

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**Media Conference**  
**October 22, 2018**

***Opening statement***

“All right, we are back on the field today. I’m trying to get my days straightened out but today is basically a Wednesday for us. We’ve got a huge challenge with Georgia Tech coming to town, we’re looking forward to playing at home. The kids have done a good job of preparing thus far, we’ve got to put the finishing touches on it the next two days and get ready to play.”

***On approaching the game and trying to play “Virginia Tech football” versus reacting to Georgia Tech and its triple option offense:***

“Obviously on the defensive side of the ball, you’re defending something that is far different schematically that tests your discipline level. Paul (Johnson Georgia Tech head coach) has been doing it for a long time so he has answers. He knows exactly how to fix or what to do next in the order of operations. From a big picture perspective, I think focusing on execution is the best thing that you can do. And I know that’s way oversimplifying things and we should be all ft pour execution every single week but the facts are, you may get fewer opportunities. Each punt return or punt opportunity may be more valuable than previous ones because you just may not have those opportunities as the game goes along. At the risk of making everybody walk around on egg shells, I think you’ve got to paint the picture of ‘Listen, we’ve got to do these things, we’ve got to value the football, we have to execute and be in the right place defensively, we’ve got to be on point on special teams because the game may be a little bit shorter than normal.”

***On his expectations for QB Ryan Willis during the second half of the season:***

“I think the biggest things is, and some of you who have been with me through a couple of quarterback competitions have heard me say this before, it’s about expected outcomes. It’s not always about the completion, it’s not always about the touchdown, it’s about when the play is called, did we deliver the ball to the person that the ball should be delivered to? Did we get an expected outcome? Did we make the average play, the mundane play on a consistent basis? You don’t have to be Joe Montana and Tom Brady all rolled into one, just can we go do those things and be consistent? The reason Josh was the starter was because he could do those things more consistently than anybody else we had and Ryan’s challenge now is to do that. We know he can make some plays down the field, he can run, he’s got a big arm, but can he make those average plays on a consistent basis?”

***On whether there are any common factors in some of the big plays allowed by the secondary:***

“Well I think the biggest thing is lack of experience. They just haven’t played very many games. I think they’ve got talent, they’re going to continue to get better and we’ve had a healthy Divine (Deablo) back there with Reggie (Floyd) and Khalil (Ladler), those three positions have been pretty good. We’re still going to be young at corner, still developing those guys so I don’t know

if there's anything other than time on the job is going to help them as the season goes along, or their career goes along, I should say."

***On the new cut block rules and how that may impact things in the game versus Georgia Tech:***

"I actually spoke to our (ACC) head of officials today, not in a complaining manner but to talk about a few things from a previous game and to talk about the new cut rules. I have seen zero difference in them really. I don't know that the five-yard cut that has been disallowed has even been called very much and I don't know that's it's happened very much, quite honestly. I'm certainly not insinuating that it should've been called, I just don't see much difference. We have coached some things differently on our side of the ball with not cutting and some looks that maybe we have on perimeter run plays. I'd say it's been negligible, I don't want to put words in Paul's mouth but I think Paul would say its negligible, it doesn't look much different than it always has."

***On WR Damon Hazelton's progression since he joined the Hokies and where he can still improve:***

"Well I think he certainly has room for improvement, doesn't mean I'm not pleased with him. I think we've been happy with the way he's approached things. He listens, he's a very coachable young man. But there are some technique things and consistency that he needs to continue to improve on as do all of our wideouts. It's something that's a focus for him every week in terms of technique. It's a lot more involved than just run by the guy. That just doesn't happen very much at this level, the corners are all fast too. Understanding the techniques, it takes and being able to execute those on a consistent basis. The good thing is like some of the guys that we've had here in the past like Isaiah (Ford) and Cam (Phillips) he can communicate with you about what he's getting or what he's seeing, so he can kind of see things in real time. There's some technique things, he's going to need to continue to improve on as he moves forward. I think he will, I think he understands that and will work on it."

***On Hazelton whether Willis might have forced some balls to Hazelton in the UNC game:***

"I don't know, it's been a while since we've played and I haven't looked at the film quite honestly. We missed Damon on several times that we shouldn't've but I didn't feel like on multiple occasions, maybe on a few, we weren't distributing the ball to the right place. But I didn't feel like it was an overriding theme throughout the entire game."

***On the most important thing he's learned about the team in the first half of the season:***

"Well I like the way that we've persevered last week. I think there is a genuine desire to improve and that's what it's going to have to be. They are going to have to stick together. In the next five weeks, it's going to be really difficult and they're going to have to stick together and focus on continuing to improve. From what I've seen so far, they're into that. They've got an understanding of that and we all want to coach a hungry group of guys whose anxious to get it and see how good they can be without worrying about the other things out there. I think there's a hint of that, we're probably not all of the way there. I've been pleased with that so far."

***On the Hokies' unusual schedule and now having time off before the Georgia Tech game:***

“The way that I look at it is, it is what it is now let’s go. That’s how I present it to our team. I don’t know if I can worry about it. We did have a little bit of extra time here and we have a little bit of extra time for next week to hopefully get healed up and be ready for the next opponent. I’m not worried about the inconsistency in the schedule, as much as I’d love for it to be more monotonous or more regimented. It is what it is and you’ve got to just roll with the punches.”

***On facing the triple option on defense and the difficulty of preparing for it:***

“Yeah I think our young coaches and scout team has done a really good job of that so far. That’s part of the challenge and part of it is not just simulating the play but simulating the speed in which they execute it. I’m always very fearful that on the very first play of the game the defense is going to look over to the sideline and go, ‘Yeah we recognized that play but it was executed so much faster than we looked at for the past week’ that they’re a step off. Our kids have embraced that challenge of simulating it and have done a pretty good job of it.”

***On the punt coverage unit and utilizing the rugby style punt more in the future***

“First of all, I’d say it’s something we’ve been working on for a year-and-a-half now with Oscar (Bradburn) trying to get him comfortable with him. Being able to use it as a changeup, it’s kind of like moving the pocket, sprinting out and changing the launch point, if executed well can be very effective. It’s not very pretty, but it can be very effective and something that we like to throw in there from time to time. We’ll have to do a good job, we’re going to face good punt returners, not just this week but throughout the rest of the season and we’re going to have to do a good job covering punts. We gave up two returns (against UNC). One of them, we had a guy right there and we missed a tackle right as he caught the ball. The other one was fourth and forever and we got blocked and he did a nice job returning it. There was no real threat of anything so they double-teamed three guys on one side of the ball. It was pretty hard, but we’ve got to be able to still cover a punt in that situation.”