

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Media Conference
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Opening Statement

“Thanks to everybody for coming. We had a good team meeting yesterday and have a tremendous challenge in front of us with Marshall coming in here. We spent a good portion of yesterday and today looking at them. They’ve always been a very well-coached team. Defensively they’ve got juniors and seniors across the board. I think they’ve only got one guy that starts that’s a sophomore. Offensively they’re about what you expect from Marshall in terms of skill players, guys that can run and catch the football, pretty explosive. Obviously, this is a unique game, we’re excited to get to play in it.

“Again, I think Whit (Babcock) and his staff deserve a tremendous amount of appreciation and respect for getting this thing done. He was in a tough situation between the way East Carolina handled this whole deal and our record. For him to get this done and us to have this opportunity, we’re excited about it. I think our student body is excited about it, as well. Brad just told me that 7500 student tickets have already gone and more to come. I understand it’s free for the students to come out to the game. It should be a unique and neat atmosphere. Our kids are excited to play in it, obviously, we’re in playoff mode here. If we win, we get to keep playing and stay together. If we don’t, then we’re done. All that being said, it’s going to be a tremendous challenge trying to get this thing pulled off because Marshall is a veteran, well-coached, talented football team, as you can see by their record.”

On if there is a more of a challenge of preparing for Marshall due to the late addition to the schedule:

“No, not particularly. In the off-season, teams change so much that we usually prepare for the first four opponent or wherever the first natural break in the schedule occurs. If you have a bye week after the third game or something like that, that’s what we spend our time on in the summer, unless there’s a special reason, triple option or something like that. When you get to the end of the schedule, you have done very little on those guys during the offseason anyways because you have a whole season's worth of film to get caught up with anyways. It’s not really unique, obviously, the situation is unique and the make-up game, just knowing for sure we’re playing only a week before the game is unique, but in terms of preparing it’s pretty much the same as its always been.”

On if any play that impactful stood out that was maybe not recognized immediately during the game Friday:

“What we do after the game is as a team we’ll pull a couple clips off, we all watch the special teams’ clips, as a team. Obviously, offensively or defensively you watch it by position groups or by side of the ball. In our team meeting, I’ll pull out some of the clips that I think are worth teaching off of. Ryan (Willis) chasing down the corner on the interception right before the half,

Dalton's (Keene) block was one of those plays. There's also another play that Ricky (Walker) makes in the possession that we hold them to a field goal at the end of the game. We have a bust at the end and the end pinches when it shouldn't and Ricky (Walker) kind of fights through that and comes underneath it to make a play. We made plenty of mistakes, indicative of us the entire year. Our kids have played hard, it's just having the ability and confidence level to get through adversity is something we're trying to get done. There were some good examples of that throughout the game."

On early decisions to kick a field goal and punt rather than go for it on fourth-and-short:

"I believe all those decisions are different year by year. We have all the statistical data going into the game and all that sort of stuff. When you go for it on fourth-and-two and you run the quarterback up there and you barely get the first down, that sticks in your mind a little bit on the next fourth-and-short. When you throw an interception right before the half and it almost gets returned for a touchdown, that sticks with you late in the game. That's just the facts of it. Trying to continue to put your team in a position to win is what you're trying to do. In some years, in some situations, you're much more aggressive. In some games, you're much more aggressive.

"Do we go back and evaluate all of those? You bet, we talk about it all the time. I still talk about the reasoning behind the decisions and sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. Yeah, we look at all those things. If I had known the field goal wasn't going to go in, obviously we would have gone for it. We punted it on the 36-yard line, we've been a really good Red Zone punting team, at least the last two years here and two years at Memphis, if you'd ask me before that I'd say we're going to get the ball around the 10 and we kicked it right out of the end zone. Those are the small detail execution things that when we're really good, we go and knock out. When you kick it out of the end zone, you say 'What did we do that for?'. It's the same thing I say if I had known we were going to do that, we would have gone for it or tried to kick a field goal. That's a long way of answering yes, we second guess like everybody else. Within our own office, we talk about those things and in very honest ways, too. I think in the military, they have after action review where they sit down and say 'This was messed up, this was good, this stunk' so on and so forth. We do the same thing, sometimes as a head coach you kick yourself for the decisions you made and sometimes you feel good about them."

