Rich athletic tradition emblazoned in sporting venues

By Nishant Prasadh
Sports Editor

Tech has a long and storied athletic tradition, and the sports facilities in which the Jackets play are a major part of each sports team's history. The sections that follow detail the home stadiums of several of Tech’s major varsity sports teams.

Bobby Dodd Stadium

Bobby Dodd Stadium at Historic Grant Field houses one of the most storied programs in college football history. The stadium was built in 1913 by Tech students and is the oldest active on-campus stadium of any NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision team. In 2003, the stadium underwent renovations that increased the stadium’s capacity to 55,000 seats. The largest crowd at the stadium since then came in a game against No. 2 Notre Dame in 2006, with 56,680 fans in attendance; the most in Tech history was 60,316, when the Jackets hosted Georgia in 1973.

Because of the stadium’s age, it has gone through numerous reconstructions that have constantly changed its seating capacity. The most recent renovation took place this summer, as the sound system was improved and a $4.5 million, 2,400 square foot video board was erected above the South end zone.

Tech named the stadium in honor of former Head Coach Bobby Dodd in April 1988. Dodd led the Jackets to a 165-64-8 record in his 23-year tenure as the head coach and served in some capacity with the institution for 56 years. The field was originally named after John W. Grant, a one-time member of the Georgia Tech board of trustees, in 1914.

**O'Keefe Gymnasium**

O'Keefe Gymnasium was used by O'Keefe High School during the 1950’s and was given to Georgia Tech in the 1960’s. It has been the home of Tech’s volleyball team since 1995.

The gym is able to host around 1,000 people, the Pep Band keeps the crowd energized during games, leading them with a cheer of “Point Tech!” every time the Jackets win a point.

**Russ Chandler Stadium**

Russ Chandler Stadium, the home of Tech baseball, opened in 1930 with the funds that Tech collected from the 1929 Rose Bowl game. It is known to some fans simply as the “Rusty C.”

The stadium was reconstructed in 2002 and has a listed capacity of 4,357. The attendance record of 4,609 was set on April 9, 2008, when Tech hosted Georgia.

Tech has hosted numerous NCAA Regionals and ACC tournaments at the stadium over the past two decades. The stadium also served as a training site during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

It was named in honor of A. Russell Chandler III, who donated much of the necessary money needed for its renovation in 1985.

**Fashion Memorial Coliseum**

Tech’s Alexander Memorial Coliseum has been home to the men’s basketball team since 1956.

The arena has gone through several renovations, each time adding seating capacity while still maintaining the intimacy and character of the arena. Its original capacity of roughly 7,000 has been expanded over time to 9,191.

The Coliseum’s popular nickname of the “Thrillerdome” was coined by former Tech announcer Brad Nessler during the 1983-84 season after five games ended in exciting fashion.

Since the Coliseum opened, the men’s team has had a home winning percentage of over .700.

**Bill Moore Tennis Center**

Tech’s tennis program hosts one of the nation’s best tennis facilities with the Bill Moore Tennis Center. Its namesake, Bill Moore, is a member of the Georgia Tech Hall of Fame who provided the funding to help open the Center in 1988.

The center features outdoor courts that can seat 1,500 and a two-story indoor court structure.

**Shirley C. Mewborn Field**

Starting in March 2009, the softball team began playing its home games at the newly built Shirley Clements Mewborn Field after 21-plus years at Glenn Field.

Mewborn Field can seat up to 1,500 spectators, and like the baseball field it has both chairback and bench seating. The facility also features indoor batting cages and bullpens along the sidelines. The inaugural season was a historic one, as Mewborn Field was the site of Tech’s first NCAA Super Regional appearance in May.

**Bobby Dodd Stadium’s new video board above the South end zone was constructed during the summer. At 2,400 square feet, it is more than three times as large as the previous video board.**

**Photo by Michael James / Student Publications**

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**Photo by Michael James / Student Publications**
Eight Tech baseball players participated in the Cape Cod Baseball League (CCBL) over the summer. The CCBL is a ten-team summer amateur league in which numerous top college baseball players participate to keep playing during the offseason. It is one of the eight leagues in the National Alliance of College Summer Baseball, which is sanctioned by the NCAA. Many future Major League Baseball players have played in the Cape Cod League during their college years, and MLB has provided financial support to the league for over 40 years. Because it attracts top-tier college players, the level of competition in the league is often considered the equivalent of a Minor League Baseball.

