Raising his stock
William Fleming’s Jamelle Hagins
You requested it; you got it!

Ever since Dave Sarmadi Mitsubishi opened its doors in 2005, many of our customers have told us they wish we were in Roanoke. Well, folks, we’ve always said we listen to our customers. The time has come! In early February, the dealership moved to 3130 Franklin Road, Roanoke, formerly the home of West Motors.

In short order, the dealership has been honored three times by Mitsubishi with its Diamond Award for annual excellence, a level of sales and service only 10 percent of Mitsubishi dealers achieve. And with our certified technicians and the most advanced computers and diagnostic tools available, we will continue to service all high-end vehicles at our Franklin Road location — including Lexus, Infiniti, Mercedes-Benz, Volvo, Jaguar and BMW.

Dave Sarmadi Mitsubishi has quickly established a reputation as a major player in luxury automobiles. We’ve done it because of the quality of our product lines; attractive pricing and financing; the training of our superior staff; and impeccable attention to service.

If you haven’t visited us before, we’re going to change that — because we’ve come to you.

Easy Access from I-581: Coming from the South, take the Tanglewood Exit and turn right on Franklin Road; coming from the North, take the Wonju Exit (past Towers). Turn right at Franklin.

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Natural Health Tip of the Month

From Dr. Jeffrey Barker, DC, CCSP

Have you ever heard the phrase, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”? It has a lot of truth and can keep you from getting sidelined by an injury. Use some common sense to avoid injuries...

1. Know your limits and build up exercise slowly
2. Drink lots of water to replace your body’s fluids
3. Eat quality foods in smaller amounts and more often to help maintain blood sugar levels
4. Do proper warm up and cool down routines
5. Cross train with a variety of exercises to keep your body well balanced

Ask A Ref

In an effort to inform fans of the finer points of the rules of the games, Play by Play regularly publishes the feature, “Ask A Ref,” a chance for fans to ask a question about specific sports rules, preferably those related to high school or the NCAA.

Questions can be sent to Ask_a_Ref@yahoo.com.

This month’s question was answered with information taken from the National Federation Web site.

Q. I know the rules for traveling are relaxed a bit in youth leagues, but I see players on the floor and it’s never called traveling anymore. Is this correct?

— B.C., Vinton

A. The traveling rule is one of the most misunderstood rules in basketball. To start a dribble, the ball must be released before the pivot foot is lifted. On a pass or a shot, the pivot foot may be lifted, but may not return to the floor before the ball is released. A player may slide on the floor while trying to secure a loose ball until that player’s momentum stops. At that point that player cannot attempt to get up or roll over. A player securing a ball while on the floor cannot attempt to stand up unless that player starts a dribble. A player in this situation may also pass, shoot or request a timeout. If the player is flat on his or her back, that player may sit up without committing a violation.
Cave Spring seems poised for a deep run

H ere’s a question for all you high school basketball superfans: In the past 10 years which Roanoke-area AAA team won the Virginia High School League basketball championship with a player whose first and middle name is Jonathan Clay?

If you’re mentally flipping through the rosters of Patrick Henry or William Fleming here’s a hint, you’re on the wrong track.

The team was the 2002 Cave Spring Knights that, due to a higher enrollment level at the time, belonged to the AAA ranks. Cave Spring dropped to AA status in the 2002-03 season with the opening of what has become its Southwest County rival, Hidden Valley, and a split of the student population between the two schools.

The aforementioned player is a 6-4 shooting guard who is currently a member of the NBA Orlando Magic, better known as J.J. Redick.

Looking Ahead
by Bill Turner

The 2002 Redick-led Knights still mark the high point of Cave Spring basketball history; it was the only hoops state championship recorded to date in the school’s 53-year existence. Redick was a McDonald’s All-American while on that team.

The 2008-09 Cave Spring team has returned the excitement to the Knights basketball program. After a 10-13 2007-08 season in which Cave Spring typically featured four or five sophomores on the court during a game, a year of experience has propelled the Knights into the middle of the Riverside District race and on the road to a possible tournament run.

This is uncharted ground for the current team members; last year they were eliminated in the district tournament opener.

“At the high school level none of these players has experienced a championship of any kind,” says 13-year head coach Billy Hicks. “That may well be about to change. Clearly at the center of the Cave Spring surge is 6-11 junior Josh Henderson, who has grown in height and added more than 25 pounds to his frame since last year. As opponents have quickly found out this season, Henderson can take over a game with his proficient scoring, control of the boards and shot-blocking capabilities.

“Josh has been at the center of our success,” Hicks says, fully aware of the pun. “He was bigger and stronger to start the season, and has developed more skills. In the off-season I made it clear the expectations were for a higher level of play.”

But with Henderson’s improvement came the obvious — the opposition began to double-team him in most games. This has led to a more well-rounded team, according to Hicks. “Starters Quentin Dill, Mark Overstreet, Adam Hagger and Clay Lacy all have picked up (their) games,” Hicks says. “They developed confidence in their shots to take the pressure off Josh. They have learned what it takes to compete and win. Games we would have lost last year are games we know how to win this year.”

If Henderson wants any advice from a winner, he doesn’t have to look far. His father, David, was a starter on the 1976 Patrick Henry High School team that went to the Group AAA state semifinals and was eliminated by the eventual champions, the Maggie Walker Green Dragons and Clyde “The Glide” Austin. Afterward, the elder Henderson played for legendary coach Lefty Driesell at the University of Maryland. In 1979-80, that Terrapin team made it to the NCAA round of 16 and finished eighth in the final polls.

Will Cave Spring make a serious run come tournament time? Hicks seems to have the ingredients in place. The Knights have defeated every team in the River Ridge at least once. They won two of three games in the December Holiday Hoopla and defeated the defending Group AA state champions from Millbrook in the end-of-January Salem Kiwanis/Member One Valley Shootout. Their January win over rival Hidden Valley was their first in four years; or as Hicks pinpointed, 1,432 days.

Here’s hoping senior captain Greg Mackey (profiled in November’s Play by Play) will be back at 100 percent strength from an ankle injury that has involved a two-month rehabilitation. “Greg is a tremendous competitor and leader,” Hicks says. “Even at 70 percent (as in the Valley Shootout) he wants to be on the court and wants the ball in his hands.”

With this group, the three key parts to a Billy Hicks team — character, hard work and preparation — seem to be set. And with the majority of the starters only juniors, Cave Spring looks to be a solid contender in the future.

Players in this Issue

Publisher/Editor John A. Montgomery
Graphic Designer Donna Earwood
Contributors Mike Ashley, Gene Marrano, Robert Blades, Joyce Montgomery, Rod Carter, Christian Moody, Donald Earwood, Mike Stevens, Sam Lazzaro, Bill Turner, Chris Manning, Dick Williams
Serving others is restaurateur’s mission

The NCAA folks are getting ready to inhabit Salem the next three months for basketball, softball and lacrosse championships, and that usually means one thing — a trip to Mac and Bob’s.

“Having a place like ours that’s received and recognized by sports fans is very flattering,” says Bob Rotanz, the landmark restaurant’s president. “I have one gentleman from Ohio who calls me every year to buy his tickets, and it’s really kind of cool when they make us part of their weekend both before and after the games.”

“When we see fans at these schools out in Wisconsin or Ohio who have been to Salem before, the first thing that comes out of their mouths is, ‘I can’t wait to get back, so I can go down to Mac and Bob’s,’” says John Shaner, Salem’s director of Parks and Recreation.

The popular eatery has been serving up those gargantuan calzones, ice cold beverages and good times since 1980, and during that span of nearly three decades the one constant has been the establishment’s mustachioed Rotanz. What started as a 10-stool diner can now accommodate more than 300.

“We’re so lucky that he came to this community and decided to stay here,” says Jay Taliaferro, Salem’s assistant city manager. “He gives of his time and gives of himself, and does so many things to help others.”

The Roanoke College graduate is not only a shrewd businessman, a key player on the 1978 NCAA championship lacrosse team and a member of the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame; he also possesses one of the biggest hearts in the Roanoke Valley.

Rotanz’s work with the Down Syndrome Association of Roanoke is just one example of his selfless giving. Almost two decades ago, two female restaurant patrons, who also were moms, were talking with Bob about doing a charity golf event. Not surprisingly, they eventually did more than just talk about it.

This coming May will mark the 17th annual Mac and Bob’s Charity Golf Tournament at Hanging Rock Golf Club. The previous 16 events have generated more than $200,000 for the Down Syndrome Association of Roanoke that serves families throughout Southwest Virginia.