On the defense rising to the moment in OT and LB Dax Hollifield's contributions to the team:

"I think it was gut check when they got the ball on the 11-yard line and we have to hold them to a field goal or the ballgame is essentially over. That was not the only way, but statistically, if we don't hold them to a field goal, it would be almost impossible. To answer the challenge like that I think was pretty remarkable of what we've seen from our guys to go try and lay it on the line. We haven't always executed enough to get that done but they did in that time."

"Dax (Hollifield) is continuing to get better and play that hard. Y'all are probably getting tired of me saying this, but the thing that he does do is pour his heart and soul into whatever he takes on. He's a very good student, he's working to become a very good football player. His hobby is welding and he's not an average welder now, he's really good. Just one of the things about him that is really unique is that whatever thing he takes on, he has the ability to pour everything he

has into that activity. We're seeing him gradually start to reap the benefits of the hard work he's putting in, football wise.

"When I went to see him at school, one of the neatest things I've ever done, and of course we recruited Dax (Hollifield) forever. The pride his face when he took me into his shop class and introduced me to his teacher and we spent about an hour in there and I don't know a single thing about that stud. Dax (Hollifield) showed me the trailer he made and we're not talking about one hinge, we're talking about big-time things. It's just kind of how he is, not everybody can be like that, very few people are, in my opinion, that devote that much time and energy into whatever endeavor they choose. I don't know how it got started."

On rehabilitation of QB Josh Jackson and his impact on the sidelines:

"He's progressing fine. He's not going to play this week and it's been good to have him around. He enjoys this football team and school and wants Ryan (Willis) to do well and do whatever he can to help us win."

On if there is anything different about DC Bud Foster calling games from the booth:

"No and no. It's not that big of a deal. If that's what he feels best about, then I'm all for it. It hasn't called a glitch anywhere. Most of those guys are usually on the field, some of them go in the box. Having been a guy that has called plays on the field and in the box, I personally, it's totally, 100 percent an individual thing, in terms of your preparation and ability to get the job done. I always enjoyed being upstairs much more so than on the field. It doesn't seem to have been anything, I don't know if he plans to do it this week. We'll talk about it as the week goes on. It hasn't been a major thing, we don't have this huge meeting and discuss it all, one guy comes down and he stays up or he stays up and one guy comes down."

On the status of RB Deshawn McClease:

"Yes, it's been a health deal with Deshawn (McClease) and it was good to have him back. Obviously, I know he wanted to play in this game, he's wanted to play in all these games, it's just been a health deal with Deshawn (McClease). It's been good having him back, I think he's different than some of the other guys we have carrying the ball. I was pleased we made a little hay in there. We got Tre (Turner) to make a big run on the perimeter, Hezzy (Hezekiah Grimsley) had a nice run on the perimeter, which I always think helps us run the ball up inside. He got a little bit more 12 personnel which helps historically, in that game, to run the ball inside. We felt that was probably our best match-up. It was good to see it come through."

On preparing guys for the upcoming game after the excitement of last week's victory:

"We have plenty of motivation and respect for our opponent but that is an element of what we've got to deal with. In our meeting yesterday I said 'Guys, I gave you yesterday off to enjoy this and pat yourself on the back but it's going to take the same type of effort and intensity the same type of emotion and discipline to extend this other streak. Every moment you spend from here on out in this meeting thinking about or daydreaming about last Friday is wasted time. We have to be able to turn the page to the next game. For us to mature as a football team, part of

maturing is handling business. We've certainly handled a lot of disappointment, now let's handle some celebration and people patting us on the back and let's get ready for this next game."

On WR Tre Turner's instinct to show up for big plays:

"The two things that stood out for me, aside from his athletic ability, was that he was highly intelligent, it was obvious the first time I sat down to have a conversation with him, he's really a sharp kid. His high school coach said wonderful things about him from a competitive standpoint, that he was a really a true competitor and leader for his high school. A lot of time coaches will say a lot of good things about their players but I could tell this one was different. To see how he's embraced the competitiveness of this and will eventually be a good leader has been really nice. He was a good basketball player and for some reason, those guys that play multiple sports, like going out and competing, whether it be basketball or baseball or football. I think there's something about those guys that just really enjoy playing games and want to go out there and compete."