

A Season To Remember

Soundbites

"There's vindication of the decision of the trustees to commit to this level of football several years ago. This championship probably will do more to bring together our alumni from all around the country than almost anything else. We are a unique university, and winning the national championship will only propel us to greater national success."



Bobby Ukrop
UR Class of 1969
and Hall of Famer in golf, basketball

"I was tearing the house up after they won. After they lost to Appalachian State last year, I had a gut feeling they were going to go all the way this year."



James Bennett
Chesterfield

"It was awesome, [an] unbelievable game from beginning to end. It was pretty incredible, considering how hard academically this school is, and to have athletes who are as great outside the classroom as they are inside the classroom."



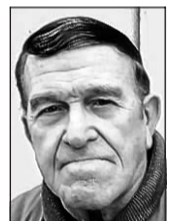
Jason Blackwell
UR Class of 2007

"I played with a lot of the juniors and seniors, and I'm so proud of these guys because they've come a long way since I was playing with them. It was a lot of fun watching them."



Joey Fore
UR Class of 2006
and former kicker

"This championship is a once-in-a-lifetime happening. And it didn't happen in a lot of people's lives at Richmond."



Ralph Peachee
UR Class of 1957
and former halfback

"It's an exciting time for the university. Not only will it be known as an outstanding academic institution, but now they'll be known as national champions forever. It's a big boost for the community."



Tasha Swaby
UR Class of 2002
and former basketball player

"This is the most exciting thing that's ever happened for Richmond athletics, and I've been watching Richmond football since the 1940s. Nothing even comes close."



Walter Tucker
UR Class of 1953

"The game was good. The team is great."



James Barber, 5 (above)
self-proclaimed biggest UR fan.

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UR fans savor crowning glory

Enthusiastic crowd salutes championship team and trophy at Robins Center

BY JAMIE C. RUFF
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

Richmond first-year coach Mike London stepped from the Spiders' team bus and held the championship trophy over his head.

"We brought this championship home for you," he told about 300 fans who gathered in front of the Robins Center on campus yesterday to welcome the national championship football team.

Fans chanted "UR" and waved posters as the players made their way off four buses that brought them from Richmond International Airport.

London thanked the crowd, players, coaches and staff for a season that concluded with the Spiders' 24-7 Football Championship Subdivision title victory over Montana on Friday night at Chattanooga, Tenn. The NCAA title is the first in school history.

London said he was "still on cloud nine right now."

"This turnout is awesome," he said. "This is truly amazing."

With the semester concluded at Richmond, the crowd included a large number of alumni from the area. Among those on hand were Jim and Jackie Sattenfield. Jim graduated from UR in 1948 and his wife graduated the next year. Jackie Sattenfield is the daughter of legendary UR coach and alumni Malcolm Pitt.



JOE MAHONEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

Fans of all ages came out to greet the national champion Spiders at the Robins Center.

"I think he's in heaven looking down, thrilled to death," she said.

"[I'm] just so excited," she said. "Happy for all of them and what this means for the school. Those boys made us proud and they... represented the school in outstanding fashion."

Added Jim Sattenfield: "I never thought we'd see a day like this."

Jenny Connors, who received her un-

dergraduate degree from UR in 2004 and completed law school in 2007, called the victory "an early Christmas present for the players and the fans."

Will Healy, 23, a backup quarterback and special teams player, said the support of the fans helped the team. "It carried us through... and it's been a tremendous boost to us," he said.

Healy is from Chattanooga and grad-

uated from UR last week. He also may have been responsible for the largest contingent at the game — by his estimate about 400 to 500 family and friends.

"It was incredible to win the national championship in my last game," Healy said.

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ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

Linebacker Eric McBride (31), making the game's only interception to set up a field goal that put the game out of reach, is among the UR starters who will be back in 2009.

Is this the rise of a power?

Expectations continue to grow as 18 starters return next season

BY JOHN O'CONNOR
Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. Mark Farley enunciated what University of Richmond football fans have longed to hear.

The Northern Iowa coach, a few days before his team fell to the Spiders in the FCS semifinals, sized up UR's operation by saying "Sometimes you'll come across a team where one or two players make a difference. They make a big run and the team has a good year."

"And then, you play programs. As I see it right now, Richmond has developed [itself] into a program, because the system fits the players and I think the players can come and go, but the system will always keep them as a top-10 team in the country."

Consistency, until recently, has been a major concern for UR. The Spiders now have four straight winning seasons, the first time that has been accomplished since 1937-40. Additional success may be forthcoming following a 13-3 championship year because:

■ Of the 24 starters, including kickers, in Friday's 24-7 FCS title-game win over Mon-

UR's personnel breakdown

A glance at next year's team:

Starters lost: RB Josh Vaughan, DE Lawrence Sidbury, DE Sherman Logan, FB John Crone, TE Joe Stewart, OL Evan Lehner.

