

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Media Conference
November 5, 2018

Opening statement

“Looking forward to the challenge this week, another, big, physical and tough football team. We got to go on the road to Pitt and get our guys ready to go. Obviously, we’re disappointed with last week’s result. There are some good things we can glean from that performance, then obviously some things we have to work to improve on. The kids had a good workout yesterday. They’re off today and look forward getting back to work tomorrow.”

On Pitt playing last Friday night and if he watched and what he thought of the Panthers:

“I did get to see a little bit of the game. I would say it’s a vintage Pitt team from my limited experience from them – physical, run the ball and do quite a bit of play action and play their four press with changeup looks on defense and are very well coached. They play hard and it starts with them running the football and stopping the run. And they’re pretty darn good on special teams, as well.”

On whether DB Bryce Watts is out for the season and what he will do to replace him:

“I would stop short on saying that he is done for the year, we just don’t know. We should know more in a couple weeks. Obviously, he’s not going to play this week. We’ve been mixing those guys in there at corner and we’ll continue to bring those guys along. He was actually going to go back there and return punts this week, but didn’t make it since it happened to him like the third or fourth play. But Damon [Hazelton] did a nice job filling in there (on punt returns). We’ll continue to bring those other guys along.”

On whether LB Rayshard Ashby will get his starting spot back if LB Rico Kearney’s continues to play well:

“We’ll see how all that goes. There’s a lot of ‘ifs’ in that question and we’ll handle those as they come along. I am proud of Rico [Kearney] and how he played when given the opportunity. Rayshard’s [Ashby] been very productive when he’s played, as well. We’ll continue to see how it all turns out with Rayshard’s health and how we feel. It’s nice to have another productive player though.”

On DB Divine Deablo’s success at Whip against Boston College:

“It certainly has the potential to be a direction we continue to go. Tyree [Rodgers] played well at free, which helped us play Divine [Deablo] down there in the alley. I really felt like, I don’t even know if I can say this, Divine was getting some confidence and I know his body was feeling good. I hope we can continue that the rest of the year, I don’t want to jinx the young man because he’s worked so hard to get back and be productive. He’s been through so much adversity in his time here from a physical standpoint, but it was certainly good to get him out there and obviously see that he was feeling well.”

On his opinion of the way targeting is called and whether the rule can be improved:

“Ever since the targeting went in, the coaches, not as a unifying force at least, brought up the discussion about flagrant one and flagrant two, similar to basketball. That is at least a discussion that needs to continue. I do believe in the rule. I think it’s been good. As in every rule I think it’s always good to continue to evaluate the effect it has. It has, not probably totally eliminated, but the hits we’ve tried to legislate out of the game don’t happen as much anymore and I think that’s a good thing for football. I know we’re all careful, we don’t want to take a step back in terms of player safety, but I think it’s good to have those conversations. To me, that has been the most prevalent suggestion that either refs or coaches have had is at least investigating the whole, I don’t know if it’s intent or exactly how we want to define it, but at least the whole flagrant one and flagrant two way to administer that one.”

On frustration with execution problems still occurring in Week 9:

“I don’t know that they’re happening any more or less than earlier in the year. The meeting we had after Florida State was, in all three phases of the game, directed at the things that if we didn’t improve on were going to hurt us down the road. I always stay away from the word frustration. It’s not our job to be frustrated, it’s our job to try to fix, coach and mentor. Continuing to try to push these guys forward so that they can execute on a more consistent basis so that as a team we have a chance to have more consistent play against very good people. The other team is going to make plays on both sides of the ball and special teams. You would like to get to the point where you’re a little more consistent in terms of your own execution to give yourself a better chance for success.”

On DB Khalil Ladler’s role being specific to special teams in the second half against Boston College:

“I think it’s just one of those deals where it wasn’t a reflection on Khalil [Ladler], we were playing pretty well and Tyree [Rodgers] at free was playing really well. There was no reason to jumble it up I guess. We certainly are not unhappy with Khalil [Ladler], he’s been very productive for us. It’s nice to have Tyree [Rodgers] emerging to give us a little more depth at safety and we’ve kind of been going back and forth.”

On using last year’s goal-line stand vs. Pitt as a motivational tool this season versus Pitt:

“While I don’t disagree with anything you said, I think it’s maybe more along the line of the last two years. Look how close these games have been. Look at the execution and the toughness and the discipline level it has taken as a team to pull off the last two years’ worth. Two years we went up there and they were very, very good. If I’m not mistaken, they beat Clemson that year and won a game by three points. This past year, it took a goal-line stand on Senior Day to win the game and it’s going to take a similar type of toughness, execution and grit to accomplish the similar or same result. I think maybe it’s not just that play, but an accumulation of all of it in what it’s going to take to find a way to win the game.”

On status of QB Ryan Willis and the need for him to avoid taking so many hits:

“He’s fine, he went through practice yesterday. I just saw him walking around the office this morning. I think certainly, he took one shot in the pocket that he shouldn’t have had to take, quite honestly. I think he’s got to be cognizant, again, I think he took one shot over on the far sideline that was penalized, not much you can do about that. The guy ran out of bounds and got hit. I think he does continue to learn how to play and compete and go get yards when those opportunities come but also be smart.”

On DC Bud Foster’s comparison of LB Dax Hollifield’s energy to FB Sam Rogers:

“I would say that is a good comparison. You’re talking about a kid whose enthusiasm is genuine. His passion for playing the game is real, it’s every day and it’s consistent. We’ve all come across people like that in our lives, not necessarily with football, whether it’s in your own profession or school work or whatever it is, that just have the ability to do their absolute best every single day, with every detail, continuing to push forward. Those people are remarkable and he’s one of them. Much in the same way that I marveled at Sam [Rogers], in that he did it every single day. There were no good days and bad days with him. In our time so far with Dax [Hollifield], I’d say it’s similar. He’s just a very genuine person who pours his heart and soul into every single thing he does. He pours his heart and soul into the classroom, his grade checks are fantastic. He just has some really consistent, high energy and effort qualities that are unique.”

On the role QB Quincy Patterson has played and if more is to come:

“I think it is certainly a possibility. There hasn’t been a situation where his numbers been called and you got the feeling that he was anything other than ready. He just plops in there and goes in there and executes and runs whatever play is called. Obviously, we don’t have him responsible for the entire package right now. Something we could continue to use situationally as we move forward.”

On thoughts of Early Signing Day coming up and approaching the second year of the new landscape of recruiting:

“I guess I would say this, I’m not convinced it’s better or worse for the kids and for me, that’s what the rule should be for. In terms of, I know I’m totally riding the fence here if we do this, which we are doing, I think it should be to help the kids make a better decision. To help be even more sure about what they’ve decided to do so that they can go make that work. I don’t know if it’s helped them or not, I don’t know if we will know for some time. For the coaches, it’s great, I mean selfishly, which is not what should be important, but to go through midterm signing day and get a line share signed of your signing class going into Christmas break makes your Christmas more relaxing, quite honestly. I think we’ve got to continue to evaluate it in terms of the student-athlete. I have been probably as outspoken as I am, which is not much, about the early official visits, I’m not in favor of that. Eight months of official visits, we’ve talked about it, it’s not about the coaches, we work when we need to work, it’s about all the auxiliary people that are on call literally eight months out of the year. Your academic people, your professors, the equipment staff, all those people that are now forced to be ready at a moment’s notice, eight months out of the year, I think is a little much for their job description.”