

**Virginia Tech Baseball**  
**Coach John Szefc Introductory Press Conference**  
**June 15, 2017**

**Director of Athletics Whit Babcock**

**Opening Remarks**

“Welcome everyone, it’s a beautiful day in Blacksburg. It’s good to have you here and we especially want to welcome Coach Szefc, his wife Barbara and their children Anna, John Michael and Sam to the Hokie family. We’re proud to have ya’ll here. We’re also proud to have you serve as the next Hokies head coach and I believe you and your family will find Virginia Tech and all of the New River Valley and community to be really special and we’re really proud to have you all as a part of that.

“Before we look ahead with anticipation and excitement to the future of Virginia Tech baseball, I just want to make sure I pause for a minute and honor the past a little bit as well. I certainly want to start off and recognize the efforts of Pat Mason. He was here for seven years as a head coach and an assistant. He was a wonderful Hokie and did it the right way and we’re wishing he and his family the best. Coach Mason certainly played an integral role in of our vision for what will soon be completed, Union Park and English Field.

“I also want to thank our student-athletes, our players for the effort they put forth this season. We talk about athletics teaching life lessons and certainly in life you have change and adversity that comes at you; I think they have handled it very well and competed very hard. Their grades were excellent and so on and so forth.

“When we first sat down and we started talking about who is the next coach going to be - certainly names come at you – but where we like to start is what are the traits we want our next head coach to have? That’s where we start. Forget the names, what do we really want them to be about and that’s what we used to guide us through the process. Through talking to people here, through talking to our current team we really put together around 10 traits. We didn’t start off with 10 but it’s a nice round number.

“This is what we started out with and I think you’ll see very soon the reason we’re honored to have Coach Szefc be our next head coach. In no particular order the ten were: We wanted our next head coach to have ACC or state of Virginia roots ideally. We wanted them to have the ability to succeed at the power five level and compete at the elite level of college baseball and that’s what the ACC is. We wanted our coach to be able to successfully recruit the Mid-Atlantic and the East coast.

We wanted our next coach to be excellent at player evaluation, but also developing talent. We were looking for a coach that brings them in at age 18 and they’re better at 19, 20 and 21 and that is always the sign of a good coach.

“Number five was we wanted our coach to show humility and to represent the brand and fabric of Virginia Tech and this community. However we also wanted them, number six, to be one heck of a competitor. We like the phrase stay humble and stay hungry if you’re combining humility and competitor; we feel that’s that. Number seven was we wanted a coach that genuinely cares about his players and the student-athlete experience. The eighth, and again these are in no particular order they’re all equally important, we wanted a coach with a clean NCAA record with an academic commitment and is the total package off the field as well as on the field.

“We wanted a coach that had that fire in his belly, so to speak, and the energy and passion to grow our culture and take us to the top of the ACC. To have that perseverance and grit and to develop us initially first and foremost as a challenger brand and then once we get to that level, we’re going to develop into a championship brand. I’m confident we have the gentleman to do that.

“Number 10 was, we wanted a coach to help us continue our momentum. On campus right now, what we’ve got is an athletic department that is rolling along really well. We used this analogy when we’re talking about it. If we’re rolling down the interstate as an athletic department, we want a coach to come in, merge right along and help us go faster. That momentum you can feel it. On this campus and in this department, that is what we also wanted a coach to fit and to do that to take us onward and upward.

“Coach Szefc certainly checks all 10 of those boxes and then some. His name came up very early in the process. Once we started with traits and started doing our homework behind the scenes, it came up early and often and it kept coming up. We talked to a number of coaches; we talked to scouts, we talked to some head coaches who are now currently in the college world series, we talked to some coaches that were formerly in the College World Series. We talked to the head of umpires’ crews and time and time again, it came back and checked all the right boxes and we were convinced he was the right guy. We certainly liked his track record and resume obviously.”

## **Virginia Tech Baseball Head Coach John Szefc**

### ***Opening Statement***

“It’s a privilege and an honor to stand before you as Virginia Tech’s head baseball coach. In my first two years at Maryland, we were in the ACC so we visited here as an opponent. In those visits, I had the opportunity to observe Virginia Tech Athletics, the passionate fan base, and the championship culture. It intrigued me and I have followed it over the years. When you step foot on this campus, it doesn’t take long to realize how committed the administration is to being competitive and developing student athletes on and off the field.

