**Spring practice hopefully provides answers at several positions for the Hokies this spring**

By Bill Roth

Today’s Kroger Roth Report will look more like one of those “all you can eat” breakfast buffets at a fancy hotel. Lots of different items for your enjoyment. No carving station or omelet bar here, but hopefully you’ll find something you like. Here goes:

**Let’s start with Tech’s offense:** As we count down the days to the spring game, Virginia Tech’s offense is still a work in progress, which is understandable considering the deep personnel losses the Hokies suffered following last season. How does losing eight starters affect Tech’s offense and coordinator Bryan Stinespring?

“You know when your pilot tells you that it’s going to be a bumpy flight? Well, we’re going to have a little bit of turbulence this spring,” Stinespring said.

So tighten your seatbelt and hang on, as the Hokies try to replace four starters on their offensive line. Starting center Andrew Miller returns, and Nick Becton (left tackle) and David Wang (left guard) have seen time before. Michael Via, who will likely start at right tackle, is missing spring ball while recovering from ACL surgery. That means this is a big spring for Vinston Painter, a fifth-year senior who’s always looked the part, but hasn’t been able to perform consistently.

This is an important spring for Vinston at right tackle, as well as Brent Benedict and Lawrence Gibson at right guard. Benedict is new. He transferred to Blacksburg from Georgia and sat out last year while continuing to recover from a serious knee injury. We’re getting our first look at Brent this spring. As for Gibson, he went to Hargrave for a year and then enrolled at Tech in January of 2010, so this is his third spring. Twenty-one-year-old sophomores eventually become 23-year-old seniors, so you hope he can get a jump-start this spring, too.

The Hokies started the same five offensive linemen for all 14 games last year. That consistency and continuity was huge for Logan Thomas and David Wilson, who set the school’s single-season rushing record. The Hokies allowed just 17 sacks in 14 games last year, the fewest at Tech since the 1996 team allowed just 16 (although that was in an 11-game schedule).

This is the time of year to tinker with the offensive line and see who can get it done. If the tinkering continues into September, that’s a concern.

**Ninety percent from freshmen?:** I asked running backs coach Shane Beamer if it’s possible that 90 percent of the Hokies’ 2012 rushing yards will come from freshmen.

“It might be higher than that,” was his response.

So who are these new guys? Well, all eyes this spring are on Michael Holmes from Harrisonburg, Va. With Wilson’s early departure to the NFL, Holmes has moved to the top of the depth chart after redshirting last year at Tech. Holmes (5-foot-11, 208 pounds), who rushed for nearly 3,000 yards his senior year at Harrisonburg High School, has a chance to really solidify his spot in the backfield with a strong spring.

Early enrollee J.C. Coleman from Oscar Smith [Va.] High School is just 5-7, but can really fly. His presence this spring will be huge as well. The question with Coleman isn’t his speed or ability to make big plays – you can see both in his stunning highlight videos. It’s how will a 5-7 running back help in blocking and pass protection.

“He’s a tough kid,” Beamer said. “We’ll throw a lot at him this spring to see how he does and see if his size is a liability in terms of blocking.”

Now remember, in August, three more running backs join the fold, including Drew Harris (6-1, 215) of Exton, Pa., speedster Chris Harris (6-0, 180) from Raleigh, N.C., and Trey Edmunds of Danville, Va., who might play linebacker or running back in college.

Among the returnees, Martin Scales is seeing action this spring and will in the fall, too.

“What you get with Martin is the ability to slide him to fullback if you need him, which can help keep defenses off balance when he’s on he field,” Beamer said. “He’s more of a north-south, downhill runner.”

The Hokies also get Tony Gregory back in the fall. He’s missing the spring while recovering from ACL surgery.

“We have 15 practices in the spring and then three weeks in the fall to see how the young guys look,” Beamer said.

In 2008, freshman Darren Evans ran for 77 percent of the Hokies’ rushing total from the tailback position. This fall, the duo, trio, (or foursome?) of rookies should eclipse that mark.

**A secondary experiment:** The plans of secondary coach Torrian Gray and the defensive staff this spring are interesting and exciting. In brief, the Hokies have some talent, but not a lot of depth or experience in their defensive backfield. So sophomore Kyshoen Jarrett is making the move from cornerback to the free safety position. Redshirt freshman Michael Cole, who is a bit bigger (6-1, 200), is also getting a really good look at that position. Gray also moved Antone Exum to boundary corner. He’ll be on one side opposite Kyle Fuller.

