

# 2012 Season Preview

## OFFENSE

Replacing offensive production and honing defensive consistency will be two themes when VMI Football reconvenes in August preseason camp in preparation for the 2012 season.

Head coach Sparky Woods welcomes back 35 lettermen to the roster, but has a number of positions he must replace on both sides of the ball. The Keydets return 12 starters overall, but must replace 12 starters in positions that include four all-conference performers and a special teams player.

On offense, five starters return to a unit that is in its third year of a pro-set alignment. The six offensive starters that do not return this season constitute a large chunk yardage from 2011 - over 90% of the rushing yards and close to 50% of receptions.

**Quarterbacks** - A position where the Keydets seem well positioned is quarterback where junior Eric Kordenbrock who returns to stabilize the all-important trigger man in the pro-set passing attack. Kordenbrock, a two-year starter, is poised for a break out year and showed the form needed to be successful putting up big numbers at the end of last season. Kordenbrock completed 51% of his passes in 2011, threw for 1792 yards, the most by a VMI quarterback since 2005, and tossed more TD passes than interceptions, the first time a starting VMI quarterback had done that since 2008.

Kordenbrock is looking to pick up where he left off at the end of last season when he put up huge numbers in the passing game. The Gibsonia, Pa. native could contend for all-conference honors if he continues his ascent in development as a quarterback. In just two years he ranks fifth all-time in career completions (170), has four 200-yard passing games in his career and has two career touchdown passes over 80 yards.

Kordenbrock will have a capable backup in redshirt junior A.J. Augustine whose has gradually improved his skills as an under-study the past two seasons which allowed redshirt junior quarterback Adam Morgan to be moved to the secondary where he

will see more playing time and projects as a starter. Augustine put together another impressive spring practice and threw six of seven aerial attempts for 107 yards and a 38-yard touchdown during scrimmage play. He should give the Keydets another poised and capable signal caller.



Eric Kordenbrock

**Receivers** - VMI must replace last year's senior leading receivers Tracy Hairston (40 catches, 521 yards) and T.J. Talley (34 catches, 180 yards), but plenty of firepower returns in the quartet of receivers in senior Stefawn Ross, redshirt senior Aaron Lewis, sophomore Dexter Bridge, and redshirt sophomore James Rogers. The four accounted for a combined 50 catches and 718 yards in 2011 and will be counted on for more numbers this fall.

Ross has established himself as a top receiver and ranks first in seniority of any returning receiver and caught 11 passes for 139 yards and a touchdown while started nine games on the season. Lewis and Bridge both came on strong at the end of last year and showed glimpses of big-play capability in the future. Lewis had a breakout year in 2011 with most of his production coming at the end of the season after missing the first five games because of injury and he finished third on the team in receptions (19) and second in receiving yardage (314) despite playing just six games. Bridge played in all 11 games as a true freshman and finished with 13 catches for 141 yards and two touchdowns, but did most of his production the last four games of the season when he

caught nine passes for 67 yards and two touchdowns over that span. Rogers, one of the most improved receivers on the team, continues to step up as he gains experience. He played in 10 games and caught at least one pass in all but one of his games last season finishing with 17 passes - the fifth most on the team.

**Tight Ends** - The tight end position is in good hands with redshirt junior Mario Thompson returning as a starter. Thomas has garnered preseason recognition by being named to the CFP Watch List for tight ends and ranked third on the team in most receiving yards with 222 while averaging 20.2 yards per catch. Thompson snagged a 70-yard touchdown pass against Richmond September 17 which was the third longest pass play of the year. Backing up Thompson will be basketball power forward turned senior tight end Wayne Whiting, who impressed onlookers in spring drills with his ability to adapt to both the position and the college football game.

**Tailbacks/Fullbacks** - The Keydets ground game must replace its top two rushers from last year, graduated seniors Chaz Jones and T.J. Talley, who combined for 1,056 of the 1,079 yards in 2011. Junior David Turner, who played special teams in the past, had a great spring practice and emerged no. 1 on the depth chart heading into the season. Sophomore Jabari Turner gradually saw his playing time increase as his true freshman year progressed and ranked third on the team in rushing with 87 yards on 21 carries and one touchdown.

At fullback, three-year letterman H.L. Temoney returns to the position for his final year of eligibility, and should also get backup help from J.O. Goode and Derrick Ziglar.



