing each other to get better."

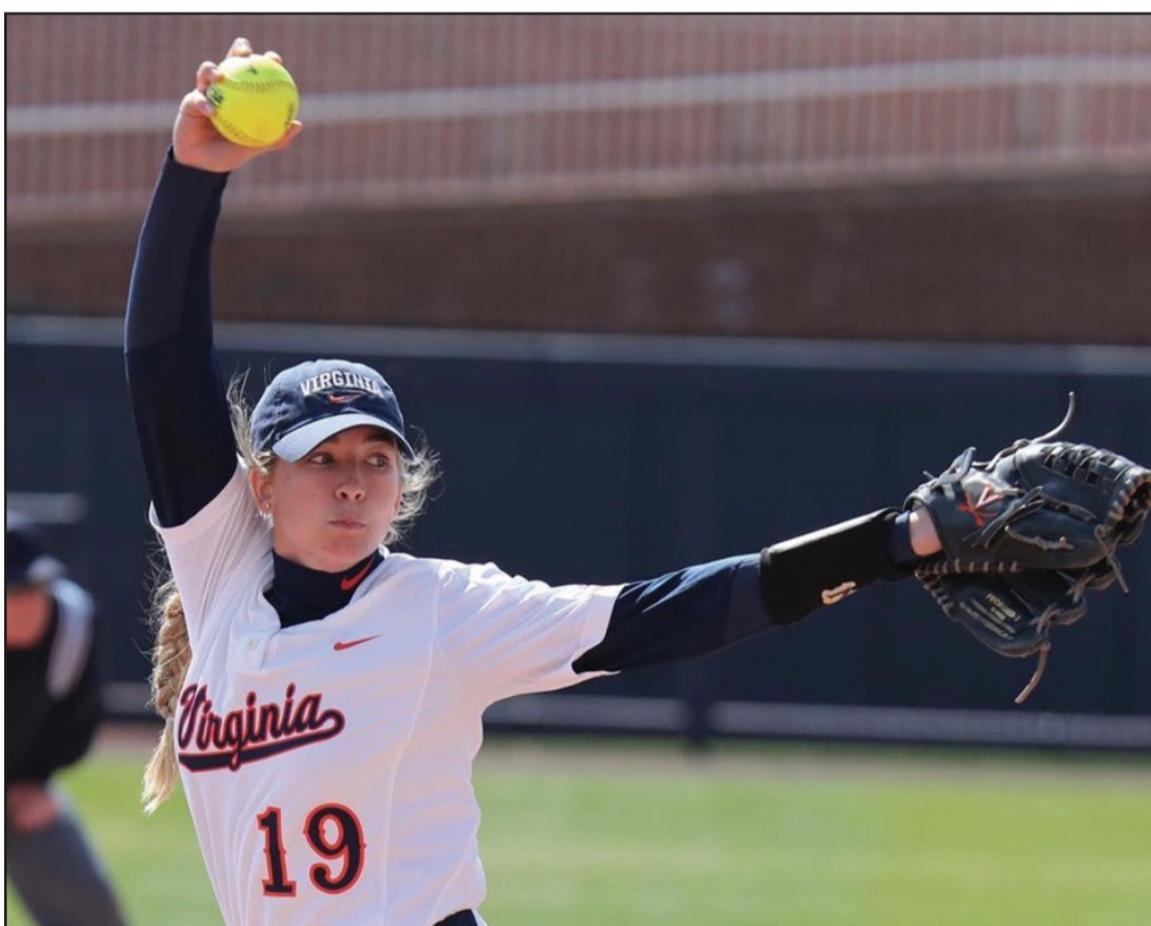
Over the holiday break, the duo trained together before heading back to their respective campuses in Blacksburg and Charlottesville. "She would pitch to me and I would hit off her and it just kind of helped both of us," Rountree said. "So we kind of put the rivalry aside and just kind of focused on getting better as players."

Both of them also happen to wear No. 19 on their respective teams — a coincidence, they said.

Jill Edwards, Isle of Wight Academy's softball coach, had a key role in shaping the duo's athletic skills. She gave them some of their first pitching lessons and later went on to coach them from eighth grade through their graduation from IWA in 2019.