“There’s no way we would be able to do a fraction of the things we do without his support,” says Susan Cloeter, one of the women who first approached Rotanz about the tournament. “I have never seen anyone with a commitment to kids quite like him.”

Cloeter and her husband, John, have been vital parts of the tournament since its inception. One of their sons, Chase, has Down syndrome and will turn 20 years old this July.

“I think the guy has to have the biggest heart of anyone we’ve ever known,” says Cloeter.

While the golf tournament is his most visible form of outreach, what he does behind the scenes is just as impressive and important when it comes to Salem attracting and maintaining so many high-caliber events.

“With all of the national championships we bring into Salem, we’ve always come to Bob and asked if he could get us a special room for our umpires or find a place for the U.S. Olympic team to eat, and the only thing that has ever come out of his mouth is, ‘We’ll take care of it,’” says Shaner.

Rotanz did just that last summer when the Olympic Softball team was scheduled to eat dinner at the restaurant the night before it played a sold-out exhibition at Kiwanis Field. The team’s flight into Roanoke was delayed and the reservation had to be canceled at the last minute. Rotanz calmly adjusted his staff and made sure the Olympians got the same first-class treatment the next day at lunch.

“He shares many of the same values Salem does when it comes to putting kids first,” says Taliaferro. “He doesn’t have to do all of the things he does in the community, but he’s just that kind of a person.”

With lacrosse season just firing up for high schools and colleges around the area, and two of his daughters now playing for the Virginia Tech Hokies and a third for Salem High, no one could blame Rotanz if he left his generous nature on the sidelines for a few months, but that would require some selfishness, something that’s just not part of his fabric.

“It’s just the right thing to do and it makes me feel good than I’m fortunate enough to be able to help people,” says Rotanz. “And I’m proud that my daughters are already starting to do some of the same things.”

Rotanz acquired the family trait of taking care of one’s fellow man honestly from his mother and his father, a former New York City detective who was killed in the line of duty when Bob was in the sixth grade.

“My mother and my father were great examples growing up, and even years after my dad passed away I heard stories about all the things he did for other people,” says Rotanz. “So, I do often wonder if there is some kind of special connection there.”

It’s the kind of connection you get when you spend your life serving others more than just food and drink.
Orienteering event will showcase the area

A NEW CHALLENGE — and a completely different one — is coming to Roanoke Valley on March 7. Orienteering will unfold on Mill Mountain and downtown.

The Mill Mountain Challenge, a four-hour speed/strategy event for inexperienced orienteering racers, families or people who don’t have the endurance for an eight-hour race. The event will go on, rain or shine — or snow, sleet, high winds or whatever March decides to toss this way.

Orienteering is one aspect of adventure racing. These challenges will not have a start or finish line, but a beginning and ending time. Teams are not likely to find all of the checkpoints in the time allotted, so it will be a point system that determines the winners.

Many of the flags will be on Mill Mountain but some will be in the city, even in participating downtown businesses. The event will be a chance to showcase Roanoke to visitors from outside the area, says sponsorship coordinator Molly Bullington. Because the racers will be entirely on foot, the area within the race boundaries will be limited to the mountain, South Roanoke and downtown.

Unlike typical races, there is no course. Part of the challenge of orienteering is the strategy involved in selecting the checkpoints that will be sought, Angell says. Each team will consist of one to four members. At no time can the team members be more than 100 feet from another member. The flags all have a unique punch on them that racers must use to verify they made it to the checkpoint. Each checkpoint, however, has a different, pre-assigned point value. There is no required order of selection for the checkpoints.

“Strategy is to figure out the easiest point to reach next,” Bullington says.

“Teams will have to decide if they want to try to get to 10 different 10-point places, or spend a lot more time trying to reach a 100-point spot,” Angell says. He will personally put out the flags and he’s not going to make it easy. The second zone, which will be used only by the experienced racers in the eight-hour session, could well have a few flags in rugged, wild areas. They are not going to be hanging from trees over the trail.

Bullington says there has already been interest from the network of people who are enthusiasts for orienteering and adventure racing from outside of Virginia. And while showing those folks all that Roanoke has to offer, she says an equally important offering will be to show locals the extensive trail system on Mill Mountain and reacquaint them with the outdoor offering quite literally in their backyards.

Angell says he’ll be scouting the zones of competition for interesting land formations to use as checkpoints. He wants to make the flags accessible but challenging. He plans to place 30 to 40 out for competition. “I’ll have as much fun setting them up and taking them down as those in the challenge,” Angell says.

The cost to enter the eight-hour event runs from $45-$60 each, depending on the size of the team. The scale is $30-$45 for the four-hour challenge.

Registration day of the race will be slightly more. Angell and Bullington say they would love to get 100 participants in this first challenge, but they will be happy with 50. “We’re putting it all together in six weeks,” says Bullington.

Angell will offer a land navigation clinic on Feb. 21, although if that fills up — and he expects it will — there will be a second clinic offered Feb. 28. The clinics will be intensive training for trekking and orienteering. There will be about five hours of study in a classroom setting followed by eight to 10 hours in the woods, both day and night. He says anyone who goes through that training will be able to handle the rigors of the eight-hour challenge.

Registration information is available at www.OARevents.com. All who finish will receive an Odyssey headsweats race cap. The top three finishing teams will have their entry fees returned. Additionally, first-place winners will receive 25 Odyssey dollars to use toward future events. Second place winners will get 10 Odyssey dollars.
FEBRUARY 16, 2009
PLAY BY PLAY

Best of times: a tale of two city champs

IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

Dick Williams

William Fleming High School 1955 champions, front row, l to r: Jack Morey, Wayne Parks, Bill Miller; second row: Carlton Assaid, P.T. Johnson, Bob Stevens, Bill Stevens, Ronnie Griffin; back row: Coach Phil Crabtree; Denny Weddle, John Willhide, Chester Rogers, Leon Turner. Not pictured: Leroy Ferris

IN 1955, A REAL RARITY OCCURRED. Roanoke’s two high schools, Jefferson and William Fleming, both won state basketball championships on the same day. The games were played in two separate locations (Richmond and Blacksburg, respectively), unlike today’s state championship games where the boys and girls, by divisions, play at the same venue.

Both teams were blessed with a big man — actually, Fleming had two — each of whom came into their own starting with their sophomore year.

Jefferson finished the regular season 18-1, the school’s best record ever. The only blemish on their schedule was a loss to powerful Dobyns-Bennett in Kingsport, Tenn. Jefferson later avenged that loss with a home victory.

The Magicians, coached by Preston Brown, rode into the state tournament as the top team in Group I, following disappointing seasons in ’53 and ’54. Don Humphreys, Paul Housman and 6-8 sophomore Dick Kepley led the 1953 team. Jefferson was beaten by GW-Danville in a Western District playoff game. Kepley emerged as a future star for the Magicians, scoring 162 points playing in his first year at Jefferson. The ’54 team’s hopes of reaching the state tournament were dashed by losses in district play. The bright spot was Kepley, who led the state in scoring, averaging 26.2 points per game. Kepley and diminutive 5-8 guard Louie Mills were named to the All-Western District team. Kepley was also named to the All-state first team.

Fleming, on the other hand, was headed to the Group II state tournament for the third consecutive year. The Colonels won the District Six championship three straight years. The ’53 team, led by Corbin Bailey, Don Divers and Don Woods, defeated Radford in the finals of the District Six tournament and earned a trip to the Group II state tournament where they lost to the eventual champion, Marion High School.

The ’54 team, coached by newcomer Phil Crabtree, breezed through the District Six tournament, easily defeating Radford, Galax and the No. 1 seed, Martinsville. Led by Bailey and 6-6 twins, Bill and Bob Stevens, the Colonels wrapped up the Group II state championship with a 71-58 win over Virginia High of Bristol. Bailey and Bob Stevens made the all-tournament team. The state title was the first for a team from Roanoke or Roanoke County since Jefferson won the Group I championship in 1941.

Unlike Fleming, Jefferson’s trip to the state tournament was based on its record at the end of the regular season in the Western District. There wasn’t a post-season tournament in that district and Jefferson was the top-seeded team in the ’55 state tournament. Led by Kepley and Mills, the Magicians rolled over their first opponent, Maury, 76-59, with Kepley tossing in 37 points against the outmanned Commodores. Jefferson defeated Newport News easily, 57-40, in the semifinal game that featured a nasty altercation between the players and fans near the end of the game. Jefferson forward Ken Catron sustained a black eye during the fray.