“One of the first things I did when I got to Maryland was to create an academic culture, which is what I intend to do here. From an administrative standpoint, I want to thank President Sands and Whit (Babcock) and the Board of (Visitors) for this great opportunity. Whit’s reputation as an athletic director speaks for itself. It’s a great feeling to be included in this group of great coaching hires.

“I want to thank the Maryland players, assistant coaches, and support staff. We accomplished outstanding things in these past five years. We created a positive working environment which is what we intend to do here. I try to create an environment where I don’t micromanage people. I let the coaches’ coach and the players play.

“As far as my vision here, we’ll work very hard to put our players in the right position on and off the field. Two of the things I talk regularly about are preparation and taking care of the details. We like to set the standard of not looking too far down the road. One thing I have always tried to do is stand behind our guys and fight for them. It’s important for the players to know that the head coach has their back through the ups and downs.

“From a timing perspective, this is a great time to be a part of this baseball program. We compete in the top baseball conference in the country and that is something that I embrace. The commitment we’ve made from a facility standpoint immediately grabs your interest and intrigue.

“The value we can put in front of a recruit is intangible. I don’t think any recruit that we’ll be after can look away from what Virginia Tech offers. I’ve spoken to about 90 percent of the current team and they seem very intrigued and excited to get back here and start working. My staff will be comprised of high-energy, non-ego guys that understand our recruiting footprint and are willing to go out and do what I need them to do.

“This is Virginia Tech and we want to build it right with Virginia players first. We have great competition in the state. I want to thank everyone for coming out. This is a great day for my family and me.

***On Whit’s presentation to hire him:***

“There really weren’t any magic words. I’ve been a student of college baseball for a long time and I started reading about this situation a long time ago. A lot of my interest had to do with what he was doing with the other sports. When we did talk, I already felt like I knew a great deal. For me, it was all about how the situation was handled. Whit made it extremely personal so it wasn’t all about business. They made me feel very comfortable with things.”

***On the challenge of rebuilding at Maryland:***

“It started with the players. I was able to get some good, young coaches. They wanted to get out and recruit. We had a good foundation of players, especially in the freshman class. It was a day-to-day development. It was all about preaching the culture and expectations. We made sure they knew it wasn’t okay to lose on Sunday and looked at what we can do to change these

problems. We coined the phrase 'what you think will happen probably will' and worked to change our mentality."

***On the difficulty on rebuilding the Virginia Tech program:***

"I don't think any situation is the same. We have really good returning players and a great class coming in. I still need to learn more about these returning players and evaluate them to learn where we're at in terms of rebuilding.

"Based on my experience, I go into the situation and evaluate it and listen a lot. I don't come in and start beating my chest. You need to learn the people and learn the situation. I'm not sure how hard it will be because I haven't seen where the players are at physically and where they are mentally. We'll put our plan in place before they ever get here and then we'll adjust it day-to-day."

***On competition for in-state recruiting:***

"There are a lot of things to sell to a recruit at Virginia Tech. The backgrounds of the coaching staff that we will put together will create value. I'll bring in my past to create credibility. A lot of Virginia athletes want to come here to play and we're in a position to confirm these reasons for them and get them to come here."

***On the importance of the new baseball facility:***

"I try to keep our players grounded and not caught up in the frills of college athletics. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter the size of the jumbotron or how cool the uniforms are, it matters how good you are and how tough you play. However, if you don't have the facilities, you may never get the talents you want to come play here in the first place."

***On the rivalries in the ACC:***

"It's hard for me to say which school would be our rival. Outside of Virginia, I don't really look at it from a rivalry standpoint. I don't try to pump up weekend games for our players. This isn't football, so we need to keep our guys relaxed so they can operate and compete at a high level. Baseball players don't perform well when you're constantly raising the bar for that particular weekend. We only need to relax and slow the game down. If you have players who can handle the mental side of things and slow everything down, you do pretty well."