

# Tech's Vick ready for hype

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — About 220 miles, several flocks of sheep and countless tobacco fields east of where Michael Vick was rehearsing for a repeat virtuoso performance at Virginia Tech, the man who perhaps knows him best made a prediction.

"This," said Warwick High School Coach Tommy Reamon, "is the biggest year of his life."

An intriguing statement, especially considering that as a redshirt freshman, Vick promptly became the nation's most electrifying player, running and passing the Hokies to an undefeated regular season and into the national championship game.

But Reamon, a man who regards Vick almost as a son, wasn't just talking about his on-the-field exploits.

"It has nothing to do with how many touchdowns he throws," Vick's high school coach said. "It has something to do with if he throws two interceptions in the first game, they're going to eat him alive. They're going to talk about him like a dog."

"People are going to not accept him. And then I'm going to have to worry about him when he walks into that apartment and shuts that door and looks at himself in the mirror. "So," he added, exhaling slowly, "this is big."

For the record, Reamon said he thinks Vick will do just fine, both on and off the field. And so far, he's made all the right calls concerning the 6-foot-1, 214-pound left-hander, who burst on the college football scene last September with such force that just three months later, he would gain 13 first-place votes and finish third in the Heisman Trophy voting.

This hot and cloudy day, on the field where Reamon turned the soft-spoken Vick into what some are calling a new breed of quarterback — elusive, mobile, accurate and improvisational — Vick's 16-year-old brother, Marcus, is flinging passes all over the place.

Standing in the middle of the field, Reamon is wearing the smile of someone who knows something special is going to happen again.

"He's going to be great and he doesn't know it," Reamon said of the high school junior while walking toward the sideline to greet Vick's parents, Brenda and Michael Boddie, both of whom are sporting Virginia Tech maroon and orange garb. "He's got more fluidness than Michael at this stage."

Better than Michael? Perhaps Reamon, a former pro running back in the mid-1970s, has been swept up in Vickmania like nearly everyone else. But one person not questioning Reamon is Michael Vick himself, who remembers his ex-coach telling him before the '99 season about being ready to embark on an incredible journey.

"It was like he saw it coming," Vick said last month in Blacksburg, Va.

Reamon wasn't alone. Hokies coach Frank Beamer, offensive coordinator and quar-

terbacks coach Rickey Bustle, and his mother all told Vick the same thing.

Marcus said: "We knew he was going to be good, but he shocked all of us."

Michael Vick, who in high school took a back seat to the area's, if not the nation's, biggest star in Hampton High's Ronald Curry, now at North Carolina, was a virtual unknown when last season started. By season's end, Vick had thrown for 1,840 yards and 12 touchdowns, run for 585 yards and another eight TDs and led the Hokies to an 11-0 record before a 46-29 loss to Florida State in the Sugar Bowl.

Vick was magnificent even in defeat, accounting for 322 of the Hokies' 502 yards. He threw for 225 yards and a TD and ran for 97 yards and another score.

"That guy was awesome," Seminoles safety Sean Key said after the game.

The 2000 season opens next weekend and the 20-year-old Vick is the Heisman front-runner.

"Michael will be good," Beamer said. "He hasn't backed down from anything that's happened yet. There will be a lot written about what's expected, but I've told Michael not to worry about that, just prepare yourself well, play the way you can and everything will turn out fine."

Easy for Beamer to say now. But just what was it about Vick that gave those among his inner circle enough confidence to predict greatness?

"When I first saw him on film when he was in the 10th grade, the quick release hit you like a sledgehammer," said Bustle, who starts his 13th season with the Hokies.

Ask Bustle about Vick's greatest asset, and you'll get this: "Is it his arm? Is it his running? No. I'd have to say it's his personality. He is the most even-keeled young athlete I've ever been around. The coolness he plays with, his maturity? I've never seen anything like it."

His coaches credit his mother, who was just 16 when she had Michael's older sister, Christine, and 17 when she gave birth to Michael. Exhausted after coming home every day after high school to take care of her babies, Brenda quickly vowed her children would have a better life.

As Christine remembers, Michael grew up not only surrounded by love but very much the glowing center of the close-knit family even in the absence of his father.

He never lacked for attention.

These days, after gracing the cover of nearly every preseason magazine, appearing on national TV to receive an ESPY award for college player of the year and getting drafted by the Colorado Rockies after not having picked up a baseball in six years ("We think he's that talented," the Rockies said), it would be

understandable if Vick were somehow changed by fame. But, his coaches say, he's not.

"Michael is still Michael, that's what's so amazing about him," Beamer said. "He is a kid you want to be around. He's confident, and he hasn't let all this get to him."

It's easy to see how talented Vick is. But what his family knows better than anyone else is what makes him tick. And that's having a support system when he needs it. He calls his mother nearly every day and she still calls him "Ookie," the name given him by his aunt after she saw the muscles he had even as a toddler. He talks to Reamon before every game, and trusts his coaches implicitly.

"He needed to go into a relationship situation," Reamon said. "He's not some kid from a bad background. He's got a tremendous family and a tremendous support system, and I was happy when he chose Tech."

And happy when Vick was redshirted in 1998.

