**Offensive line has size and right attitude, but the key this spring is developing chemistry**

By Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech quarterback Logan Thomas usually receives the bulk of the interview requests on the Hokies’ football squad. A lot of that comes about because Thomas is not afraid to answer questions forthrightly, though he hardly classifies as a bomb thrower.

He answered a question in such a manner following the Hokies’ first day of spring practice, a session cut short by the jags of lightning piercing the evening. He was asked about the offensive line – a sizzling topic this spring and a source of consternation among those who cheer for orange and maroon

“The o-line will be fine,” Thomas said. “Like always. Coach [Curt] Newsome [Tech’s offensive line coach] will get them right.”

Maybe that unit will be just fine by the time the season starts. But there’s no denying the Hokies’ top priority this spring is to get that group headed in the “right” direction.

Tech lost four fifth-year seniors off last season’s offensive line. Behind that unit, the Hokies finished third in the ACC in total offense and second in rushing offense. Granted, others (e.g. David Wilson) played big roles, but nothing gets accomplished without solid offensive line play. Those four starters combined for 159 career starts, and two of them, Blake DeChristopher and Jaymes Brooks, both started 51 games in their careers.

So the Hokies lost both talent and experience.

“No question,” Newsome said. “Those guys played a lot of snaps at Virginia Tech, and that is always hard to replace.

“But that’s what happens. They do graduate. The ones we have coming back, I’m excited about them and their attitude, and I think they have a chance to be good also.”

Any 2012 success starts with lone returning starter Andrew Miller, who anchors Tech’s line from the center spot. He represents a great place to start when molding the 2012 unit because he possesses an NFL future and leadership qualities to match.

So the Hokies need to find four other starters. The good news is there is potential there.

At left tackle, Nick Becton could be considered a starter. Though he hasn’t started a game in his career, the 6-foot-6, 328-pounder has played in 31 games in his career, so he’ll be fine.

Unfortunately, Michael Via is missing spring practice while recovering from knee surgery. He provides both experience (24 career games, 3 starts) and versatility (center, guard and tackle).

His absence, though, has left needed reps for Vinston Painter, the X-factor of Tech’s offensive line. Painter possesses all the physical attributes. The redshirt senior stands 6-6, weighs 305 pounds, runs a 4.7 in the 40 and benches 430 pounds. Now, those attributes need to translate on the field.

“When you know you’re not going to get as many reps and when you’re not getting many reps, at certain times, you don’t practice like you’re going to play on Saturday,” Newsome said. “He’s really taking this as a challenge. He really wants to be a good football player, and that’s a big part of the battle.”

The two guards figure to be David Wang and Bruce Benedict, a 6-5, 311-pound redshirt sophomore who transferred from Georgia last year. Newsome planned on playing Wang a lot last season, but the 6-1, 286-pounder broke his foot against ECU and missed the rest of the season. He’s back this spring.

Also, Caleb Farris, a 6-4, 310-pound sophomore, and Matt Arkema, a 6-3, 285-pound redshirt sophomore, figure into the mix. Arkema played in four games last season as a guard, with Farris’ four games coming at center.

Heading toward the end of spring, the depth chart featured a first team of Becton, Wang, Miller, Benedict and Painter. Via certainly figures in, and if Farris and/or Arkema come along, that gives Newsome seven or eight pieces.

As a group, this bunch will be bigger than last year’s offensive line. In fact, six of them weigh more than 300 pounds, and most in the group have some athleticism.

“I think there’s some toughness to this group,” Newsome added. “I think they bring that to the table. It’s a physical group. They’re bigger, but I do think there’s athletic ability there. I think they’ve got the right attitude, and they’ve approached things the right way.”

The key will be getting them to play together. For that reason, Newsome plans on keeping each at a specific spot this spring. He wants each to learn that spot, and that, in turn, helps develop cohesion. The sooner that group develops cohesion, the better Tech’s offense will play.

Tech’s staff obviously knows this. So, too, does Thomas, and he’s banking on them being just fine by the end of spring.