"McKenize and Maddie are like two kids I have never coached before. One, they're extremely talented. They're very special, they're sweet, they're humble. But I've never had two kids work as hard as they do. They stand out, obviously, but they're always putting in the extra work." Edwards is a graduate of Powhatan High School. She also studied and played softball at Christopher Newport University.

Edwards said Wooten is a dominant pitcher and "carries the role well. It takes a special person to



Above, MacKenzie Wooten is a member of the University of Virginia's softball team. At right, Madison Rountree plays softball for Virginia Tech. Both girls got their start here at home and were standouts at Isle of Wight Academy.

handle all that pressure and want the ball in their hand every single pitch, and that's her. Maddie I could put her anywhere. She's played third, she's caught, she was a great catcher, she played first base — she was phenomenal at first base. Anywhere I would've put her, I think she would have excelled."

The pandemic cut the Hokies' last softball season short. The experience, Rountree said, enhanced her perspective that in sports and life, it's important to work hard and play hard "because you just never know what's going to happen and you've just got to play like it's going to be your last, because maybe it will be."

Going into the upcoming season, Rountree said she prepared with the same intensity and focus. "There's always been talk like, 'What if you guys don't have a season again?' but you can't prepare like that. You have to prepare like you're going to play every single game."

Wooten said she and the team worked hard through the unprecedented offseason preparing for this year.

Last season, "we didn't even play half our games," Wooten said. With her season cut short due to COVID, "I don't have that full year of experience like a normal second year would, so it's kind of like I'm doing this for



the first time again. We have a much older team this year, and I'm excited to see how those two things come together."

The team plays out of conference to start the season, then enters conference play. "There's such a big difference between ACC games and out of conference," she continued. "So I'm very excited to see very good competition in the ACC and hopefully go to ACC play in the tournament in that environment."

Wooten, a Windsor native, is a kinesiology major and would

like to also study physical therapy and work in sports medicine. Rountree, a Smithfield native, was studying sports media and analytics minoring in leadership and social change but plans to switch majors to public relations for the coming semester.

"We're extremely proud of them here in our community and definitely at IWA. To have two kids go Division I at programs like that is just unheard of around here, and we're just really thrilled for them," Edwards said.



Members of the Smithfield High Packers wrestling team recently competed at the state tournament. Fresh off of its first Regional wrestling title, Smithfield's wrestling team earned a Top 5 team finish in this season's 4A State Wrestling Championships held at the Virginia Beach Sports Center. (submitted photo)

SHS wrestling succeeds

By Nate Delesline III
Staff Writer

The Packers wrestling team recently achieved a first.

Smithfield's wrestling team recently won a regional championship title for the first time in program history. The team had pursued a regional title for nearly 25 years but came up short as the runner up in the 2015, 2016 and 2020 seasons.

"Our wrestling team has also overcome many obstacles throughout the season to finish a strong fifth place in Class 4, including having seven VHSL All-State medalists," said Matthew Moore, Smithfield's athletic director.

Smithfield wrestling brought home a Top 5 team finish in this season's 4A State Wrestling Championships held at the Virginia Beach Sports Center on Feb 20.

The team qualified five wrestlers to the consolation

finals. Evan Chrisstofor (106) won by a 3-0 decision over Waylon Rogers (Orange County). Nik Voros (120) 3-1 won by third period fall over Devin Burrows (Spotsylvania). Hunter Ray (126) lost a 6-12 decision to Gabe Nesmith (King George). Cameron Hatchett (145) 3-1 won by third period injury default over Kyman Kinney (Salem). Brady Stalls (160) lost by a second period fall to Eric Dewald (Fauquier).

In the fifth and sixth place medal round, Roberto Hines (132) lost by a 0-5 decision to Tharun Svetanant (Blacksburg) and Khali Harden (152) lost by a first period fall to Kylee Martin (Amherst County).

The wrestling team is under the leadership of second year head coach Tony Leonard and volunteer coach John Swartz.

Smithfield High Principal Bryan Thrift said the school overall had "a very successful winter season." He also noted that 10 stu-

dent athletes were able to cheer from the sidelines for home events.