The Magicians’ win matched them against Washington & Lee of Arlington in the finals. W&L led the Magicians throughout the game, up by 10 points at one time. With four minutes left in the game, the Generals were still ahead, 37-31. Jefferson cut the lead to 39-38 with 1:26 to go. Kepley hit two free throws to put the Jeffs ahead by one but W&L scored to make it 41-40 with 58 seconds left. A missed shot by Jefferson, a tie-up, a jump ball (tie-ups resulted in jump balls in those days) and a foul on Kepley gave W&L the ball on a day’s alternate possession rule and a scramble under the Magicians’ goal led to a Jefferson basket and the state title by the score of 42-41. The scramble was an errant pass that went over the outstretched hands of Kepley into the waiting hands of reserve Walter Howard, who put in the winning basket.

Howard, a junior, was fouled on the play but missed the free throw. W&L never got another shot.

Kepley led the scoring with 20 points, 14 coming on free throws. Mills finished with 12 and was named the MVP of the tournament despite going 2-14 from the floor in the title game. It was Jefferson’s seventh state basketball title (following teams from 1922, ’29, ’30, ’34, ’35, and ’41). The Magicians added an eighth in 1970, four years prior to the school’s closing.

“Winning the state championship was a dream come true for me and the other players,” says Kepley. “All of us were close friends.”

“Our goal at the beginning of the season was to win our district and get to the state tourney,” says Jonnie (Mills) handle the ball in the fourth quarter, especially if the game was close.”

What was Brown’s coaching style? Kepley labeled him “a strict disciplinarian. One time I was late to practice and he told me that if I ever showed up late again I wouldn’t play anymore. I’m leading the state in scoring and Coach Brown is going to bench me. I don’t think he would have,” says Kepley, laughing.

Fleming won the District Six tournament with wins over Fieldale, Blacksburg and unbeaten Martinsville. The Bulldogs were 22-0 coming into the tournament and had beaten Fleming twice during the regular season. The third time was the Colonels’ charm as they prevailed in the district final, 65-55.

The Stevens twins helped Fleming overcome a two-point deficit by outscoring the Bulldogs 25-13 in the final period. Bill and Bob scored all of Fleming’s points in the third quarter and at one time during the game they accounted for 23 consecutive points.

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Fleming romped to the Group II state championship...
From the Bookshelf

Breezy take on a landmark event

by Mike Ashley


Mark Bowden’s breezy take on the 1958 NFL Championship game is the latest in a long line of books on the game that forever married football and television. (ESPN recently aired a television special on the game as well.) It was an event that began the shift to the gridiron as our true national passion, if not our pastime.

“The Best Game Ever” is just 279 pages, and it’s nothing if not fun. Before television and huge salaries took hold, the players, who by necessity worked other jobs often in their team’s community, were having a blast playing the game.

That theme rings true over and over, from whacky Baltimore Colts defensive end Art Donovan’s shenanigans (histraining methods including two pizzas and a six-pack at curfew the night before a game) to New York Giants star Frank “Hollywood” Gifford flirting with a career on the silver screen instead of one catching screen passes.

Then there’s this from former Virginia Tech and Colts center Buzz Nutter in the book. When asked by coach Weeb Ewbank at the half of a regular season game what Baltimore should do about dominating Giants middle linebacker Sam Huff, Nutter responded, “I think we should trade for him.” (Play by Play contributor Todd Marcum profiled Nutter in this publication shortly after his death last spring.)

The heart of the book is also the passion of men like obsessive Colts receiver Raymond Berry and the intense Huff, who went from West Virginia bumpkin to literally create the position of middle linebacker under defensive coordinator Tom Landry. Oh, and that Giants offense had a pretty good coordinator, too, fellow by the name of Vince Lombardi.

There’s a sense that this game was also a convergence at a major branch of the NFL family tree, the principles of Paul Brown through Ewbank and then the influence of Lombardi and Landry, along with the real coming out party for the quintessential quarterback of the NFL’s new era, Johnny Unitas.

Not to mention names that would become fixtures for future generations of football fans, like Johnny Unitas, Pat Summerall. In fact, on this day with 45 million tuned in to watch, it was the day their future jobs would become so important.

There was a sense throughout Yankee Stadium and in homes all over America that something truly memorable was unfolding. It was television prime time. The nation was experiencing what was still a new kind of human experience, a truly communal live national event, something made possible by the new medium. In future years the phenomenon would become familiar, but no less powerful, as the nation gathered to watch rocket launches, the aftermath of assassinations, a magnificent civil rights speech, an astronaut stepping on the moon, a presidential resignation, and someday even the slow-speed highway chase in Los Angeles of a former NFL football star charged with a double-murder — O.J. Simpson was still in grade school in 1958. In this moment, football itself was about to step fully into the age of television, of multimillion-dollar player contracts, slow-motion replay, cable sports networks, Super Bowls, and franchises with market values exceeding the gross national product of many small countries.

If you don’t know how the game ends and care, this is a must-read and I won’t spoil it. If you do know and this book doesn’t give you enough, I highly recommend Michael McCambridge’s much more exhaustive NFL treatise, 2004’s America’s Game, a major source for Bowden.
Snapshots of the season

- **Big Orange Wrestling**
  William Byrd High School assistant principal Otis Dowdy (right), a Roanoke Valley wrestling icon for the past 45 years, spoke to those who attended the Big Orange Wrestling Tournament at the school in late January.

- **Volleyball Honors**
  Hidden Valley High School coach Carla Poff (above, center) was recently named Group AA state coach of the year. Eva Delaney (above, right) was named first-team all-state and Sarah Church (above, left) made the second team. The team finished as state runner-up in November.

- **Mike Ashley**
  The noted Play by Play columnist was radio station WFIR’s special halftime guest at the Salem-Cave Spring high school basketball game Jan. 23. Ashley provided broadcasters Ron Myers (left) and Bob Southard (right) with some amusing analysis.

- **Luke Hancock**
  The former Hidden Valley High School basketball standout, who now plays for Hargrave Military Academy, performed very well in two area games in late January. Hancock will play for George Mason University next year.

- **Mikey O’Brien**
  On Jan. 29, HVHS retired the jersey of the former star baseball pitcher, a 2008 graduate. Now in the Yankees farm system, O’Brien was joined by his parents, Susan and James, and his baseball coach, Jason Taylor.
Inside Game

with italicized commentary
by Mike Ashley

RADFORD UNIVERSITY junior Phillip Martin, a 2006 Roanoke Catholic graduate, kept a diary at Play by Play’s request for a few days last month to take us behind the scenes in college basketball and in the life of a Division I athlete.

Martin, who also moved into Radford’s starting lineup last month, isn’t your typical student-athlete. He’s a double-major on the dean’s list at Radford, and a basketball jack-of-all-trades.

“Phil is the epitome of an unselfish player,” says his coach, Brad Greenberg. “Winning is all he cares about. He’ll sacrifice his body, his ego and personal statistics for the good of the team. He works hard every single day, never takes a play off, never takes a day off. He’s a unique young man. He’s very focused on his academics and takes the academic side of college extremely seriously. At the same time, though, he is very much an athlete that loves competition and has a social life away from school. He’s fun to be around.”

Thoughtful and naturally introspective as a philosophy major, Martin actually had too much to say on more topics than we could fit into this story. By necessity, his diary focuses on his day-to-day life at Radford, where he and 9,120 other students attend school in the heart of the New River Valley and the Highlanders operate as one of the northernmost outposts in the Big South Conference.

Martin is the son of Dean and Twila Martin of Roanoke, and has three sisters, though as you’ll see, basketball, books and breaking bread take up nearly all of his time during the winter.

Friday, Jan. 16

My day starts at 11 a.m., this being a bit later than usual with Radford on winter break. I immediately make breakfast then take my dog, Arthas (named for a character in a video game), out for a short walk before practice.

Practice is scheduled for 1 p.m.; however, many members of the team, including myself, get to the gym about an hour early. I like to get taped and stretched out by our trainers and get some extra shots up before we hit the ground running.

Today we started practice by watching about 20 minutes of film on tomorrow’s opponent, High Point University. (Assistant) coach Rick Hall is in charge of scouting High Point and during the review he elaborates on what we can expect to see during the game as far as their plays and personnel.

Traditionally, each assistant coach is responsible for a scouting report on specific opponents. They’ll break down game tape — college basketball coaches keep UPS and other delivery companies in the black — and be the assistant doing a lot of talking come game time because they’ll be expert on that opponent, down to what inbounds plays are coming.

In the team film session, former Roanoker Hall emphasizes attacking HPU’s 2-3 zone with patience and execution. On defense, a premium is placed in getting back to slow the Panthers’ fast-break and preventing easy baskets.