Of the eight Jackets in the league, three are playing for the Cotuit Kettleers, who play their home games in Lowell Park and were 20-18-5 through August 4. First baseman Tony Plagman is one of the three; the rising senior was Tech’s cleanup hitter for much of last season, batting .354 with a team-leading 87 hits and 73 RBI. He has struggled during his time in the CCBL, hitting just .195 with a .283 slugging percentage. Rising junior center fielder Jeff Rowland is doing slightly better with a .238 average, but his 36 strikeouts are third-most on the team, and the speedster has only seven stolen bases through more than 40 games. Still, the league has historically been dominated by pitching, and the Tech hitters are hardly the only ones to be struggling offensively. Junior Brandon Cumpton is no exception; the right-handed starter has made three starts, going 1-0 with a 1.59 ERA and allowing just three runs and three walks in 17 innings.

Three Tech juniors—left-handed pitcher Zach Brewster, shortstop Derek Dietrich and catcher Cole Leonida—have joined the Wareham Gatemen, who play at Clem Spillane Field and were 19-18-6 through August 4. Brewster was the Jackets’ primary left-handed reliever in 2009, finishing the season with a 3.73 ERA in 31.1 innings pitched with a solid 35 strikeouts and just 16 walks. He has struggled in six appearances with the Gatemen, though, allowing 12 baserunners in 6.2 innings and amassing a 5.40 ERA.

Dietrich’s numbers were slightly down with the Jackets in 2009 after he earned Freshman Hitter of the Year honors the previous season, but he still had a solid year, batting .311 with 10 home runs and a .937 OPS. With Wareham the shortstop’s batting eye has allowed him to lead the team with 27 walks, 26 runs scored and 50 total bases. Leonida—who was the main backup to Jason Haniger last season—has seen limited action, with only 54 at-bats, but he has posted a strong .385 on-base percentage when he has played and scored 10 runs.

The last two Jackets in the CCBL, sophomore pitcher Mark Pope and sophomore third baseman Matt Stolle, are on the Falmouth Commodores, who are 17-23-2. Pope, who notchted eight saves as Tech’s closer in 2009, has seen time as both a starter and reliever with Falmouth and has thrived in both roles; the righthander is 2-2 in 34.1 innings with a 2.10 ERA, a .99 WHIP and 32 strikeouts. Stolle, who earned Louisville Slugger Freshman All-American honors, has struggled to find his power at the plate with a .178 average and just one home run in 90 at-bats, but he does have a solid ratio of 20 walks against just 28 strikeouts.

In addition to these eight players participating in this summer league, several other Tech players have kept the baseball mindset in other leagues throughout the nation. Five players are competing in the Sunbelt Baseball League, including junior outfielder Chase Burnett; four in the Coastal Plain League, including two players who split time between pitching and hitting in senior Patrick Long and sophomore Jake Davies; two in the Cal Ripken Sr. League, sophomore left-handed starter Jed Bradley and sophomore infielder Connor Winn; and one player each in the Alaska Baseball League, Great South League, Hampton’s Collegiate Baseball, Northwoods League and Valley Baseball League.
A year ago, the Jackets were expected to struggle as they adjusted to new head coach Paul Johnson’s unique option-based offensive scheme. Instead, Tech adapted quickly and pulled off a 9-4 campaign, ended long losing streaks against Florida State and Georgia in dramatic fashion, and earned a berth in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl. Most of the 2008 squad returns, and while there are holes to fill, there is plenty of reason for optimism as the Jackets head into year two under the defending ACC Coach of the Year.

Tech was a dominant force in the college football world in 1917, having allowed just 17 points all season including the season finale against Auburn. While the Tigers would eventually emerge as one of Tech’s main rivals, they were no match for the Engineers, as Tech crushed Auburn 68-7 to clinch the school’s first national championship. The win concluded a 9-0 season under Head Coach John Heisman.

At 9-1 heading into the game, the Bobby Dodd-led Tech squad endured a fierce battle in their only meeting to date with the Kansas Jayhawks. Tech managed to secure a 20-7 lead in the third quarter, but Kansas added a touchdown in the fourth quarter and drove down the field late in the game, reaching Tech’s goal line. However, Tech managed to force a fumble and recover to preserve the six-point win.

Tech was once again on the brink of a national title, having gone 11-0 leading up to the game and having surrendered ten points in a game only once all season. Facing Ole Miss, they allowed the Rebels the first touchdown but responded with four straight scores to win 24-7. It was the school’s third national title and Bobby Dodd’s first.
Offense
After proving last season that his offense was certainly a force to be reckoned with in the ACC, Head Coach Paul Johnson looked to take his triple-option offense to new heights this year. With nine starters returning on offense this year, including the ACC Offensive Player of the Year, junior B-back Jonathan Dwyer, the rushing attack of the Jackets appears to be well on its way to another highly productive season. However, this season Johnson hopes to implement more of his playbook and develop a greater passing threat to balance the run-heavy offense. There has been plenty of speculation that ACC defenses will catch up to the option attack in year two, and Johnson and his players will have to look to the critics by delivering on the field.

