

Alum Coaches Blue Crab Winners to National Recognition

The atmosphere is intense. The competition is fierce. Only the smartest and the fastest will prevail.

Each year, teams of top-notch high-school students from around the country compete in lightning-fast buzzer rounds and challenging essays about the world's oceans at the National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB®), a Jeopardy-like championship for the marine sciences.

For four Chesapeake Bay Governor's School students and their coach, Kevin Goff, it was the experience of a lifetime. For Goff, that journey began at VIMS.

Goff first took part in the NOSB experience while a graduate student at VIMS, volunteering to officiate in the Blue Crab Bowl, Virginia's qualifier for the national bowl. Goff earned his Master's in 2002 studying dredge performance in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery.

Co-sponsored each year by VIMS and Old Dominion University, the Blue Crab Bowl is a round-robin, double-elimination contest that tests students' knowledge of oceanography, geology, biology, marine history, and more.

The 2006 Blue Crab Bowl drew nearly 70 students from 14 high schools around the Commonwealth to test their knowledge of marine science. Converging on this year's competition site at ODU, all were hoping to advance to the National Ocean Science Bowl.

"It's a lot of work, but worth every minute of it," says Goff, now a biology and marine science teacher at the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School's Warsaw campus on Virginia's Northern Neck.

Goff's team of two juniors and two seniors began preparations for the February Blue Crab Bowl after the winter holidays. After their successful win, there was little rest—they hit the books even harder, preparing for the nationals coming up in May.

The group met to practice and study two nights a week. Each student took a special focus, such as biology or physics, and received topic-specific assignments to complete. At practice the students shared their assignments and learned to work through team-challenge questions.

The team also went hands-on, with field trips to the National Aquarium in Baltimore and the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, as well as a three-day spring-break field trip to the Outer Banks to study the region's physical and biological attributes. Goff even worked with the group on what he calls

'speed and aggressiveness training' to gain confidence. "Many of the teams are so good and they are really fast. Speed is one of the keys to success," says Goff.

Another key to success is having an excellent coach.

"Kevin is inspiring," says Dr. Carol Hopper Brill, co-regional coordinator of the Blue Crab Bowl. "He is a master educator and a model of what we would like all educators to be. He is demanding but his excitement about learning really inspires his students to rise to the challenge. One of the things that impresses me most about Kevin is how well rounded he is. He can talk about geology, fisheries, physics, chemistry—you name it. He's kind of a renaissance guy."

Goff's students agree. "He's the best teacher I've ever had," says Abby Hughes, a Rappahannock High School senior and one of Goff's team members. "He is so excited about what he teaches, which makes you so excited about what you are learning. He opened my eyes to what an amazing teacher can do for his students. He has really inspired me to study math and biology and I hope to follow in his footsteps as a teacher at the Governor's School."

Goff credits his time at VIMS for much of his success as a teacher and coach.

"I got a terrific education in marine science at VIMS. I used my time there to explore and learn all aspects of marine science. VIMS offers so many great opportunities, so many great classes and professors. Now I have the opportunity to share my well-rounded oceanographic background with my students."

This year was Goff's second consecutive victory at the Blue Crab Bowl. As Virginia's winners, Goff and his team received an all-expense paid trip to the national competition in May in Monterey, California, facing the top teams from 24 other states.

With Hopper Brill's help, Goff's team gained funding from the VIMS Endowment Association to spend an extra day in Monterey. The group used the time to explore the geology, biodiversity, and coastal ecology of Point Lobos State Park and the world-famous Monterey Bay Aquarium.

"It was just great. I hadn't seen shoreline like that before, getting to see kelp, seals, otters—the whole experience was a terrific learning experience for the kids—and me," says Goff. "I am so grateful to the folks at VIMS who made this happen for us."



As winners of the 2006 Blue Crab Bowl, the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School team represented the Virginia Region at the finals of the National Ocean Sciences Bowl held on California's Monterey Coast May 13-15.

From L: Susan Haynes, NOSB Director; Dr. Richard Spinrad, National Ocean Service; Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Jr. (US Navy, Retired), NOAA Administrator; Jonathan Lee (junior, Essex High School); Tiffany Lee (senior, Essex High); Luke Bessler (junior, Lancaster High); Abby Hughes (senior, Rappahannock High School); Coach Kevin Goff (Chesapeake Bay Governor's School, Warsaw Campus), and Rear Admiral Dick West (US Navy, Retired), President of the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education (CORE).

While Goff's team didn't win this year's national competition, they did walk away with the coveted James D. Watkins Sportsmanship Award. This special recognition from the NOSB® officials acknowledges the students who best exemplify professionalism and collegiality, demonstrating respect for one another, their opponents, and the competition judges.

"I'm very proud of how my team performed," says Goff. "Even though the competition was intense, there is still a wonderful bonding that goes on between the kids from different teams. My students worked very hard to get there. They earned it and it is a great gift that will be with them forever."

by Leslie McCollough



Alexander Smith of Dominion (L) presents a \$50,000 check to VIMS Dean and Director John Wells (R). The gift will be used to equip a classroom in VIMS' new research building, Andrews Hall, which is scheduled to open in the spring of 2007. VIMS Development Director Anne Marshall (C) looks on.