"Our track program looks to finish the season strong at the VHSL Indoor State Track Championship over the weekend at Liberty University, where 15

SHS student-athletes will compete for a state title," Moore said. "The town has thoroughly supported our student-athletes throughout this pandemic, and we can't express enough of how appreciative we are to the Smithfield community."

Top 5 Team Scores:

1. Liberty (Beaeton) — 113.0
2. Eastern View — 92.0
3. Loudoun County — 90.0
4. Amherst County — 81.0
5. Smithfield — 80.0

Packer Wrestlers Who Competed at 4A States

- 106 – Evan Chrisstofor (11), 3rd Place
- 120 – Nik Voros (11), 3rd Place
- 126 – Hunter Ray (10), 4th Place
- 132 – Roberto Hines (10), 6th Place
- 138 – Ben Ray (10), Did Not Place
- 145 – Cameron Hatchett (12), 3rd Place
- 152 – Khali Harden (12), 6th Place
- 160 – Brady Stalls (12), 4th Place
- 170 – Riley Fesser (9), Did Not Place
- 182 – Austin Ray (9), Did Not Place
- 195 – James Sessoms (10), Did Not Place
- 220 – Joe Sessoms (12), Did Not Place
- 285 – Justin Goodin (10), Did Not Place



Members of the Smithfield High Packers boys basketball team celebrate after winning the state championship over John Handley High School in Winchester. The Packers won 61-54. (submitted photo)

Packers win state championship

By Nate Delesline III
Staff Writer

For the first time in the school's 115-year history, Smithfield High's boys basketball team are state champions.

The 61-54 victory over John Handley High School at Winchester on Feb. 20 is a triumph in a year that's seen student-athletes, coaches and parents work through sustained challenges and changes due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Their sacrifice and persistence paid off. Coach Theotis Porter knew he and the team were about to make history as the game ran down to the final minute, giving the

team the Class 4 Virginia High School League title.

"A lot was going through my head in that moment," said Porter, who was an assistant coach at King's Fork in Suffolk when it won the state championship in 2009. "The pressure was different, the feeling was a little different and knowing the journey that myself and the staff have been through with these kids," he said. "It was a surreal moment, and it just kind of put things in perspective."

"It was a very fulfilling and great feeling to see that clock go off," added Porter, who is in

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Members of the Smithfield High Packers boys basketball team ceremonially cut down the net at John Handley High School in Winchester after winning the state championship. (submitted photo)

Championship _____

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his third year at Smithfield.

Matthew Moore, Smithfield's athletic director, echoed that sentiment.

"This amazing accomplishment couldn't happen to a more deserving coaching staff or group of student-athletes," said Moore. "To overcome the late start of the season, the limitations placed on our practices due to the need to implement safety mitigation strategies, and the stress of living through a pandemic, which has been a time of loss for many in our community, just goes to prove how resilient our student-athletes are. To win our first athletic team championship in our school's 115-year history considering all of these obstacles is nothing short of impressive."

Porter said running a successful program through a pandemic is a challenge that everyone met head on.

"Just trying to keep myself, my staff, my family as well as the kids and their families, it was a bit stressful at times dealing with that," he said. "But once we were able to talk to our parents and our kids and get everybody on the same page it really kind of ran itself at that point. We had our mitigation strategy that our administration put forth, which was a great plan and everyone followed it to a T and we didn't have any issues along the way."

Smithfield's basketball team includes eight seniors. Porter said they plan to continue as college student athletes.

"The student athletes, coaches, and parents should be commended for their dedication during this difficult time," said Smithfield High Principal Bryan Thrift. "We are thankful [Superintendent Dr. Jim] Thornton allowed our students the opportunity to participate in VHSL athletics. This outlet is essential for students during the pandemic."

"I cannot overstate how proud I am of all of our winter sport athletes," Thrift continued. "To bring home the state championship is a major accomplishment for the school and the community. Watching the bus pull into Smithfield High School escorted by Isle of Wight County Sheriff's office, led by Sheriff James Clarke, was an emotional experience. The basketball team was greeted by 100-plus fans at the school, honking horns and cheering as the boys got off the bus. This was the welcome home you would expect from such a great community."

Porter said he's in conversation with school leaders to possibly organize some socially distanced celebrations to honor the team. He said the community can stay tuned to social media for details as those plans come together.