- Quarterbacks
Junior Josh Nesbitt started 11 games for the Jackets last season, completing 54 passes for 808 yards and two touchdowns, but he completed only 43.9 percent of his passes. Nesbitt demonstrated his ability to lead the team on several occasions, but how well he adapts to the more pass-intensive offense that Johnson plans to implement will be a key this season. If the junior handles pressure as well as he did last season, then the new offensive approach could prove highly successful.

- Running backs
Tech’s backfield is a clear strength on the team and is considered by many to be the deepest unit in the nation. Dwyer will anchor the B-back position once again in 2009, and he will once again be Nesbitt’s main back-up this year.

- Wide Receivers
Junior Demaryius Thomas will return as the primary receiving threat after leading the team with 39 receptions for 627 yards last season. Senior Speedregistered a 77-yard touchdown on a punt return in the season finale and will again be Nesbitt’s main back-up this year.

- Offensive Line
Injuries allowed sophomore Nick Claytor and junior Austin Barrick to receive starting experience at both tackle positions in 2008. Still, replacing a pair of seniors in David Brown and NFL draft pick Andrew Gardner will not be easy.

Defense
While the running game and the offense get most of the attention, the defense could be a cause for concern this season. While several top playmakers return, the unit also suffered heavy losses, particularly on the line. Additionally, the defense allowed an alarming 80 combined points over the final two games of the 2008 season after allowing 81 through the first seven games, raising speculation over whether the defense would hold up against stiffer competition. With big tests early on this year, including a September 10 matchup against ACC Player of the Year candidate C.J. Spiller and a potent Clemson offense, the Jackets’ defense will have to replicate its success from the first part of 2008 for the team to be a contender in the ACC.

- Defensive Line
The Jackets lost three starting defensive linemen—end Michael Johnson and tackles Vance Walker and Darryl Richard—who had combined for over 100 starts for the Jackets and were all taken in April’s NFL Draft. The lone returning lineman is junior defensive end Derrick Morgan, who emerged as one of the best ends in the ACC last year with seven sacks and 51 tackles, including 9.5 tackles for loss. Morgan will anchor a line that is still in flux heading into the season and could see some high pressure early on.

- Linebackers
The line backers were plagued by injuries last season and struggled to create pressure and stop the run. Depth remains a major concern, so Tech will compensate for this apparent weakness and its strengths in other areas by shifting to a 4-2-5 scheme with two linebackers and five defensive backs, an uncommon defensive scheme in both professional and college football. Senior Sedric Griffin and redshirt sophomore Kyle Jackson will likely be the starters to begin the year. Griffin had played sparingly prior to 2008 but emerged as the leader of the line-backing corps, narrowly edging out scholarship end and returning starter through the first seven games, raising speculation over whether the defense would hold up against stiffer competition. With sophomores Michael Taylor and Jerrard Tarrant, Tech will have plenty of options at the starting defensive tackles.

- Secondary
Considered the weakest part of the team several years ago, this unit will be the strength of the defense in 2009 thanks to plenty of depth and talent. Cornerback Jabaal Sheard and sophomore Steven>Sylvester> were both first team All-ACC selections. Senior Dominique Reese, who had three interceptions, and sophomore Jerrod Tarrant, who was suspended for the 2008 season, should be a major factor.

Special Teams
Junior Scott Blair returns after serving as the placekicker and punter for the Jackets last season. Blair, the first Tech player to handle both duties since 1983, his 12-of-19 field goal attempts and averaged just under 39 yards per punt in 2008. He will have competition at both positions from sophomore Chandler Anderson, who was the holder last year and made five punts during the Duke and Gardner-Webb games. Redshirt Jones returned 15 kickoffs for 354 yards and will probably be the main kick returner for Tech once again; he and Jerrard Tarrant will be the main candidates for punt returner after the departure of Andrew Smith. This unit was a major weakness for the Jackets, and the team has spent time working to improve in the off-season.

