

Covering Local sports in
the Roanoke Valley

FREE

Play by Play

Vol. 4, No. 5, February 18, 2008

Northside's Trent Kincer
and Byrd's Brian Wood
grapple in the Big Orange

Going to the mat on principle

Giving it the old college try | Sports enhances campus life at JCHS

by Gene Marrano

VIRGINIA TECH HAS ITS Hokies and Virginia has its 'Hoos. Not to be outdone, however, the Jefferson College of Health Sciences in downtown Roanoke has its Blue Healers and a mascot to boot: Jeff the Blue Healer was rolled out at a recent news conference held on Spirit Day.

The Carilion-owned school known better for training health care professionals is in the process of ramping up a 2-year-old team sports program designed in large part to foster a sense of community. Officials and faculty members there hope to make the commuter school on Jefferson Street seem more like a traditional college campus, where sports is often a bonding element.

With a student population often older and working when not in class, Jefferson College has found that individual sports like running and tennis work best — although

attempts have been made to organize team sports as well. These are all club level activities at Jefferson: “no NAIA or anything like that,” says **Mark Lambert**, coordinator of Communications and College Relations. Nearby Virginia Western has been an opponent.

The school's focus is to promote a tight-knit atmosphere among students and Lambert says athletics fills that bill. Every Monday and Tuesday activities are scheduled at times where no classes are being given. Sports “are definitely a big part of that” effort, says Lambert, to offer more of a traditional college feel. Local high school gyms host the school's volleyball and recreation basketball teams when it can field enough players to have a game;



Tennis coach Dave Eckes (left), president Carol Seavor and the JCHS team receive a USTA sportmanship award last year

the running squad often trains downtown.

“We find space where we can — here and there,” says Lambert. Jefferson College will soon move to the larger Carilion Community Hospital building several doors down from its present home, but there is no gym yet.

With an average student age of 29 — some are older, others right out of high school — putting Blue Healer teams together is another challenge. Jeff, the fuzzy St. Bernard mascot that debuted last month “is a big thing,” says Lambert. “It becomes a very important identity for a school.”

Dave Eckes coaches several teams at Jefferson College and was a longtime coach at Liberty High School (cross country, track, tennis) before coming to the Roanoke school as an adjunct science professor four years ago. That previous experience spurred a desire to form teams and find potential athletes in his new position. While a student at Greensboro College, Eckes ran track and played tennis. He stays in shape now by competing in triathlons and taught a running-for-fitness class last fall.

Many of the sporting events are co-ed offerings, starting with cross-country in the fall and tennis, where the school has won invitational events.

“We’ve been really fortunate and feel good about that,” says Eckes. He’s lobbying for a trophy case in the lobby, in part as a recruiting tool.

The Jefferson College men’s cross-country team took second place at a meet in North Carolina last year.

Eckes spends a lot of time on the phone with other colleges, trying to persuade them to play non-con-

ference matches. Ferrum College has cooperated and others have come to the tennis invitationals he has set up on weekends. “We are competing against schools [with] varsity players. We’re going to play our best.”

Fall seems to be the best season for arranging matches. Eckes will, however, offer spring track while another faculty member is trying to field a women’s soccer team

in the next few months.

About 900 students currently attend Jefferson College of Health Sciences; many are married so it’s not unusual for his squads to have members with families and jobs. Those deep into their training may be working 12-hour shifts at local hospitals, furthering complicating schedules for practices and competitive meets. One of Eckes’ runners is 40. “Then again I have some 18-year-olds — a real mix.”

Eckes believes there are good student-athletes on campus, but it can be a challenge to get them to come out for a team.

In some cases, such as on the tennis squad, he must teach the basics of the game to participants who are willing, if not entirely able. Eckes joined the USTA collegiate club-level tennis league, where minimum requirements call for two men and two women players. With track the numbers can vary, another reason why individual sports where there is no roster minimum are easier for a school like Jefferson College.

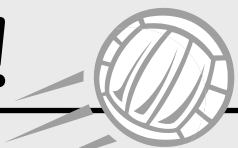
Pizza nights and group movies substitute for long trips on the road and dorm life.

“I definitely want them to bond together,” says Eckes.

The exercise is a benefit, and in many cases a relief for students who live hectic lives and may not have time for workouts elsewhere. Eckes estimates that several dozen students may be involved so far at the school, with more to follow. In fact, the anonymous man dressed up as Jeff the Blue Healer at the January news conference is on his tennis team.

“It’s just a matter of getting the word out,” Eckes says. “It’s going to take time. I can’t think of a school at all like us.”

Serve, set, kill!



by Christian Moody

ST. PATRICK'S DAY IS NOT A MAJOR TRAVEL HOLIDAY, BUT Roanoke Valley merchants will enjoy the annual influx of thousands of out-of-town visitors, thanks to the 2008 Shamrock Festival volleyball tournament. Not that there is an actual festival — there is so much volleyball in a two-day span that it's enough of a festival just as it is.

On March 15 and 16, a total of 228 teams from eight states will converge on the valley to dig, set and kill the volleyball in front of an interested audience of parents and college coaches.

This season, the coaches will only need to go to one place to see most of the top talent, says **Mark Tanis**, who is co-director of the tournament with his wife, **Tamalyn**. The Roanoke Civic Center will have 13 courts — four in the main arena and nine set in the new exhibit hall. Special floors with multiple courts are being brought in from Richmond for both venues at the civic center. Another floor with five courts will be put down in the Salem Civic Center.

This will reduce the overall number of match sites. Hollins University was not available this year, nor was Roanoke College. Courts at Patrick Henry's new gym and auxiliary gym will be used, as will the gyms at the Roanoke County high schools and the new facility at Faith Christian School. A court at The Edge Sports Performance Center will also be used. Most of the older teams will play at the Roanoke Civic Center, Tanis says, because that's the level where the players are prospects right now, not talented kids who have potential but cannot sign a letter of intent for some years.

Each team is guaranteed seven matches — six in pool play and a first-round match in the single-elimination playoff bracket Sunday. That's a total of just short of 1,000 matches spanning 36 hours — it's a hectic pace, but it works, ideally. Tanis says there have been times when a venue got behind and matches were still going on past midnight, but the play is supposed to fit a match into an hour time slot. Matches are best 2 games of 3, plus rally scoring is being used

See VOLLEYBALL, Page 17