After film, we hit the court for a little over two hours. Today’s practice is not as physically demanding as our usual practices — our preparation is more mental than physical, perhaps (Coach Greenberg) wanting us to conserve our energy. After practice, I lift weights for about an hour and 15 minutes. By 4:30, I’m back at the apartment for a bite to eat.

After that, I relax the rest of the night, eat a late dinner at 9 and then get to bed by 12, already getting mentally prepared to play at High Point tomorrow.

Saturday, Jan. 17

Game Day

I wake up at 10 a.m., and make another ham, egg and cheese sandwich, with an orange juice. I live on the east side of Radford with teammates Cole Wilder from Wytheville, and Joey Lynch-Flohr from Fairfax, two of my best friends. We live in an apartment just off campus and just minutes from the Dedmon Center.

We’re there by 10:30 and prepare for our walk-through at 11. Walk-throughs are nothing like normal practice. We come in and first look at a PowerPoint presentation of High Point’s personnel and what the coaching staff believes are the keys to winning tonight.

After that, we step on the court to shoot, and then we walk-through some of High Point’s plays. A scout team steps onto the court and simulates those plays to help everyone visualize what to expect.

After the walk-through, I get back to my apartment at 12:15 p.m. and start packing for the game. I play with my puppy before...
heading back down to the Dedmon Center to leave at 1:35 p.m.

We load up the motor coach and head for Radford landmark Sal’s Italian Restaurant. They’ve already prepared a buffet-style meal — lasagna, chicken parmagiana and chicken alfredo — for the team in a private room in the back.

We leave Sal’s at 2:35, and begin the trip south to High Point. The team rarely leaves for away games on the day of the game but I really enjoyed traveling the same day. I get to spend the night in my own bed and in my own normal environment. Not that we don’t stay in nice hotels with comfortable beds, it’s just more comfortable being in my regular atmosphere.

I usually sleep the way to the game or hotel. Conversely, I rarely sleep on the bus after games. Usually a combination of either being pumped from winning, retrospective over losing or simply still being too wired from just running up and down the court keeps me up.

Typically on the bus going to a game there will be film on of the team we are about to play. We watch the film and listen to our music. The bus is at High Point by 4:30, and I immediately get taped so I can get out on the floor and start shooting and stretching.

The game tips off at 7 p.m., and we’re done by 8:45. We beat High Point 65-52, marking our fifth straight conference win and for the team in a private room in the back.

In the second half, Radford's transition defense is pretty good but the Highlanders aren’t patient on offense and trail 28-27 at the half in the Millis Center, one of several, small, tough gyms in the Big South that isn’t very friendly for visiting teams.

In the second half, Radford runs better offense and begins to pull away. Five Highlanders score in double figures, and as usual, Martin isn’t one of them. He has a modest two points, taking just three shots and contributing three rebounds, a steal and no turnovers in 21 minutes.

However, it’s RU’s fifth straight win since he moved into the starting lineup, and the intangibles he brings — toughness, steadiness, defense and a team-first attitude — seem to have helped elevate the team’s play recently.

“arthur has always felt like he should be in there (starting),” says Hall. “I understand that, a very competitive nature. He’s been a big lift. He doesn’t miss many assignments. When Phillip makes a mistake it’s because he’s playing too hard and too fast, and you can live with that. He doesn’t make lack-of-effort, lack-of-focus type of mistakes.”

After the win, we get on the bus and begin eating subs from Jersey Mike’s. The day before the game, we decide what sub we want and tell Head of Basketball Operations/assistant coach Ross Condon.

Most basketball teams travel after games this way, ordering food to eat on the bus so they can get back to give the student-athletes a chance to get to class the next morning, although this is a Saturday game. College basketball folks spend enough time on the road that just getting home quickly is always paramount.

At about 1 p.m., I head to IHOP for all-you-can-eat pancakes with Cole and my girlfriend, Deanna. We bump into Radford basketball enthusiast Todd Joyce, and talk about the game last night. At 3, I watch some NFL playoffs but at 6:30, it’s back to the Dedmon Center to lift weights for about an hour. During the season my lifting is basically to just try to stay fit and not lose too much of what we worked on all preseason.

At 7:30, I go eat at BT’s (another local landmark almost on campus). Afterwards, I watch my favorite TV show, “The Office,” with some friends. I order a pizza and hit the bed.

Listed at 6-6, 190 pounds, Martin will never be mistaken for a bodybuilder. He’s rail thin though he does have some deceiving muscle that makes him more effective on the low block than many opponents first suspect. And now we know how he keeps that weight and strength up. On a day off, he had a breakfast, all-you-can-eat at IHOP, dinner at a restaurant and then a pizza before bed.

Monday, Jan. 19

I wake up at 9 a.m. I feed my dog and eat a muffin, banana and cereal for breakfast. I head for practice at 9:50 a.m., get taped, stretch and shoot for about an hour before practice. Practice starts at 11 a.m. and ends at 2:15 p.m. Afterward, I eat lunch, pizza again, which surprisingly isn’t old to me.

I relax most of the rest of the day, the last day of winter break before classes begin. Prior to calling it a night, I go to the (Hurlbur) Student Center, aka “the Bonnie” (named for longtime RU Dean of Students Bonnie Hurlbur). There, I print out a syllabus for my Introduction to Professional Education class, which was e-mailed by Dr. (Kristan) Morrison. I’ll need that tomorrow.

Martinisa double-major in Social Science and Philosophy and Religious Studies. And while you won’t meet many Division I student-athletes majoring in philosophy and religion, Martin is already demonstrating the same kind of versatility in the classroom that has made him a success on the court.

See MARTIN, Page 16
Not Just a Long Shot
by Mike Ashley
Roanoke College women seek ODAC title

If this Roanoke College women’s basketball team goes on to do great things this post-season, the Maroons may owe it all to a 30-point loss.

In the midst of a dream season, Roanoke had rolled to a 19-2 record at press time and the top of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference. The Maroons looked poised for even more success before the end of the 2008-09 year. They won their first eight games before a one-point loss at Lynchburg, and then the flood gates seemed to open in a disastrous performance against Randolph-Macon.
The Maroons fell 73-43 at home in early January to a very solid Wildcat team but a team that had no business beating Roanoke by 30 points in the Bast Center. “We started out well against them — Jaleesa blocked a shot, Caitlyn drew a charge and then hit a three and we were rolling,” says 28th-year coach Susan Dunagan shaking her head at the R-MC memory. “The second half...we were trying up to a point but nothing was working. You have those nights.”

“This year we’ve had so many different players step up at different times,” says shooting guard Caitlyn Long. “We’ve found a way to win by just maturing and learning to play like a team. In the past it seems a way to win by just maturing and learning to play like a team. In the past it seems...”

See MAROONS, Page 17

Cave Spring graduate Caitlyn Long has been a basketball and volleyball star for Roanoke College

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PLAY BY PLAY FEBRUARY 16, 2009
Dalton built baseball résumé, then homes

by Gene Marrano

DEE DALTON MADE HIS mark at Cave Spring High School as a baseball player in the late 1980s and early '90s, before moving on to Virginia Tech and a stint in the minor leagues. His accomplishments earned him a spot in the Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame last month, where he was part of the most recent crop of inductees.

Longtime Cave Spring Little League coach Jerry Ellis, Vienna-area Dixie League coach Bruce Spencer (page 18) and Salem Civic Center executive Carey Harvey-cutter joined Dalton on the dais Jan. 29. Ellis and Harvey-cutter have been highlighted in earlier issues of Play by Play.

A seemingly quiet and modest man at first blush, Dalton had plenty to crow about concerning a baseball career that ended after five seasons as a shortstop in the St. Louis Cardinals farm system. He was selected three times for the Roanoke Valley All-District team before he left Cave Spring in 1991. He made the Group AAA Northwest Region team as an infielder several times, was the Roanoke Valley District’s most valuable player twice and a Virginia High School League All-Star in 1990 and 1991.

The head coach with the Knights at the time was Roger White, who led Cave Spring to the state championship game during Dalton’s sophomore year. “We had a good program,” Dalton modestly recalls.

In short, the young man had game, enough so that he was a lower-round draft pick by the California Angels coming out of Cave Spring. “I wasn’t ready to go to the next level,” says Dalton. Instead he opted to play for Chuck Hartman at Virginia Tech, where three years later his work at shortstop earned him third-team All-America honors.

One of his teammates with the Hokies was Brad Clontz, later a major league reliever of some renown with the Atlanta Braves. Clontz was slated for induction into the Salem-Roanoke Hall himself this year but couldn’t arrange his schedule to be at the dinner to accept that honor. He likely will be a candidate in a future year.