"We just wanted to bring him along slowly, not give him too much too fast" Bustle said.

"We had a quarterback, and Michael needed to get settled into school and get a good grasp of what we were doing."

"It was best for Michael," said Brenda, standing near her minivan with the personal license plate "VT MOM 7."

Three years after Vick's graduation, Reamon remains as protective as a mother hen.

He was, for instance, annoyed when he found out Vick had signed 300 autographs at Virginia Tech's media day earlier this month.

"Would you want to do that?" Reamon asked. "The most important thing is how the adults around him handle things."

The Hokies sports information office, which set up a Web site for Vick last month (nearly 100,000 hits since July 26), has been deluged with interview requests. Beamer promises the school will do its best to keep Vick's schedule under control.

"People need to have access to him, but his life doesn't need to change so much that he's get-

ting away from what's really important, and that's how he plays," Beamer said.

"The thing with Michael is he has a hard time saying no, so we have to put some order in his week."

Can there ever be order again? Agents are swarming, anticipating he will turn pro after the season. "I just don't talk to them," he says.

People recognize him at Kmart and Burger King. "It comes with the territory. It's OK," he adds.

And folks in Newport News recognize his mother, the most famous school bus driver in town.

"Are you Michael Vick's mom?" the kids ask her as they hop aboard and look up at pictures of her two football-playing sons hanging from a visor. "Can you get me his autograph?"

Brenda's bus, No. 121, broke down last year, but she'll be getting a new one soon.

"Maybe they'll give me bus No. 7," she said, smiling.

**"We knew he was going to be good, but he shocked all of us"**

**Marcus Vick**  
Michael Vick's brother

**"Michael is still Michael, that's what so amazing about him."**

**Frank Beamer**  
Virginia Tech Head Coach

# Slechta returns to boost defensive line

Slechta from page 14

"We think those three will do a great job of controlling the line of scrimmage," he said.

Controlling the line of scrimmage is crucial to NU's defensive scheme, first-year defensive coordinator Craig Bohl said.

"You have to establish the line of scrimmage and shut down the run," he said.

"So if we are not able to do that, then our fancy stuff doesn't work too well. Their impact is going to be critical for us this year."

Practice Notes: Nebraska's first-team defense received its Blackshirts on Monday. Sophomore line-backers Randy Stella and Scott Shanle, along with sophomore rush end DeMoine Adams, received the distinction for the first time.

Kaiser said that the distribution differed from years past. Former defensive coordinator Charlie McBride used to hand out the Blackshirts in the locker room personally.

But Bohl held a meeting that included a video featuring former Huskers talking about what it means to wear the Blackshirt.

**"Jeremy (Slechta) is very tough, and he understands the difference between pain and injury."**

**Jeff Jamrog**  
first-year defensive line coach

"It was neat how they did it this year," he said. It is one of the best feelings in the world."

# Woods-May match shows Tiger is merely one to marvel at

TIGER from page 14

from human emotion on the course, while being interviewed and in the public domain.

So Tiger is not a man. He's Tiger. There's never been another athlete like him.

He's so scarily driven, so totally fixated on golf, that I can only marvel at his greatness. I cannot like him.

If and when he takes those hands off the bill, he won't be as successful.

And until he takes those hands off the bill, he won't be able to understand the well-rounded personality, the inner peace, of a guy like Bob May.

While Tiger nipped the anonymous man by a stroke, the imperfect May, composed of heart, mind and body, and not a million swing thoughts, came out infinitely ahead.

Until Tiger straightens from the crouch and looks around, like May did Sunday, like Michael Jordan remembered to, like Arnold Palmer did so well, I can't like him. I can only marvel.

# Jayhawks' hopes for season rest on well-stocked backfield

KU PREVIEW from page 14

Winbush is "as healthy as he has ever been," Allen said.

Allen and his coaching staff said they hope that the trio, the strongest backfield in recent Jayhawk history, can propel the team to greater things. KU finished 5-7 last season, but return 17 starters from that team.

With a defense anchored by Carl Nesmith, a First Team All-Big 12 selection at defensive back last season, and a solid offensive line, the backfield will have help.

Allen has said his 2000 team

will be better than last season. Whether that results in a better record depends on the increased strength of the Big 12, he said.

This much is certain. With Winbush, 5-foot-7, 180 pounds, and Norris in the backfield, the Jayhawks will have a 1-2 punch few conference teams can rival.

It will be like night and day when the two run the ball.

"That will keep a whole lot of defenses off balance," Norris said. "He's shifty and quick, and I'm a bruiser that's just going to run people over."

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**SPAGHETTI WORKS**



# KSU sticks with Beasley in game against Iowa

ROBERSON from page 14

look to him." Elsewhere around the Big 12 Conference, similar quarterback races are being waged, while new quarterbacks settle into positions where they're badly needed.

A case in point is Baylor, where Coach Kevin Steele pins much of his team's hopes on Greg Cicero.

Cicero, a former Texas quarterback, spent one season in junior college before transferring to the Bears. He had the starting nod upon arrival, and former quarterback Odell James has been moved.

"He's thrown the ball well and all those things," Steele said. "But the thing that's most impressive is that when Greg is in the huddle, people listen to him."

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