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**ASSIGNING EDITOR:** Professor Palmer

**BYLINE:** Prycles Royall

**HEADLINE:** Get in the Motion with Trojan Xplosion!

**SUBHEAD:** The experience of an HBCU marching band

**DATELINE:** PETERSBURG, VA

**ART**

**Main Photo:**



Madison Madourie (left), a freshman on the Virginia State University marching band and Taylor Whitehead (right), the current Virginia State University band director.

VSUJOURN 1/ Prycles Royall

## **STORY:**

Petersburg, VA—TOUCHDOWN!!!!!!!!!!!!!! The Virginia State Trojans score a winning touchdown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. Everyone is jumping up in excitement and Jawun the drum major is making a hand gesture to his neck saying, “We right here” and the band knew what time it was. Everyone strapped up and immediately went into the Neck chant.

Here at Virginia State University, there is a shared love and pride that comes from the VSU Trojan Xplosion Marching Band. From the audiences they attract to the music they perform and the way they put on a show no wonder people come here for the experience. Being able to perform and compete against other schools doesn't begin to scratch the surface of what comes with being a part of a band. Traveling and balancing school with band life comes hand in hand but being committed and passionate is a start of the journey for many students and band coaches alike.

### **A home away from home**

When coming into college for the fall '23 school year Madison Madourie didn't expect to continue her band experience after being a part of an ensemble since she was 13 years old. She had hopes of being a regular college student doing normal student things, but her heart had other plans.

“I actually didn't want to continue my craft in band. I wanted to just be a regular college student at first but then I just joined band out of nowhere because I was curious of what it would be like. I really did like it and as always, the experience has been amazing” says Madourie.

She claims it's the love she has for band that pushed her to try it out anyways instead of letting the semester pass her by and wishing she had tried out and watching what she could've been. “It was refreshing being around people who shared that same interest with me and kind of being cut from the same cloth when it came to our love for music, they made feel right at home”. She further says, “It was those nights of making up a dance routine a few nights before the show or going to the café and singing our ‘I love the band’ song that made me feel like I found my second family on this campus”.

As for band director Dr. Taylor Whitehead there was no hesitation on whether or not, he was going to continue his craft in band. Whitehead always knew he would have a life in band since he was first introduced to it at five years old. His parents were alumni of VSU and would constantly bring him to the school and every time he came his interest was piqued.

“Because when I got here, I found very quickly that VSU was a home away from home. It gave me a sense of belonging, but more importantly it was a place that I could grow” says Whitehead. He felt as though it was only right to continue his craft as a band director and before coming back to vsu as a director he started out as a high school band director for 20 years.

### **The drum-line dream**

Being a part of VSU marching band has been “an experience like no other” says Whitehead. After being a high school band director, he came to VSU as an assistant band director in 2013 and went on to full-time in 2018. Within the 10 years whitehead has been here he has earned quite a few accolades and titles because of the VSU band. He has also been named the Head Band Director of the Trojan Xplosion Marching and Pep Band.

“I currently am on the board for the HBCU national band orchestras director consortium, Im also on the board of directors for cadets, drum, and bugle corps, and I’m also actively involved in many of the VSU alumni associations and won a few different awards from that”, says Whitehead.

For whitehead the band is more than just the music, it’s the performance as a whole and all parties involved. What makes VSU band memorable is how they put on a show for the audience to enjoy. “They’re gonna get entertainment, they’re gonna get musicality, they’re gonna get passion, energy, excitement, but more importantly there’re gonna get what I would say is a comprehensive performance”.

It’s not every day that you get to experience what it's like watching a live band, but you can bet when watching VSU it would be an unforgettable performance. For the coaches and students, it takes a lot of hard work and passion to make sure the crowd is pleased. “Anytime that you invest a considerable amount of time in something, and you give it your all, you want to take pride in it and that’s what this is. You know, we work considerably hard, but we got it, we take pride in what we do”.

The band doesn’t stop at helping coaches reach their goals, but it also helps open up doors for the students as well. From traveling to different states and being inspired by the band environment it's a “band kids dream come true”.

“I was able to travel the states I’ve never been to before; meet people I’ve never gotten to meet. My band was on TV, we got to go to the White House perform for the president and other big leaders. That’s just off of one year so it's just like already amazing in itself. So, I can only imagine what gonna happen in the next three years” says Madourie.

Being surrounded by people who can help you pursue what you see as a future career meant nothing but hard work to Madourie. She has hopes to be a music educator and she sees band as a “perfect way to get my foot through the door”.

### **Teamwork makes the dream work**

Even though to an audience the VSU band may look like a fun and exciting show it takes a lot to get there. Learning how to balance schoolwork with band life is a key factor for a band student. Knowing how to stay motivated when times get rough and being able to depend on your band family is the best way to stay afloat.

“I mean the band experience is fun, it can get rough though with the late-night practices”, Madourie expresses. “We’re like a big dysfunctional family, we’re always arguing always fighting but then we love each other five minutes later”. “Everyone has their own bonds and relationships with different members of the band but in the end we all have the love for band and each other.

Having a relationship with band mates and band coaches/ directors is “imperative to succeed in a band” when you have people in the same situation as you helping you stay on top of everything else it helps you keep focus the bigger picture.

“You got to manage being a person outside of band. Having homework to do, being in organizations on campus, having a lot of things to do personally it can be a lot” exclaimed Madourie. “But me and my band members we hold each other accountable and make sure nobody drowns— once you learn how to balance it, everything else band has to offer makes band all the more worthwhile”.