Coaching Staff
Paul Johnson silenced many of his critics with Tech’s surprising 9-4 record in a season many thought would be devoted to rebuilding the team and teaching players his unusual scheme. In Johnson’s first year as head coach at the U.S. Naval Academy, the Midshipmen went 2-10 in year one before achieving five straight winning seasons. Rather than hiring an offensive coordinator, Johnson will continue to call the plays for the offense, teaching players his unusual scheme. In Johnson’s first year as head coach at the U.S. Naval Academy, the Midshipmen went 2-10 in year one before achieving five straight winning seasons. Rather than hiring an offensive coordinator, Johnson will continue to call the plays for the offense, teaching players his unusual scheme.
Volleyball begins Tonya Johnson era with high hopes

By Nishant Prasad
Sports Editor

The 2009 season comes during a period of transition for Tech's volleyball team, as the squad will take the court with a young but talented roster and a new head coach. Still, the Jackets have strung together three straight 20-win seasons, and the players have had little trouble adapting to their new and accomplished coach.

Head Coach Tonya Johnson takes over the Tech program after the departure of Bond Shymansky, who coached the team for seven years before resigning in December to become the head coach at Marquette University. Johnson brings plenty of experience to Atlanta, having been involved in coaching Division I volleyball for 11 years. She was an assistant at LSU from 1998-2002 before moving on to an assistant job at Texas, where she has spent the last six seasons. The Longhorns have had great success in the strong Big XII Conference since she arrived; they have reached the NCAA Tournament each of the past five seasons and made it to the Elite Eight the last three, including a 2008 Final Four appearance when Johnson served as associate head coach.

Texas was one of four Big XII teams in the top 20 of the American Volleyball Coaches Association's final 2008 poll, while the highest-ranked ACC team was No. 35 Duke. However, Johnson believes that volleyball is growing in the Southeast and that the level of play in the ACC is rising.

"I think the ACC is an up-and-coming conference...there are a lot of young coaches, but there are [also] some veteran coaches who are starting to take their programs to another level," Johnson said.

She will inherit a Jackets squad that lost four key seniors from last year’s squad. Gone are outside hitter Talisa Kellogg, middle hitter Callie Miller, setter Alisamp Campbell, and libero Michelle Kendall, all of whom were vital to the team’s success last season.

Seven players return from the 2008 team, and at the forefront are a pair of seniors in outside hitter Christy DeMichelis and middle/rightside blocker Brittany Roderick. DeMichelis was second among Tech players last year with 317 kills per set and will likely take over as the Jackets’ primary outside hitter. Roderick was fourth on the team in kills and total attacks and should once again be a fixture in the starting lineup.

Johnson will be looking to the seniors to demonstrate leadership on the relatively young squad, and she expects that they will respond well. "I think we have good leaders in [Roderick] and [DeMichelis], and I think they want to go out on a high note," Johnson said.

Two juniors will be on the 2009 roster, including setter Mary Ashley Tippins, who played sparingly behind Niekamp but had a strong 3.08 assists per set for the season. Also returning is libero Jordan McCullers, who was second among Jackets players with 243 digs and will replace Kendall as the main defensive specialist.

Because Tech brings back only four seniors, Johnson is expecting his team to rely on its younger players frequently, especially on offense. Thankfully, the three sophomores on the roster received plenty of experience last season. Roderick will have help from fellow middle blocker Asia Stawicka, who played in 19 games last season and led the team in hit percentage at .390. Outside hitter Alison Campbell started 27 games in 2008, notching 147 kills and 23 service aces. Also new on the court is middle/rightside blocker Bailey Hunter, led all Tech outside hitters with a .258 hit percentage.

Johnson also has a strong off-season on the recruiting trail, and the Jackets will welcome six freshmen in 2009. The coach expects that all six will likely see considerable playing time this season.

"I think at some point they’re all going to be able to contribute...they’re here to compete for playing time, and that’s going to be a big plus," Johnson said.

Tech students who follow college football will see a familiar name among the freshmen: Nicki Meyer, a 5-foot-6 libero from Gainesville, Florida, is the daughter of University of Florida head football coach Urban Meyer. Austin, Texas native Hannah Tucci will also help shore up the libero position. The class is fairly balanced between offense and defense, with an outside hitter (Susan Carlson), a rightside hitter (Monique Mead), a middle blocker (Annie Cramnecki) and a setter (Jordan Kissan) also joining the team.

Johnson highlighted Mead as a player to watch this season. Last October, ESPN Rise profiled Mead as a rising star of the sport—a powerful, athletic 5-foot-10 left-hander whose leaping ability allows her to thrive on the front line, even at a position where most players are over six feet tall.

Mead graduated a semester early and enrolled at Tech in the spring to start working with the program early. "She’s a little bit ahead of everybody. I think she’s going to be a pretty special and talented player," Johnson said.