Dexter Bridge

**Offensive Line** - A tall rebuilding task faces the offensive line as the Keydets must replace four seniors from a year ago. Returning to anchor the group is redshirt junior Robert Collins who carries two years of starting experience to the interior line listed on the post-spring depth chart at starting left guard. Collins is a solid and enthusiastic competitor and played on 680 snaps and lettered for the third time in 2011 while making nine starts on the year with eight at right guard and one at left guard. Other offensive line starting possibilities include redshirt senior David Stradford, who served as a backup to graduated center D'Angelo Smith, and redshirt junior tackle Andy Marcotte, who briefly broke the starting line up last year and followed up with a spring practice that projects him as a possible starter. At guard, redshirt sophomore Nate Murray could grab a starting role, and redshirt junior Patrick Goulden was moved from the defensive line to offensive line in spring practice and looked promising at left tackle. Another to watch is junior Will Lucas, who moved inside from tight end to center in spring practice and adapted to the new role.

**DEFENSE**

New defensive coordinator Jeff Farrington will lead a unit that must replace five starters including some key figures at linebacker and secondary. Among the group are all-conference performers A.J. Gross at linebacker and Byron Allen at strong safety as well as three-year starting outside linebacker Emilio Calvin.

**Defensive Line** - The defensive line is one area where the Keydets are deep and strong with all three starters returning from a year ago. Senior Charlie Jones and Shawn Chapman are joined by redshirt junior



Shawn Chapman

Justin Smith to form a formidable front three. Jones could contend for all-conference honors and played in nine games and saw action on 530 plays last year as he led the defense in tackles-for-loss with 11 for 37 yards. Chapman who led the Big South Conference in 2011 in sacks with 5.0 for 27 yards, had another great year of off-season conditioning and was awarded one of the two top accolades on the team - Super Iron Keydet. Smith has the potential for a break-out year, and flourished in his first full year as a starting defensive tackle and had 38 stops in 11 games. Others who could see action on the defensive front include sophomore Denton Ensminger and redshirt sophomore John Washington.

**Outside Linebackers** - Two proven veterans return to the starting outside linebacker slots in redshirt junior Chris Harper and redshirt sophomore Logan Staib. Harper is slated to take the full reins at one outside linebacker position as a starter after playing in all 11 games at outside linebacker while compiling 40 tackles which ranked eighth on the defensive charts. Staib put up big numbers his true freshman season and played all 11 games with five starts and compiled 47 tackles including 28 solos. He posted a season-high 14 tackles against The Citadel including 11 solo hits.

**Inside Linebackers** - The starting inside linebacker duo of A.J. Gross (2011 All-Big South second team) and Josh Sneed must be replaced this year and redshirt junior Weston Reber and redshirt sophomore Ty Garvin are ready to fill the void. Reber has dealt with preseason injury each of the last two seasons but has worked back to be a projected starter and is looking forward to having a breakout season. Reber played in all 11 games for the second consecutive season and lettered and had nine tackles and 20 assists on the year. Garvin saw his first action on the field and played in all 11 games in 2011 to attain his first varsity letter after totaling 14 tackles on the season.

**Secondary** - The secondary will transition in new personnel as three of the four defensive backfield starters in the 2011 opener are not in the picture for this coming year. One key returnee is junior cornerback Mike Smith, who is hoping to shake off past injuries to have a full and productive campaign. Smith will give will give the defen-

sive backfield needed experience and is one of two veterans with the most starting experience. Another proven veteran back is senior strong safety Michael Johnson who played in all 11 games and ranked second on the team in tackles with 58 including two-for-loss. Sophomore cornerback James Fruehan played well his freshman season and continued that progress in spring drills and will be a key part of the defense and special teams. Perhaps the most notable story in spring practice was the move of redshirt junior Adam Morgan from quarterback to free safety in spring practice. By all accounts, the transition was a success and Morgan will continue his career as a starter in the defensive backfield. Other possible depth in the secondary could come from sophomore Caleb Furlow and redshirt freshman Justin Price.

**Kicking** - The Keydets return senior placekicker Jeff Sexton and both redshirt junior snappers in Clark Irvine and Patrick Sexton, but must replace graduated punter Cameron Murray. Redshirt junior David Eberhardt who served as a backup the last two years, is poised to move into the starting punter role.

VMI's 2012 recruiting class featured 16 signees on signing day with an emphasis on defensive backs and offensive linemen.

Six home games and the first meeting with the Naval Academy since 2003 highlight the 2012 football schedule released last February. It will be the most home games for a VMI football team since the Keydets played the same number during the 2007 season slate.



Charlie Jones