

# TAYLOR-MADE

BY CLAY MEYER

**In his four years under center at Virginia Tech, quarterback Tyrod Taylor is proving that he's been placed in the position for a reason.**

**E**very legitimate college football team has one. A field general who knows no fear. A signal-caller with ice in his veins. Simply stated, a quarterback who can both lead the team to victory and pick them up in defeat.

Virginia Tech Quarterbacks Coach Mike O'Cain knows a great quarterback when he sees one. He has offered his instruction to plenty of them in his time, always reminding them of the reality of their position.

"I tell them they'll receive a lot of praise that is undeserved and a lot of the blame and criticism that is undeserved as well," he said.

In light of the circumstances, O'Cain and the Hokies know they are blessed with Tyrod Taylor, the senior quarterback who has filled the position for the past four years.

"Tyrod is a natural leader because he is strong and demands respect, but not in a forceful way," O'Cain said. "He has that God-given ability to lead and is just a good guy to be around. The game is very important to him, but doing things the right way is even more important to him. He's put his life and his talents in God's hands."

O'Cain's final sentence paints a clear picture of Taylor. The quarterback's stats have put him at the top of nearly every Virginia Tech record category and have earned him offensive MVP awards and ACC Championships. But Taylor doesn't want to be defined as "just" a quarterback. Unlike many of his position counterparts across the country Taylor seeks to remain humble and unassuming—a man who isn't awash in all he can do, but in what he can't do on his own.

"Without God I can't do anything," Taylor said. "I have put my faith in Him, and through Him I believe I can achieve anything."

It all started in Hampton, Va., where Taylor was born and raised. As the only child of Rodney and Trina Taylor, the senior still praises his parents and grandparents for providing him with a strong foundation. Surrounded by what he calls "a lot of trouble," Taylor's family shielded him from the distractions of the Hampton area by encouraging him to pour his energy into schoolwork and athletics.

Heeding their advice, Taylor worked hard in the classroom and earned consistent spots on the Hampton High School honor roll. He also starred on the football field and eventually was named the Virginia Player of the Year as a senior.

For college, Taylor chose to go across the state to Blacksburg and attend Virginia Tech, where he would continue his pursuit of academics and football. But he wouldn't leave Hampton without a solid spiritual understanding to guide him through the process.

Under the teaching of his Christian family, Taylor had given his life to the Lord during church as a ninth-grader, and he left Hampton hoping to deepen his faith in his time as a Hokie.

"God had always been in my life through my mom and grandmas," Taylor said. "When I was younger I almost felt forced to go to church, but, when I got older, I decided to go on my own. Eventually I took the opportunity to give my life to Him and to be baptized. At that point, I knew nothing was possible without Him. And now, every day, He puts me in situations where I can give Him all the credit."

Taylor's unconventional college football career started with a difficult test. When he took his first regular-season snap for the Hokies as a true freshman, he did so in one of the harshest college football environments: Louisiana State's Tiger Stadium.

Taylor was brought in to help rescue an ineffective offense, and, while the Hokies lost the game, Taylor himself scored the team's only touchdown. It was enough to gain the attention of his coaches and earn his first start the following week.

Under Taylor's leadership, the Hokies continued to perform well, winning the next four games. Taylor's season would be paused, however, as he suffered an ankle sprain in the sixth game. After missing two games, he didn't start for the rest of the season and saw only limited playing time.

Looking back, Taylor sees that season as educational—one in which he was learning what it meant to be a leader.

"I think I needed to be more vocal," he said. "I had older guys above me, so I didn't feel like I really needed to lead with words, just with actions."

The coaching staff planned to redshirt Taylor as a sophomore, but in the second game of the season, he was once again called upon to jump-start the Hokies' sputtering offense. He accomplished the mission, providing the necessary spark by rushing for more than 100 yards despite splitting time with fellow QB Sean Glennon.

After the game, Taylor was once again named the starter. The

season rolled along successfully for four games until, as O’Cain explained, Taylor endured a stretch of games that proved to be a turning point in his career.

The Hokies suffered an upset loss, and, in the next game, Taylor injured his ankle and was forced to the sidelines for the next two. When he returned from the injury, Taylor played well enough in a loss—again as a backup—to earn a start in the next game against Duke. But his return to the starting lineup was statistically disastrous as he committed five turnovers, two interceptions and three fumbles all in the first half.