“It’s been a while since I played baseball and I’ve sort of moved on with life,” says Dalton about his own induction, “but it’s a nice feeling. Baseball is something I worked hard at and spent a lot of time doing. It’s nice to be rewarded.”

Longtime Cave Spring baseball booster Wally Beagle, a Salem-Roanoke Hall of Famer himself, recalls Dalton as “an outstanding defensive player, extremely coachable.” Starting as a sophomore at shortstop for a state runner-up means you’ve got to be good,” Beagle says.

Beagle credits the “outstanding foundation” provided Dalton by the Cave Spring National Little League. Beagle won his own Knights baseball cap to the Hall of Fame dinner to honor Dalton. (Beagle’s sons, Chad and Mark, also played baseball for Cave Spring.)

Dalton, 37, very likely encountered fellow inductee Ellis as the former came up through the Cave Spring National Little League system, playing T-ball on Ogden Road, minor league games at Green Valley Elementary and major league (Little League) contests at Starkey Park.

Following his junior year, Dalton left Tech after being drafted again, this time by the Cardinals in the 15th round. He exited pro ball five years later after rising as high as Double-A with the Arkansas Travelers. Back in Roanoke, he now builds custom homes and small residential developments with his own company, Dalton Construction.

As he made his way up the Cardinals chain, Dalton came to a realization: “My batting seemed to be more of a problem than my defense. I guess in the end I was better defensively than offensive-ly... (but even with that) I knew I wasn’t going to be the next Ozzie Smith.” Dalton could see it coming and said the Cardinals “were always good to me. I had every opportunity to [move up] but it just didn’t work out.”

Along the way there were good times and teammates who went on to major league careers, like utility man Joe McEwing, a teammate of Mark McGwire in St. Louis in 1998 as the slugger pursued Roger Maris’ season home run mark of 61, on his way to 70. Matt Morris became a fairly successful major league pitcher for several teams.

“I think it’s great,” says Dalton of the local hall, which now honors more than 80 who have made a contribution to the game of baseball in some way. “There are so many people that spend a lot of time [supporting the game]. Not just players, but parents and coaches. It’s nice for them to be noticed.”

With a 3-year-old daughter and another girl on the way, there are no more baseball shortstops in the Dalton household, at least not yet. His high school and college exploits however will live on via a plaque at the Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame, which may actually open its doors this spring.

Former Boston Red Sox star outfielder Fred Lynn was the guest speaker at this year’s Hall of Fame/Hot Stove dinner, the first co-hosted by the Salem Red Sox.

Champions

From Page 7

with wins over Coeburn, 68-42, Churchland, 73-53, and George Mason-Fairfax in the title game, 53-32. Second-year coach Crabtree said after the tournament that any team in District Six could have beaten these teams.

Bill Stevens was the MVP of the tournament, while brother Bob, along with Leroy Ferris, made the alltournament team. Bill Stevens led the team in scoring in the tournament. According to Crabtree, all of Fleming’s starters should have been named to the all-tournament first team. Fleming finished the season 21-5, losing twice to Jefferson and Martinsville and once to E.C. Glass.

“We never practiced a man-to-man defense because every team played zone against us,” says Bob Stevens.

“Coach Crabtree emphasized rebounding for the most part, that’s how we won our games,” says Denny Weddle. “We also used half-court pressure at times. I remember playing Bassett and at the beginning of the game, I picked up my man at half-court. He was so surprised that he spit his bubble gum out. He tried to catch it before it hit the floor and I took the ball from him and made an easy lay-up to start the scoring. It was a funny thing.”

How does basketball 54 years ago compare to the game today?

“The game is much quicker and more physical,” Bob Stevens says. “Most all teams today play tough man-to-man defense and we played a 2-3 or 1-3-1 zone in our days,” says Weddle.

“Teams play many more games today, especially the AAA teams. They play lots of games, including out-of-town games every weekend,” says Kepley, who is now coaching a young girls’ team.

For the record, Kepley scored 1,292 points during his career. The late Bill Stevens and his brother, Bob, scored 287 and 208 points, respectively, during their careers.

Fleming was 43-9 in Crabtree’s two seasons, including two state and two District Six titles. Brown’s Magicians were 21-1.

Ironically, both Crabtree and Brown left coaching following the ’55 season. Kepley led the state in scoring in 1955, averaging just under 30 points per game. He was named captain of the all-state team, which included Mills. Kepley, who went on to play collegiate at North Carolina, later coached at Jefferson and took his team to consecutive state finals, losing to Hampton in 1969 and winning the state title over Maury in 1970 in dramatic fashion similar to the ’55 championship.

Fleming has played in four more state title games since 1955, winning the championship most recently in 2007.

(Dick Williams was a Jefferson High School freshman in 1955.)
Pathfinders strives to make hiking, walking and bike riding more pleasurable activities

The Roanoke River Greenway is by far the most notable in the valley. It’s a class A trail along much of its length, meaning it has been paved and is wide enough for two-way traffic. There are other well-known greenways, such as the Tinker Creek Greenway in Roanoke and the Wolf Creek Greenway in Vinton, but few consider that the Mill Mountain Trail is actually a greenway, as are the networks of trails on Mill Mountain and around Carvins Cove. In fact, the Carvins Cove trails measure 142 miles in total, more than seven times the length of the Roanoke River Greenway.

“We just recently incorporated all of Carvins Cove into our comprehensive plan,” says Amy Powell, the chairwoman of the public relations and marketing committee for Pathfinders. “We will be helping with the recreational planning.”

The vast majority of trails at Carvins Cove are class C, meaning they are natural surface trails without added agents such as gravel or cinders. Many are known as great mountain biking trails. They may be paths in the woods, but they are greenways.

Pathfinders as a group gives between 3,000-5,000 volunteer hours each year in trail building and maintenance. Powell says the group has its own equipment, including a pick-up truck, a ditch witch and a muck truck. Pathfinders coordinates workdays, volunteers, adopt-a-greenway efforts, fund-raising and other efforts. Community groups that want to make working on a greenway a project can go through Pathfinders to get a time and place for maximum benefit. The organization will also provide educational information and speakers to any group that wants to learn more about greenways or what it can do.

The best part is that anyone can be part of it. There are no formal memberships. The Web site (pathfinders.org) gives all of the information needed to know what projects are on the slate, whom to call and where to be in order to help. There is more formal membership on the board of directors, which is a must for a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, but there is a nominating committee, so anyone from the citizenry who wants to be considered for that board can request consideration.

Pathfinders has regular trail-building crews that work most Saturdays, coordinated by current President Brian Batteiger, and a midweek crew coordinated by Bill Gage.

**Blazing the trail**

Ikking, walking or bike riding aren’t much as spectator sports, but for those who want to get out and do something, they are as available as any other activity. Put one foot in front of the other to participate; and in the Roanoke Valley, there is a broad and ever-expanding network of opportunities when it comes to finding great trails.

Pathfinders for Greenways is a volunteer organization that gives involvement in the greenway process to citizens. It is a nonprofit that partners with the Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission, which is a governmentally appointed group that handles the nuts and bolts of the greenways — location, land, planning, funding and other aspects.

Pathfinders is a group of people who roll up their sleeves and work at making the greenways an extensive network of trails that people can enjoy.

by Christian Moody

**FEBRUARY 16, 2009**
Is it time for another look at pro hockey in the valley?

by Gene Marrano

H

MM...A FULL PARKING lot and 5,000 or more people in the stands at the Roanoke Civic Center. Not watching a tractor pull, pro wrestling or a country music singer, either.

That was the scene on Jan. 23 when Virginia Tech’s club-level hockey team battled back from a 1-0 deficit to beat the University of Virginia 4-1. The Hokies call the civic center home, since there is no ice in Blacksburg.

No doubt there were fans of Roanoke’s former pro hockey teams on hand. Perhaps they were recalling the glory days of the Express when Virginia Tech’s club-level hockey team battled back from a 1-0 deficit to beat the University of Virginia 4-1. The Hokies call the civic center home, since there is no ice in Blacksburg.

Perhaps the key lies with Global Spectrum, the new operator and manager of the Roanoke Civic Spectrum, the new operator and manager of the Roanoke Civic Center stand — especially after experience with the Vipers, who left the last less-than-successful ex

the city of Roanoke and others loads of money.

Perhaps the key lies with Global Spectrum, the new operator and manager of the Roanoke Civic Center since the city of Roanoke opted to go the privatizing route. Global Spectrum then named Chris Connolly, a 10-year company veteran, as the general manager. A Philadelphia native and Flyers fan, he was most recently in hockey-crazed Canada as assistant general manager at the Labatt Centre in London, Ont. There the local junior league London Knights team, comprised of teenagers, drew 9,000 per opening.

