

## From ACC Champions to First Round Exit
















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Saying the 2021-22 Virginia Tech men's basketball teams' season was nothing but a rollercoaster would be an understatement. There were many points in the season where the Hokies looked unstoppable and played like one of the best teams in the country. A prime player example of this was Hunter Cattoor, a guard who has established himself as a valid number one three-point shooter. Yet unfortunately, there were also other points where it seemed like a high school varsity team could be putting up a better fight as the Hokies would go on prolonged, agonizing scoring droughts. The point is this team could be described with just one simple word, inconsistent.

"Let's Go Hokies" what does this mean to you? To most, the phrase has no meaning, and honestly, most people will probably question what a Hokie is but ask any Virginia Tech fan, and they will tell you these words mean it's game time. "For us (students and alumni), it's more than just a phrase we shout. It's basically us putting our energy into the players and doing our part to help this team win," said Rhys Jones, a current junior at Virginia Tech. One thing that quickly becomes apparent at Tech' is that the students bleed maroon and orange, which is no different when it comes to men's basketball.

Making it to five straight NCAA tournaments and in 2019, advancing to the sweet 16 is no easy accomplishment. The Hokies have always found a way to win, and this season was a prime example of that. Starting the season 5-0, Tech' looked dominant, led by senior Keve Aluma and graduate student Justyn Mutts. However, the Hokies would quickly come back to reality and play sub .500 basketball midway through the season yet would find a way to win eight of their last ten games. Though ending off

Team	Conf	Overall	Home	Away	Stk
 Duke	16-4	30-6	15-3	9-2	W2
 UNC	15-5	26-9	15-2	8-3	W2
 Notre Dame	15-5	24-11	14-1	7-5	L1
 Miami FL	14-6	25-10	10-5	10-2	W2
 Wake Forest	13-7	25-9	18-2	5-5	W2
 Virginia	12-8	21-13	11-6	7-6	W2
 Virginia Tech	11-9	23-13	11-4	7-6	L1
 Florida State	10-10	17-14	11-4	4-8	L1
 Syracuse	9-11	16-17	11-5	3-8	L1
 Clemson	8-12	17-16	11-5	3-8	L1
 Louisville	6-14	13-19	8-8	2-10	L1
 Boston College	6-14	13-20	9-7	2-10	L1
 Pittsburgh	6-14	11-21	8-11	3-9	L5
 Georgia Tech	5-15	12-20	9-9	3-8	L1
 NC State	4-16	11-21	7-10	3-7	L5

on a lovely stretch, going into the ACC tournament, expectations were not high for this Tech' team after finishing in seventh place and in the middle of the conference. Teams like Duke or UNC indeed looked more dominant, and that was the feeling around the league going into March.

The Virginia Tech vs Clemson game in the first round of the ACC tournament was a nail-biter. One of those games that genuinely keeps you on the edge of your seat till the last second. "I honestly could not take my eyes off the game, especially in overtime, the game was anyone's to be won, but Aluma did it for us (Virginia Tech)", said Carter Wood, a current senior. Keve Alumas' dominating performance and hitting a game-winning three in the last second of overtime gave this team some much-needed confidence for the rest of the tournament. It seemed Tech' found its groove, and nothing would stop this group.



The thing with this team that would eventually lead them to beat Notre Dame, UNC, and Duke in the finals to win their first ACC championship in school history is that Virginia Tech head coach, Mike Young, had a plan, and everything fell into place. The playbook was unmatched as Tech' found different ways to get open, which allowed certain players who would typically fly under the radar to shine bright on the big stage. One of these notable players was Hunter Cattoor, as he would go on to make the ACC all-tournament first team and eventually be awarded the tournament's most valuable player. This honor was rightfully deserved as it seemed like whenever the ball was in Cattoors' hand, he wasn't going to miss, especially in the finals against Duke. Hunter played astonishingly that game as he would score a career-high of 31 points and shoot 78% from three. "I honestly can't even describe how good that dude played. Whenever we had the ball in the second half, all I was thinking was 'pass the ball to Cattoor'," said Khalil Godard. The thing about this win was not only that it was against Duke, who finished first in the ACC; it's the fact that Virginia Tech was able to take over and win by 15 points.

Going into the NCAA tournament there was not a more hyped-up team than the red-hot Virginia Tech Hokies. After hearing their name announced on selection Sunday, confidence was at an all-time high as they matched up against the Texas Longhorns. Many had Tech' as a dark horse team to make a deep run in the tournament. "Virginia Tech is going to win it all, no doubt," said Pendleton Bright. Unfortunately, I think this ended up ruining Tech' and led to them being eliminated in only the first round. There was too much hype, and Mike Young's Hokies cracked under it. This game showed how inconsistent this team could be, as the Longhorns took the lead late in the first half and held it for the rest of the game.

Though Virginia Tech fans wish the season would not have ended so abruptly, to call this season a disappointment would not be accurate. This feeling like the first true season since the pandemic with fans being allowed back in attendance, this team was able to bounce back and show why they deserved a spot in the NCAA tournament. This season also showed a lot of bright spots for the future, including just how good true freshman Sean Pedulla can be. Even though the NCAA tournament didn't go as expected, there is one thing no one can take away from Virginia Tech this year, ACC champions. Let's go Hokies!