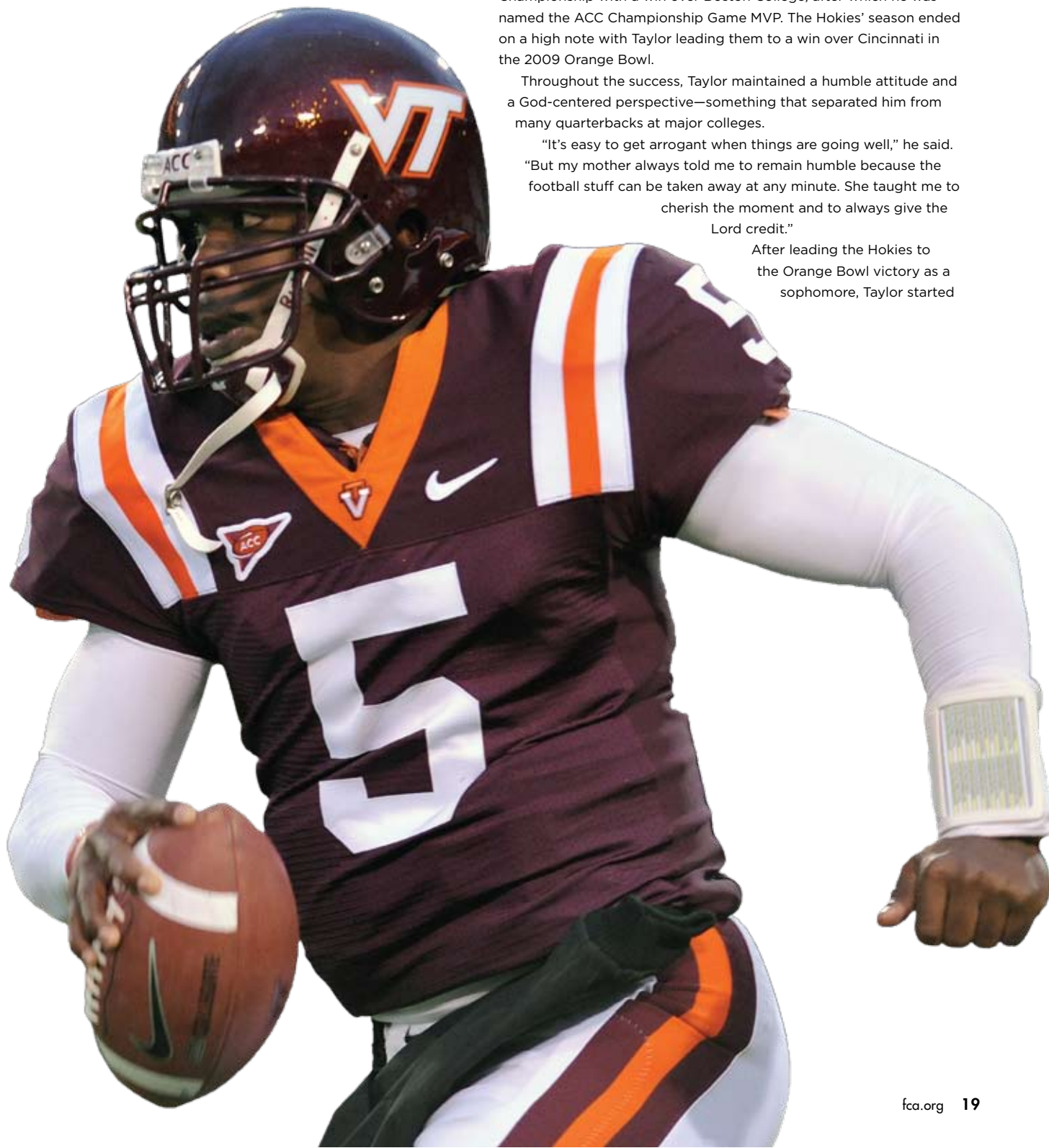
“That was the first game in which the fans turned on him,” O’Cain said. “At that point, I think he realized that football was just a game, and, in the long run, it made him better. He became more appreciative of playing time and of just going out and playing hard. He wants to be a good football player, but, at the same time, he doesn’t allow that to completely control his life.”

The coaching staff trusted Taylor enough to retain him as a starter, and he recovered well. In the next game—a win over in-state rival Virginia—he threw for 137 yards and one touchdown and rushed for a career-high 137 yards. His stellar play continued a week later when he led the Hokies to their second consecutive and third overall ACC Championship with a win over Boston College, after which he was named the ACC Championship Game MVP. The Hokies’ season ended on a high note with Taylor leading them to a win over Cincinnati in the 2009 Orange Bowl.

Throughout the success, Taylor maintained a humble attitude and a God-centered perspective—something that separated him from many quarterbacks at major colleges.

“It’s easy to get arrogant when things are going well,” he said. “But my mother always told me to remain humble because the football stuff can be taken away at any minute. She taught me to cherish the moment and to always give the Lord credit.”