Starters returning: QB Eric Ward, WR Kevin Grayson, LB Eric McBride, CB/KR Justin Rogers, CB/PR Derek Hatcher, K Andrew Howard, OL Matt McCracken, OL Michael Silva, DT Martin Parker, DT Parker Miles, LB Patrick Weldon, LB Collin McGonaghy, CB David Horton, S Michael Ireland, P Brian Raadford, OL Jared Decker, OL Drew Lachenmayer, WR Jordan Mitchell.

tana, 18 are scheduled to return. Among them are quarterback Eric Ward, leading receiver Kevin Grayson and the top nine tacklers from the 2008 team, basically a junior-sophomore outfit.

■ Richmond coach Mike London, known for his recruiting as an assistant at Virginia, said Spiders recruiting "has really, really been amped up. We've been fortunate to be involved with a lot of really good players."

■ Last week, the first visible sign that UR's on-campus stadium is coming appeared at First Market Stadium, the site adjacent to the Robins Center where the new football facility will be built. Posts were in place for a retaining fence, part of the construction process. UR Athletic Director Jim Miller said on Thursday that he feels strongly that the on-campus stadium, which will seat about 9,000, will be ready for the 2010 season.

What's not to like about this picture?

"I was very concerned [about the future of UR football] if we didn't get that stadium on campus," said Dave Clawson, the Richmond coach during 2004-07, and recently named Bowling Green's coach after a year as Tennessee's offensive coordinator. "Now that they're able to get the stadium on campus, I think Richmond is poised to really continue to be a force in the Colonial Athletic Association."

"That doesn't mean you're going to win the league every year or go to the playoffs every year, but I think without question, Richmond is in a great position there."

It's likely UR's staff, given the success, will experience attrition. But there's no reason at this point to believe London is moving on.

"There are not even words to describe what he's done for this

program," linebacker Patrick Weldon said. "I feel like he brought in kind of a new attitude to our program."

Energy. Passion. London, 48, played with them as a UR defensive back, and coaches with them. Add poise and understanding, too. He inherited 16 starters from an 11-3 team that reached the 2007 FCS semifinals, and huge expectations in his first year as a head coach.

"What I had to do was just put the plan together and say 'Look, I don't want to mess this up,'" London said.

There will undoubtedly be requests from rabid supporters to increase the recruiting budget and coaches' salaries, expand facilities and loosen entrance requirements to put UR in position to attract even better players. London knows those adjustments probably aren't coming. He isn't crushed.

"The reality of it is, this is one of the best academic schools in the country, and this is a [program] that has won conference championships, and they go hand-in-hand," he said. "I think the support that [Dr. Edward L. Ayers, the school president], with new leadership, has given, I'm quite sure — I feel confident — that we'll be moving in a positive direction."

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Woody

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team and that we were going to execute."

They stuck together. They didn't crack. And a diamond of a season was produced. They can attribute that to many things.

There was the music at practice.

A compilation put together by coach Mike London blared through most of the Spiders' workouts. Ostensibly, it was to prepare the offense for hostile environments.

"It also makes practice a little more fun," senior defensive end Lawrence Sidbury said. "He's always trying to find stuff like that to keep things comfortable."

They will remember how they had each other's back. Like Friday night, when linebacker Eric McBride crashed through the Montana offensive line and delivered a punishing blow to quarterback Cole Bergquist.

"I knew if I missed him, somebody was going to be there to get him," McBride said. "That's the kind of defense we play."

They will remember that in the week leading to the championship game and on game day, they expressed themselves. They shared their emotions during a meeting in the team hotel, then relaxed and played.

"The one thing we could control was our mindset going into the game," London said. "The worst thing you can do is try to overemphasize how important the game is. Then, the players start thinking they can't make any mistakes. We wanted to keep them free from that thought process."

Some Spiders will remember this season was about more than just the championship. It was about the journey that led to the title.

Sidbury arrived on campus after a 2-9 season in 2003. He redshirted as a freshman and watched the team go 3-8.

"When I first came in, nobody really knew what a Richmond Spider was," Sidbury said. "I'm happy I've been a part of a group of guys who have been able to turn the program around."

Sidbury and his fellow seniors leave with a four-year record of 39-15 and a national championship.

"Now, when you say 'Richmond Spiders,' people are not going to say, 'Who are those guys?'" Sidbury said. "That is gratifying. That right there is worth something."

That is a season and career worth remembering — forever.

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