“We sold out every game,” says Connolly, who cut his teeth out of college as an intern at the Wachovia Center in Philadelphia. “I love hockey.” That could be good news for local fans — having an advocate in management for the sport.

Of course, Roanoke is not Ontario; it’s not even in the same country, for that matter.

In his two months on the job, Connolly has heard from folks on both sides of the hockey argument. “A lot of people,” he says, have told him “hockey should be back,” while others have been naysayers, claiming it will not work “no matter what.”

It’s been more pro than con by far, adds Connolly, who reports to Roanoke Assistant City Manager Jim Grigsby. He understands if some are a bit skittish about bringing back yet another hockey franchise, which would be the sixth in the valley by most counts. “I do think it can be successful in the right elements,” Connolly says. Membership in a credible league will help for starters, a circuit fans “will buy in to.”

He would prefer local ownership that would put their “heart and soul into it.” Perhaps the most important factor to Connolly is a sort of thinking: “the price has to be right.”

He provides a more specific definition: ticket costs not too high where people won’t come, yet not too low where that might devalue the on-ice product.

“There is potential for a team to come back in to Roanoke and be successful but those elements have to be [in place],” Connolly believes the city would be open to a new team. “At Global Spectrum, we have to explore the different possibilities and come up with one we feel would be a good fit for Roanoke. We’re out there looking. It’s definitely premature for me to say there will be hockey back.”

Former Roanoke Express General Manager Pierre Paiement, who has considered forming an ownership group in the past, says Global Spectrum has already made inquiries to the Southern Professional Hockey League, a six-team circuit that may consider expansion this summer. With teams in Winston-Salem and Richmond, travel expenses would be minimized.

“The problem is just to get ownership in place,” says Paiement, who once advocated that Roanoke place a team in the SPHL, as opposed to the United Hockey League, due to much lower operating expenses and franchise fees.

He made that case to the civic center brass as a member of the facility’s citizen commission. With annual budgets under $1 million, Paiement says an SPHL franchise might be able to break even by averaging less than 3,000 fans, with top ticket prices of $8 or less.

That advice was ignored when the Vipers came to town as a UHL team with a cost structure much like the defunct Express — about twice as high as the SPHL. Now both the Vipers and the UHL are history.

Here’s an irony: when there once was interest from ownership groups in placing a team at the civic center, Roanoke City officials were hesitant, says Paiement, who played for the old Salem Rebels. Now the city is interested, according to Paiement, but “we don’t have ownership [groups].”

Southern Professional Hockey League commissioner Jim Combs knows the Roanoke Civic Center well — he was an East Coast Hockey League referee back in the ’90s when the Express still drew sizable crowds. “The place was awesome,” recalls Combs of the Express salad days. He’d like to come back, this time as a league commissioner.

“Roanoke is definitely a fit and we’ve had some people look at the market, but city council is not favorable to providing a lease for a hockey team. That’s the biggest stumbling point,” Combs says.

Combs said in approving teams to Roanoke and others loads of money.

Perhaps the key lies with Global Spectrum, the new operator and manager of the Roanoke Civic Center stand — especially after experience with the Vipers, who left the last less-than-successful ex

and minors charged $5 per day and adults $8 per day to watch as many tournament games as they like. A group discount of $1 per ticket is available for groups of 10 or more. A family of four can have a day at the rink for just $26.

Tickets are on sale at the Roanoke Civic Center Ticket Office, online at tickets.com or by phone at 888-397-3100.

ACCHL tournament set for Feb. 20-22

The Virginia Tech Hokie hockey team will be vying for the ACCHL title against teams from Duke, Georgetown, N.C. State, UNC and UVA.

Game times are as follows:

Friday, Feb. 20 - preliminary rounds at 7 p.m. and 10:15 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 21 - qualifying rounds at 11 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m.
Sunday Feb. 22 - Bronze Medal game (11 a.m.) and Gold Medal game (2 p.m.)

The ACCHL tournament will have All Day Pricing with students and minors charged $5 per day and adults $8 per day to watch as many tournament games as they like. A group discount of $1 per ticket is available for groups of 10 or more. A family of four can have a day at the rink for just $26.

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Tickets are on sale at the Roanoke Civic Center Ticket Office, online at tickets.com or by phone at 888-397-3100.
Martin

From Page 11

court back to his AAU and Roanoke Catholic heroes with coach Joe Gaither. He has been a dean’s list student every semester at Radford, and he carries a 3.91 grade point average.

As far as I know, I’m the only athlete at RU in philosophy and religion. I think that makes me unique, not only within athletics but in society in general. I have an intense passion in regard to philosophy and religious studies. My education so far has given me very distinct and unusual perspectives on life and humanity. It has helped make me more open-minded. I incorporate things from all the different religions I have studied into my life.

The double-major, along with playing sports, is unbelievably difficult. I don’t really have time for lower-level classes or classes that might be interesting but are outside my major. I take all upper-level courses in my major and I’ve just applied to the education department.

My dream is to attend graduate school and eventually receive my doctorate and become a professor of religious studies. That’s a lot of schooling and that’s why I want to enter the education department, get my teaching degree and possibly teach high school as my back-up plan.

Martin has a jump on that professorial look, sporting a beard — ‘I trimmed it down (to a goatee) once when we had a big recruit in,’ he says — and he catches a lot of grief from his coaches and teammates. The unfamiliar facial hair, at least on a college basketball player, also makes Martin a target for fans in opposing arenas.

The unfamiliar facial hair, at least on a college basketball player, also makes Martin a target for fans in opposing arenas.

As part of his basketball scholarship, Martin’s books, a major college expense for most students, are paid for by the school.

Back home, I take a small nap and leave for my 3:30 Introduction to Professional Education class. Class ends at 4:45, and practice is at 5. Today’s practice is a lot about the mental preparation we’ll need to play VMI, a team that plays like no other in the conference and maybe no other in the nation.

We focus on their press and what we want to do offensively. Practice ends at 7:15, and I head home. I order in some pasta, and hit the bed at 12. Since today was the first day of class, I was lucky enough to not have to worry about any homework tonight.

Wednesday, Jan. 21, Game Day

I was up at 8:30, and into the usual routine. I have a 10 a.m., 300-level religion class that I really enjoy. We’ve been discussing the imagery of monsters in religion this week, and it’s been a fun topic of discussion for the whole class. It’s a small class, only about 10 of us, and really, all my classes at Radford have been relatively small.

It’s a great environment. I still have teachers from my freshman year who say hello to me when I’m walking across campus. You have a lot of opportunities to develop personal relationships with your professors but that doesn’t mean you get any big breaks just because you’re an athlete. I had to drop an English class my freshman year when I was going to miss too many classes traveling.

I’m taking 12 hours this semester and that’s about right with basketball and upper-level classes. I average reading two hours a day and while I don’t have as much written work as in other majors, you have to be prepared for the great discussions in class. I really enjoy it. At noon I have an upper-level class in late, modern philosophy, mostly Kant, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

Martin may be understating his written work. He wrote a 45-page paper last semester for a religion class. He also added that he has gone to summer school every year at RU to stay ‘on time’ for graduation, but in college athletics there’s a lot more to summer school. Martin estimates that 75 percent of his teammates have been there with him every summer, and those figures might be even higher at most Division I basketball programs.

As many basketball coaches point out when their sport’s graduation rates are measured against other sports, basketball is one of the few college sports that bridges two semesters, thus making it even tougher academically. Taking lighter class loads is common, as is catching up each summer.

The summers also allow players to lift weights at the university’s facilities and play pick-up games, building team chemistry. Coaches aren’t allowed, by NCAA rule, to be in the gym with them.

We have to be at the Dedmon Center for the pregame walk-through at 2 p.m. The pregame meal is pasta and bread at the Muse (Hall) cafeteria and then part of my home-game ritual is a 30-minute power nap at home. I try to get back to the Dedmon Center by 5:15, to get taped and stretch on the court. By 5:40, we’re all out on the floor shooting.

It’s a special night at the Dedmon Center. While it’s the middle of January, it’s still Radford’s first game in its improved home arena. The Highlanders’ first home contest were in old Peters Hall, a 600-seat bandbox in the middle of campus where Radford’s athletic program first began in earnest in the 1970s.

Everyone is happy to be back in the Dedmon Center, named for Radford’s fourth president, Donald N. Dedmon, who had the chutzpah to ask Norfolk & Western Railroad to donate the land and to ask the state legislature for the money to build the new 5,000-seat air-supported facility, that first opened in 1981.

