
Virginia Tech Captures their Second National Championship in Group Soil Judging; Two Qualify for International Contest

The 2018 Virginia Tech Hokies Soil Judging Team took first place out of 22 teams in the group judging event on Friday, March 23rd in Martin, Tennessee. The Hokies finished ahead of Maryland, Tennessee Tech, West Virginia, and Kansas State. This is the second time that Virginia Tech has won the group judging national championship. The first victory came in 2006.

The Hokies also took 2nd place in the overall score, 16 points behind Tennessee-Knoxville and ahead of West Virginia, Maryland and Purdue at the Soil Science Society of America National Intercollegiate Soil Judging Contest. The team was led by 8th place individual finisher Sophomore Biological Systems Engineering (BSE) student Ben Smith from Chesterfield, VA. Also on the team was Senior BSE major Sam Withers from Asheville, NC, Senior Environmental Science (ENSC) major Cameron Bermand from Bedford, New Hampshire, and Senior Environmental Sciences major Chris Moritz from Gloucester, VA. All four individuals were in the 52nd percentile or better. The top five individual winners were Kelli Roush from Iowa State, Joey Loffredo from Rhode Island, David Gentry from Tennessee-Knoxville, Dan Brum from University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and Mark Castanon from Fresno State. There were 87 students in the contest.

The group judging event had 10 students involved from Virginia Tech. These include the four individual judges along with Sabrina Vladu from Yorktown, VA, Megan Leach from Falls Church, VA, Morgan Ré from Winchester, VA, Jirius Abdallah from Vienna, VA, Xuanyu “Peter” Guo from Beijing, China, and Annie Konjevoda from Falls Church, VA. Izzy Fish from Haymarket, VA was unable to attend the contest due to illness. “Soil Judging is an ultimate example of experiential learning, where students must excel at learning and applying new concepts. We were literally learning up to the last day of practice, and then had to test our knowledge the next morning. It was a mental and physical challenge” according to coach Galbraith. “The team did so well in the group judging because all 10 students worked together and cooperated and respected each other. The team is very tight knit. Now they know how much dedication and sacrifice it takes to be the best at something. They deserve their awards and I am proud of them.”

The assistant coaches were graduate students Mike Badzmierowski from Rhode Island and Alexandra Schmidt from Phoenixville, PA. Graduate student assistant coach Daniel Smith from Upper Marlboro, MD was unable to attend the trip.

The contest was a qualifier for the 3rd International Soil Judging Contest sponsored by the International Union of Soil Scientists in Itaguaí and Seropédica, Brazil in August, 2018, just before the 21st World Congress of Soil Science in Barra da Tejuca, Brazil. The top eight individuals qualify for two teams from the USA. Ben Smith qualified for the second USA team as did coach John Galbraith. Ben will be on the USA Team A. and John will coach that team. It is John’s second time to qualify as a USA Coach, more than any other. John is the only person in the world who has coached at all three International contests.



Virginia Tech's National Championship group judging team, 2nd place overall score: (left to right, front row) Chris Moritz, Sam Withers, Sabrina Vladu, Morgan Ré, Asst. Coach Alexandra Schmidt, Megan Leach, Peter Guo. (left to right, back row) Jirius Abdallah, Annie Konjevoda, Cameron Bermand, and Ben Smith. Not pictured: Izzy Fish, Asst. Coaches Mike Baszmierowski and Daniel Smith, and Coach John Galbraith.