“The free safety position is important for us since that’s the guy who makes the calls,” defensive coordinator Bud Foster said. “But you get beat quickest at corner.”

Exum’s a big guy (6-0, 220) who started 11 games at free safety and three at rover in 2011. He was the Hokies’ leading tackler last year. He’d be Tech’s biggest corner since Jimmy Williams, and Foster and Gray are spending this spring seeing how he performs in the new role. But in doing so, the Hokies are creating depth in having guys who can play multiple positions, as Fuller has done the past several years. This allows the Hokies to adjust to the competition.

For example, when the Hokies face Georgia Tech’s running attack, they’ll be able to play both Exum and Fuller, who are both outstanding tacklers, up on the line of scrimmage, as they’ve done in the past. Detrick Bonner and Boye Aromire are now your rovers for 2012. And again, they are transplanted corners who both have terrific futures. For all these guys, it will be interesting to see how they perform and if the moves become permanent for the fall.

**Tech’s Charles Steger chairing BCS Presidential Committee**: The future of college football’s postseason is about to change radically, and Virginia Tech president Charles Steger will be front and center in this process. Dr. Steger is the chair of the Presidential Oversight Committee that will convene this summer to re-work the BCS. Dr. Steger is one of 12 university presidents on the committee, which includes some real “power people” in college athletics, including Texas President Bill Powers, Nebraska’s Harvey Perlman, Notre Dame’s Reverend John Jenkins, Florida’s Bernie Manchin, and USC’s Max Nikias among others.

I’m excited that Dr. Steger has a seat at this table (at the “head” of the table in this case) and will represent the ACC, along with Commissioner John Swofford and Georgia Tech AD Dan Radakovich. The commissioners and bowl executives are gathering again in South Florida on April 24-26 to continue discussions on various models, including:

1. A plus-one model. Following all the bowls, the top two teams are selected to meet in a championship game.
2. Modify the current BCS by eliminating automatic qualifying conferences, allow more than two teams per conference to participate, and create opportunities for conference champions to play in different BCS bowls.
3. Create a four-team playoff with the games taking place (a) in current bowl games, (b) at neutral sites, (c) on campus sites, (d) a combination of the above.
4. Four-team plus. This basically protects the Rose Bowl and its tie-in with the Pac-12 and Big Ten in which those champions always meet in the Rose Bowl even if they’re ranked in the top four.

You can read *USA Today’s* Steve Wieberg’s excellent piece, and see the actual BCS proposal options here: http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/football/story/2012-04-04/bcs-focuses-on-four-postseason-plans/53996360/1

Any proposal the commissioners come up with this month would then be presented to the various conference’s presidents, including Steger, at the different league meetings in late May and early June. Then, the 11 Division I-A commissioners and Notre Dame AD Jack Swarbrick will reconvene in Chicago in June to hopefully reach a consensus.

Big changes ahead? You bet.

“I do think there is a sense in the room with the other commissioners that there needs to be change, and it needs to significant,” Swofford said.

Any changes will go into effect for the 2014 season.

**What’s the best “end game” for VT?:** Blowing up the current BCS model, while inevitable, is a point of some internal conflict because this system has (with the exception of the 2000 season) worked pretty well for Virginia Tech. Amazingly, in the 18 years since the “Bowl Alliance” (which evolved into the BCS) began in 1994, the Hokies have gone to either the No. 1 (BCS) or No. 2 bowl (Gator or Chick-fil-A) in the Big East or ACC 15 times. Think about that for a second. Just *three times in 18 years* has Virginia Tech slipped below its respective league’s No. 2 bowl. Tech’s played in the Sugar Bowl or Orange Bowl eight times, the Gator Bowl five times, and the Chick-fil-A Bowl twice.

Some sort of four-team playoff seems inevitable now that the Big Ten has acquiesced from its original position opposing the notion when Swofford and SEC counterpart Mike Slive originally proposed it several years ago. Clearly, the commissioners are making changes that will enhance the sport, and that’s good for fans. By creating new and exciting bowl opportunities for all teams, fans will have the chance to travel to new sites for postseason football. We’ll have a sense of the model, and college football’s postseason future, by this summer.