The arena has undergone a major face-lift with new steel beams supporting another fabric, but not air-supported, roof. Inside, long black partitions like the ones used in football domes where they play basketball give the court a new intimacy. Coats of new paint — particularly the preferred Radford red — also give the facility a brand-new luster.

The place is filled — just under 5,000 — for the reopening, state rival VMI has brought a vocal contingent, and there’s extra media in town, too.

Radford does everything right in the first few minutes, running out to a 13-0 lead in the battle for first place in the conference. But by halftime, VMI’s run-and-gun, pressure-defense style has already discombobulated the Highlanders, the Keydets storming to a 30-32 lead on their way to an 87-72 victory.

Martin has four points and three rebounds in 30 minutes, playing some solid defense but missing all four of his free throws and four of six field goal attempts.

We didn’t meet their intensity and we just didn’t keep up with them. The first time you play VMI every year is tough because they’re the only team you face that plays that way (run, run, run, spread the floor, trap everywhere).

After a game like that, it’s hard for me to decompress. I’ll replay parts over and over. There’s a lot of negative retrospective thinking but my goal is always to cool down and find out what I can do better the next time.

After the game, I go out and eat with my mom and my girlfriend. I don’t know what it is but after games, I always like to get dessert.

Back home, I have about 30 minutes of reading to do before I can go to bed at 12:30.

Martin reported that Radford had a great practice two days later, and then on Saturday, in a pivotal road game against another in-state rival, the Highlanders scored a 92-84 double overtime victory at Liberty to stay on VMI’s heels. Martin had eight points, seven rebounds and four assists in 27 minutes.

The rematch with VMI is Feb. 21 in Lexington, and the regular season will close Feb. 28 with a big home game against Liberty. Not surprisingly, Martin is hungry for another shot at both teams.
Maroons

From Page 12

like there was always one person who was really good and we all depended on them. But it was never enough." But Long, a junior from Cave Spring, says despite its gaudy record, Roanoke’s issues — even among a tight team — were coming to the fore. That game, they boiled over.

“Randolph-Macon is such a good team but we knew we could beat them,” she says. “But after the first half, a lot of us felt uneasy. We weren’t getting along that well. We were disagreeing with each other and we had too much going on. I think the pressure of trying to play so perfect got to us.”

After the game, Dunagan and her veteran coaching staff did things a little differently. There was no yelling or screaming in the locker room. Instead, the veteran talked about pride in the Roanoke College women’s program and how the team had already won too many games this year to be considered a fluke. She let her veterans on the team take it from there.

The Maroons have lost in the ODAC Tournament semifinals the last two years and entered this season without graduated leading scorer and all-conference performer Erin Hanson. Of course, Hanson missed some significant time last year with injury, and that’s another big part of this season’s success story, according to Dunagan.

“Last year when Erin Hanson got hurt, this team had to find ways to look up to and there was no one person, they were all responsible and had to be accountable,” says Dunagan. “It’s like they said, ‘Erin’s not here so I guess we’re all going to have to do it.’ And I guess they proved to themselves that they could. We were a better team by the end of the season because of that.”

And the Maroons, paced by veterans like Long, point guard Jaleesa Osborne, center Jordan Gholson, guard Erin Jenkins and forward Virginia Anne Hagood, continued to be a better team this season. Senior Marcy Conner, a Hidden Valley product, has been another key contributor off the bench.

“We seasoned up big time and we had to redeem ourselves,” says Long. “We made a point of saying that defense is going to win our games and if we make a point of stopping other teams, everything else will just fall into place.”

And everything else has fallen into place. After the loss to R-MC, Roanoke reeled off another lengthy winning streak. The Maroons lead the ODAC in defense, allowing just 50.1 points and 34.4 percent shooting. No Roanoke player ranks in the Top 10 in the league in scoring but three are among the top 15 in assists, a statistic Dunagan says points to the team’s unselfishness.

In the first six games of the recent winning streak, six different players have led Roanoke in scoring, including 23 by Long in a 75-65 victory at Guilford. The feisty 5-6 guard typifies the team’s attitude. She leads the team in scoring (11.7 ppg) and minutes played (29.2 mpg), is second in steals (1.9 spg) and third in assists (2.9 apg).

“This young lady has grown since the first day she stepped on the floor here,” says Dunagan. “She has come from having to do it all her herself to having to mix and be a part of it. She’s doing a great job defensively and with her size she does a great job on the boards. She gets her share of steals. She’s doing a lot of the things besides just shooting that you have to do to be a good player.”

Long is the first to admit her shot hasn’t been as sure as she would like. At 37.0 percent from the field, she’s gaining on last year’s 37.5-percent pace, and it’s largely because of extra effort. She practices shooting whenever she can, often getting her dad, Larry, an assistant baseball coach for the Maroons, to grab rebound for her.

She extended season on Roanoke’s ultra-successful volleyball team this fall may have contributed to her slow basketball start.

Long’s multi-faceted local sports roots run deep. She played for her aunt, Linda Long, at Cave Spring, and there she was renowned as a shooter and scorer. Ironically, though, it was volleyball that got her to Roanoke College. Her AAU coach, Blair Trail, also guides the Maroons, and she lured Long across town. Long was all-conference this past season as Roanoke won more games (24) than any volleyball team in school history.

Now the Roanoke College basketball team is on pace for its most victories since the mid-’90s. Team chemistry is the common thread, according to Long, but then again, maybe she’s actually the common thread in all these Maroon victories in two sports. As her jump shot heats up, so do Roanoke College’s post-season possibilities.

“She always finds ways to contribute,” says Dunagan. “She has turned into a complete player.”

Spencer

From Page 18

batters for the win and back-to-back state championships for Vinton. The same people who were questioning Spencer’s strategy a few minutes prior were suddenly convinced more than ever of his baseball genius.

Although 92 was the first and 93 was special because of the “back to back” aspect, few could argue that his 1996 team may be the most remarkable. The ‘96 Nationals went undefeated in the sub-district, district and state games, cruising to the state championship and Spencer’s third trip to the Dixie Youth World Series. For the first time, the Vinton Nationals won a game in the World Series, marking another achievement for Spencer and his team.

The most memorable experience for Spencer though, was the state sportsmanship award, an award his teams have won in ’94, ’96 and ’97.

What Spencer is best known for in the Vinton circles is his commitment to discipline and fundamentals. “Kids learn more from Bruce in the two weeks of practice than they do in the entire regular season,” says Walthall. Those fundamentals shine through the entire Vinton baseball program.

“Former Northside coach Butch Tyree said to me, at one time, that we had such an advantage at Byrd because we never had to re-teach the kids, while he was having to teach fundamentals at a high school level. That is a huge testament to Bruce and Barry and Larry when they coached the JV,” says Walthall.

Barry and Larry Light aren’t the only former “Bruce products” to achieve success in coaching. McGuire, who played on the Vinton Nationals in ’92 and ’93, has coached at VMI, Tennessee Wesleyan and is in his first year as a coach at baseball powerhouse Ferrum College.

“I use things when I’m coaching that I learned playing for Bruce,” McGuire says. “He shaped the type of player I became and as kids he taught us how to play the game the right way.”

Another two-year “Bruce alumnus” (‘91-’92), Tommy Chambers, is involved in coaching Vinton’s youth and keeps some of Spencer’s words close to heart when teaching his own players. “I tell my kids to practice like you’re going to play, because you never know who is watching. It wasn’t just about fundamentals with Bruce, he taught work ethic and discipline that I still remember to this day,” he says.

Spencer says he’s going to make it to his 30th year in coaching and then evaluate from there, but the biggest key is the fun. “As soon as it becomes not very fun, then it’s time to look at doing something different,” Spencer says. For the teams to come, I’m sure current Byrd varsity coach Steve Sizemore is hoping things stay fun for Spencer.
Youth coach stresses the fundamentals

by Chris Manning

Bruce Spencer, a recent three-sport letterman at William Byrd, wasn’t a baseball fanatic. “It certainly wasn’t an interest of mine growing up,” he says. But the others were convincing. They used the old line dropped on many hesitant people who are asked to try their hand at coaching: “You’ll learn as you go.”

Turns out they were right. Last month Spencer was one of four inductees into the Salem-Roanoke Baseball Hall of Fame. The call, fittingly, came from hall of fame board member and 2001 inductee Gary Walthall, whom some even call the Godfather of Vinton baseball (but never to his face).

“I’m humbled by it,” Spencer says. “It is certainly something you never think is going to happen when you go into coaching.”

In his acceptance speech Spencer thanked his wife, Voner, Walthall, his first players (and later assistant coaches) Barry and Larry Light, and his basketball coach at Byrd, Roland Malone. He told a few stories and it was certainly a great night for a very deserving man.