Of the six freshmen, Mead is the only one who attended high school in Georgia. Johnson’s past coaching stints have given her a number of connections outside the Southeast, and while she does intend to search within Georgia for talent, she prefers to look all across the country for recruits.

"We’ll try to get some of the top players in Georgia to stay home—that’s always a goal. There are some pockets of the country where volleyball is just better, and we want to keep recruiting in those pockets...[but] it’s starting to pick up in the Southeast. So I would hope that in [the near future] we’ll be able to keep the top players in Georgia," Johnson said.

As for the lineup, Johnson has made it clear that the girls must earn their playing time. "Our gym is opportunity-oriented; you don’t get to play because you’re a senior, you get to play because you’ve earned it," Johnson said.

Tech will open the season on August 28, when they take on the Georgia Bulldogs on the first day of the Georgia Tech Regency Suites Invitational. The Jackets will compete in three other invitational, and the ACC schedule will begin in earnest on September 25 when North Carolina State comes to O’Keefe Gym.
Incoming freshman and No. 2-ranked recruit Derrick Favors of South Atlanta High announced his intentions to attend Tech during a conference last winter at Buckhead’s ESPN zone.

By Nishant Prasad
Sports Editor

Last season, Tech’s men’s basketball team was very competitive in the majority of its ACC games, as ten of its conference matches were decided by five or fewer points. However, the Jackets’ 1-9 record in those close games tells the story of one of the most difficult seasons for the program in recent memory. Tech finished with an 11-18 record, including a league-worst 2-14 mark in ACC play during a season in which it seemed nothing could go right for the Jackets. Additionally, the team would be losing two key seniors to high school outside Georgia; the 6-foot-6 forward from Delaware is best known for his strong jump shooting ability.

Along with the recruits, two names more familiar to Tech basketball fans have confirmed they will be returning for the 2009-10 season. Senior wing forward D’Andre Bell missed all of last season after being diagnosed with spinal stenosis—a congenital narrowing of the spine—but a medical redshirt allowed him to retain his final year of eligibility, and he was cleared to play for the Jackets in 2009. Bell emerged as Tech’s best perimeter defender two years ago, and his defense, versatility, and leadership should aid the young Jackets squad greatly. Also returning is power forward Gani Lawal, who entered his name for the 2009 NBA Draft but withdrew and decided to return for his junior year. Lawal was the focus of Tech’s offense last season, finishing second on the team with 15.1 points per game and posting a team-high 9.5 rebounds per game.

“We know as a coaching staff that the most important things that have happened to this program are [Bell] being cleared and [Lawal] making the decision to come back,” Hewitt said.

In total, four starters and several reserves from last season’s team return, and the result will be a very crowded roster. However, Hewitt is not worried about finding playing time for everyone. “It’s a good problem to have, because you never know how things will play out. When we get to practice, and we start working out, guys start to separate themselves. It will work itself out. It always does,” Hewitt said.

Another freshman who could contribute early and often is Mfon Udofia, a 6-foot-2 point guard from Miller Grove High. The quick, left-handed Udofia was one of ESPN’s Top 100 prospects for the Class of 2009, and like Favors he led his high school to a state championship as Miller Grove took the Georgia Class AAAA title. The Jackets already have two established point guards in Shumpert and junior Moe Miller, but Udofia should compete for playing time.

Power forward recruit Kammeon Holsey is tall but thin, standing 6-foot-8 and weighing roughly 195 pounds, and unlike most post players he relies on length and explosiveness to play his position. While many of his opponents may be stronger, Holsey’s leaping ability and quickness make him an excellent rebounder and shot blocker. Holsey is more of a raw talent and may not play as much right away, but his athleticism and potential earned him an ESPNU Top 100 distinction.

The biggest player in the class is Daniel Miller, a 6-foot-10 center from Loganville Christian Academy who originally committed to Georgia before switching to Tech in April. Miller is the fourth and final Tech recruit in the ESPNU Top 100, and although attending Loganville meant he did not play against many other major NCAA prospects, he played well enough to draw attention from several Division I basketball programs. Miller is a solid player who should provide the Jackets with quality depth in the frontcourt.

The last two players in the class are shooting guard Glen Rice Jr. and small forward Brian Oliver, Rice, the son of longtime NBA three-point specialist Glen Rice, has a different skill set from his father and prefers to drive to the basket. Like Holsey, he may not play much right away but should contribute down the road. Oliver is the only Tech recruit who went to high school outside Georgia; the 6-foot-6 forward from Delaware is best known for his strong jump shooting ability.

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