After leading the Hokies to the Orange Bowl victory as a sophomore, Taylor started



# VIRGINIA TECH FCA: MEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION

For three years, FCA's Johnny Shelton has been ministering to the Virginia Tech football coaches and players as the team's chaplain. This season he has a theme: "Men Under Construction." When meeting with the team, Shelton relates the phrase to the house built on the rock referenced in Matthew 7.

"We are talking about building a solid foundation as men so that, when we go through those storms in life, our house, which is built on rock, will stand," Shelton said. "We're talking about several different core values within that context. I've been challenging them to get core values for their lives, just like FCA has the core values of

integrity, serving, teamwork and excellence. Those can offer them a good foundation to build on."

Shelton and FCA also team up with the campus' Athletes in Action to involve all VT athletes through what they call "Crosstraining." Through the weekly Crosstraining meetings, team Bible studies, and the off-campus appearances arranged by Shelton, athletes have many opportunities to grow in their faith and to connect with other believers.

The FCA ministry efforts also have been enhanced by the actions of local board member Steve Mason of Media Concepts in Roanoke, Va., who used his production



Taylor and Shelton

services to shoot a promotional video for Virginia Tech's FCA. The short film combines game highlights of Tyrod Taylor and other members of the football team with footage of them speaking about their faith and reading Scripture.

To watch the video and learn more about FCA and the VT Crosstraining Ministry, visit [vtchaplain.com](http://vtchaplain.com) or [crosstrainingvt.org](http://crosstrainingvt.org).

every game as a junior. He led the Hokies to a 10-3 record—their sixth consecutive 10-win season—and another bowl victory: a 34-17 win over Tennessee in the Chick-fil-A Bowl.

Taylor's most prized possession through it all has remained his relationship with the Lord, which has deepened significantly since his decision to follow Him years ago. But the spiritual growth hasn't been a solo effort. Along with O'Cain, another spiritual mentor who has impacted the young quarterback's life has been VT chaplain and FCA staff member Johnny Shelton.

Through Shelton's guidance, Taylor has not only grown in biblical wisdom, but also in the hands-on lessons of community ministry—something that has helped him become more skilled at verbally expressing his faith. He frequently works with Shelton in speaking at local FCA and community events where audiences, prior to hearing his testimony, had known him only for his football skills.

"He has a powerful impact on everyone who comes to hear him speak," Shelton said. "And, in terms of his walk, he has been steadily growing since day one. He is constantly asking me questions about the Lord to know even more and wanting to be bolder in his witness."

Shelton recalls one specific instance when referencing the power of Taylor's testimony.

This summer, Shelton took 15 Tech players to a local church's vacation Bible school. When one of the kids asked Taylor how he handled the attention of being a

high-profile quarterback, he answered—without skipping a beat—by talking about the power of God in his life and how his priorities were God first and family second.

The next day Shelton received a phone call from a mother whose 9-year-old son had heard Taylor's answer. That morning she had found her son reading his Bible because of what Taylor had said. The young man also told his mother that he wanted to accept Christ as his Savior.

"That story is so powerful, and it's one of so many," Shelton said. "I am constantly telling the guys about their influence and how strong it really is."

Taylor knows that, with a national audience, his influence reaches beyond Blacksburg, especially back in Hampton.

"A lot of people back home are looking up to me," he said. "It's crazy to think that I am so young but am still seen as a role model. I know there are a lot of eyes on me at all times, so I have to make sure I do the right thing and take that into consideration."

In such a high-profile and influential position, Taylor is thankful that he's not alone. He is grateful for the example and the counsel of Shelton. And he isn't the only one.

"My mom especially appreciates that I have someone here I can talk to about any problems," he said. "Johnny has really influenced my life. It's good to have a person like him that I can talk to. I respect him and

all the things he does for me and the whole team."

After so many successful seasons, the Hokies started the 2010 season slowly, losing their first two games before bouncing back against East Carolina. The start drew the criticism of many fans and media, but the team's field general and steady leader, Tyrod Taylor, wasn't overwhelmed by the negative vibes. He wasn't a stranger to college football's rough patches, and his unconventional career offered proof.

Instead, Taylor knew the Lord was, and is, in control, and that, even in tough times, he could still give glory and honor to his Creator.

"Philippians 4:13 was the first verse my mom taught me when I was little, and, as an athlete and in everyday life that verse means so much to me," Taylor said. "Some people may have doubt, but I don't listen to that. I focus on God and the goal. Sometimes things seem like they can't be fixed, but if you look to Him and put your faith in Him there is always a better play ahead."

STV



## TYROD TAYLOR - #5

**School:** Virginia Tech

**Position:** Quarterback

**Born:** Aug. 3, 1989, in Hampton, Va.

**Height/Weight:** 6-1/210 lbs.