Was induction a reward for 28 years of work? “No, the hall is a great honor, but my reward comes from the kids, knowing that I had an impact on someone or taking a group of individuals and seeing them mold into a team. That’s what makes it worth it,” Spencer says.

A 1980 Byrd graduate, Spencer’s high school loves had been basketball, football and track. When he moved on to East Tennessee State University, he left those sports to the guys with the scholarships.

Spencer focused on his degree in finance, and then took an extra year in college to get certified to teach. He found a job waiting at Byrd. Meanwhile, he was coaching 11- and 12-year-olds in baseball at Byrd field in the spring and summer.

“I kind of picked it up as I went. I knew the game, but I had to obviously learn some more,” Spencer recalls. Bruce’s first draft picks in his first year were the Light brothers, who after going on with their careers, came back and coached alongside him.

A few years into his stint with the pre-teens, Spencer received a call from Walthall asking for help at the high school level. “Bruce is a coach who teaches fundamentals and teaches the game the right way,” Walthall says.

At first, Spencer helped Walthall with the varsity, but when it was time to start a junior varsity team, there was only one person Walthall wanted for the job: Spencer. “Having Bruce work with the kids at 11-12 and teaching them the right way to play the game, then as JV coach, he was continuing the process. By the time they got to the varsity, we were able to spend time on repetition instead of teaching, because Bruce had already taught them.”

After a few years at the helm of the JV, Spencer was offered a teaching position at Northwest High School as well as the opportunity to work with football coach Jim Hickam. “He’s a great motivator,” says Spencer.

Spencer, however, wasn’t giving up his favorite gig in Vinton. “Being involved with Byrd baseball is like a fraternity.”

The change of scenery on the day job and the motivation from Hickam may have carried over to his Vinton team, because in 1991, Spencer’s Vinton National team made it to the state tournament, a first for him.

In 1992, there was success surrounding Vinton baseball, but none any sweeter than the success of Spencer’s Vinton National team. (Full disclosure: 1992 was the year of the legendary William Byrd High School Class 3-A team, referenced in the September and October issues of Play by Play, but this writer was on the ‘92 Vinton National team, so I’ll tell the story how we on the team saw it.)

The Nationals swept through district play, again heading to the state tournament. The difference on Spencer’s end was that this was no longer the first time he had been this far; he was there to win some games.

After losing the first game, the Nationals won the next five, leading to three teams with one loss. In Dixie Youth, there is a coin toss to see who gets a bye to the finals.

“We needed to win that coin toss, we were out of pitching,” Spencer says. When the coin fell, Spencer’s raised both arms in the air, signifying that the Nationals had won the coin toss and would go on to the finals. The team won the state championship, a first in Vinton at any level of baseball.

“It was great being the first but what was even better was how we did it. After losing the first game we came back and won five games in a row and then had to have that coin fall our way and we did. It seemed like it was destiny,” Spencer says.

Destiny must have been on his side again in 1993 as the Nationals made it two in a row for Spencer. This championship, too, wasn’t without a major gamble paying off.

“We were up by two runs and Rustburg had the bases loaded with their big hitter up. He had hit eight or nine home runs in this tournament alone. I had him intentionally walked to only put us up one run, but I didn’t want to lose a major gamble paying off. The risk paid off when Matt McGuire struck out the final two batters.”

Bruce Spencer was a three-sport letterman at William Byrd High School, but a fourth sport—baseball—became his passion as an adult. He was a three-sport letterman at William Byrd, wasn’t growing up a baseball fanatic, and only after convincing of the others did he decide to take the coaching role. After earning a degree in finance, Spencer decided to take on the role of teaching at the high school level. He worked with football coach Jim Hickam, who was a great motivator. The team reached the state championship, winning five games in a row before advancing to the finals. The risk paid off when Matt McGuire struck out the final two batters, securing the team’s victory. His coaching skills and ability to motivate his players were highlighted throughout his career.
Hoopster Obama sets press-idential tone

I was as thrilled as anybody last month when Barack Obama became our 44th President. It says a lot about our country that we finally have a basketball guy as commander-in-chief! All my life it’s been golfers and guys who liked baseball and guys who liked football. I feel like a great barrier has been breeched with a basketballer in the round office.

Hoop has long been the most inclusive of sports, played internationally, by both sexes and on city playgrounds and suburban driveways. You could make a case for soccer here...and you’d have to because I won’t. It’s not our game the same way and I have never, ever been in a World Cup pool.

I came of age politically in the Richard Nixon presidential era, and he was calling ill-fated plays for the Washington Redskins and for inner-office documentation. He once gave George Allen a reverse that lost 16 yards. I don’t know if any tape of that play still exists.

Then Gerald Ford, who was a football player at Michigan, was our late-innings relief President. It was kind of strange since everyone made fun of him for falling down a lot and he was a President who was actually athletic. Ironically, Ford launched Chevy Chase’s career.

Jimmy Carter seemed like the nicest guy with the worst luck when it came to sports (and being President). There was that “killer rabbit” attack when he was fishing and then there were those horrid photos of him about to collapse after jogging. Neither image engendered much faith in the vigor and power of our federal government at the time but sure set the stage for our “Miracle on Ice,” in a sports-related vein.

Enter Ronald Reagan, another former footballer who had at one time made a living simulating baseball play-by-play on radio. Hey, he played the “Gipper” in the movies and if you know Notre Dame lore, you know that’s even bigger than Rudy.

My sports correlation for Reagan, though, came when he joined some announcers in the TV booth at the baseball all-star game one July. He stepped in to do a little play-by-play as Julio Franco stepped to the plate.

“I don’t know whether it’s Hoolio or Juleio,” Dutch intoned. A friend of mine in stand-up comedy quickly observed, “And this is the guy dictating national foreign policy.”

It did seem like Reagan enjoyed having his picture taken with national and world championship teams more than any other President, not that there’s anything’s wrong with that.

I can’t even visualize George Bush anymore. I try and I just see Dana Carvey. I do remember that he played baseball at Yale, though. (George Bush that is, not Dana Carvey.)

Bill Clinton came aboard next and seemed so much younger and hipper. He was jogging and playing golf and going to Arkansas and Georgetown basketball games, eating French fries all the time. I identified with him, and “in turn,” he let me down. (Columnist’s comedy tip-off: read that last sentence carefully.)

And that brings us to George W. Bush, the Bushes atop the national sporting scene almost as long as Rocky Balboa. “W” was a cheerleader at Yale and part-owner of a baseball team — famously trading Sammy Sosa before he blew up as a player — and well, just blew up, landing himself in steroid hearings where he infamously somehow forgot how to habla English.

“W” loves sports and the image of him throwing out that first pitch in Yankee Stadium after 9/11 is something I’ll never forget, a much-needed relief appearance for all of us in crunch time. He was a cheerleader again.

I’ve long imagined that George W. Bush would one day be the Commissioner of Major League Baseball, which at one time in my life I would have considered a lateral move from the White House. Being primarily a fan, he might just be able to rule the game a little more objectively than a used-car-dealer-turned-owner-turned-commish.

I always thought it would be cool to be President if for no other reason than all those championship jerseys you get with your name and the No. 1 on it. In fact, that looks like the best reason to be President these days and that’s only part of the reason why my name will never show up on a ballot.

If I’m never President — sorry, Mom — it won’t be because basketball hasn’t always been my preferred participatory sport. Obama has elevated all of us gym-rats. Sports Illustrated had a wonderful look at this peculiar phenomenon in “The Audacity of Hoop” (Jan. 19 issue), a clever play on newly minted President Obama’s book, The Audacity of Hope.

I was interested to find that one of the President’s regular pick-up guys is personal aide Reggie Love, who starred in football and basketball at Duke. The story also noted that the 6-foot, 4-inch Love is always on Obama’s team, some of the best court-packing since FDR was President.

Not that I begrudge a President that trait. Picking teams is a time-honored backyard hoops skill and we need a really good team right now to win games and stay on the court. I like having a President who has game and knows how to win, although some opponents think he only goes to the left.

I also think Obama could take most other world leaders one-on-one, not to denigrate the athletic prowess of those leaders. Heck, North Korean President Kim Jong-il reportedly shot 38-under par and had five aces the first time he played golf so he’d have to be a threat, but I think Obama can post him up. Barack would probably get off the low block and shoot over Eastern Bloc leaders, and I know he’ll “drop a dime” on Third World leaders and their teammates.

Now if he can just give the economy a fast break....

SIDELINES
by Mike Ashley

Graphic courtesy of The New York Times/Chris Gash

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