

Virginia Tech Football
Head coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Spring Football Media Conference
March 12, 2018

Opening statement

"Thank you all for braving the elements to come and spend some time with us today. First of all, I want to congratulate Buzz [Williams], his group and their season. They have been a lot of fun to watch and I don't know a whole lot about basketball, but I know something about guys who work hard and compete hard. They are awfully fun to watch and I will enjoy watching them in the NCAA Tournament.

"If I'm not mistaken, we have a new roster for you guys and a list for guys who are out and guys who will be limited throughout spring ball. The guys that are out, are out. The guys who are limited are all under varying degrees of participation parameters. As we go through the spring if those guys are getting more and more of it, we will change their status and I'll be happy to tell you about it. Most of those guys in the limited category are postseason surgeries that can't have contact, but they can go out there and run around a little bit and we'll try to get as much out of them as we can.

"We are finishing up our winter conditioning hard hat program in the weight room. I think one of the most telling things I've seen is the gains that we have made. I think that is indicative of really two things. One, Ben Hilgart and his staff do a fantastic job down there, and the other thing is our youth. When you have a young football team, you obviously have more area for gains. When you have an older football team, those gains tend to be a little smaller with guys being a little further along in their development in bench press, squat, hang cleans and all of that sort of stuff. When you are dealing with nine seniors and three quarters of your team being sophomores or younger, it's good to see those big gains because you need those things.

"All of that being said, I'm excited about the way we've worked. I like our attitude and our work ethic, though we have a long way to go. We are looking forward to getting to practice and getting out there and running around. I'm sure there will be several questions about the roster, so I will hit on a couple of those guys briefly.

"Joe Kane has made the move to offensive line and Lecitus [Smith] made the move to offensive line months ago. He just kept getting bigger and it was just too big a strain on his body, he's a big human being so it was a natural move for Lecitus. Caleb [Farley] will probably get the most press or coverage in terms of his position because of all the things that have gone through with him. We are going to start him at defensive back and he is going to be limited. He won't do much and I'm still holding out on the fact he could play offense. I would like to play him on offense as much as anybody, but the bottom line is where we are out in the secondary right now, between our youth and some older players who have been less than consistent for us, we feel like in the long run that is his best spot. The No. 1 thing for Caleb right now is to get

healthy. He has made huge strides and has attacked his rehab with great intensity, toughness and a fantastic attitude. He has been through a tremendous amount in his young career, I love being around him on a daily basis. The No. 1 thing for us is to get him healthy and find a way to get him on the field.

"I'm sure I will be asked about the quarterback situation, so the bottom line is if we played tomorrow, sure, Josh [Jackson] would be our starter. But quarterback, like every position, we have very few guys who are above or beyond reproach in terms of competing for their jobs. So he'll go out there and we will divide the reps between the other two guys with [Ryan] Willis and Hendon [Hooker]. There are already some things that we know about Josh that we don't know about the other two, that we will need to try to simulate in terms of when we scrimmage, we'll have to do some live work with Willis and Hooker that we will not do with Josh. Josh has more than proved his ability to handle the toughness it takes and all that sort of stuff. So, we will divide it up and go let them compete, I like the way all three of those kids have worked. I make no bones about it I love Josh's competitiveness and I look forward to getting him out there and going and getting after it.

"We have several strides to make as a team throughout spring and we are starting to talk about those things just now. And we are looking forward to finishing this week with getting spring break out of them, that was what our plan was for today. Obviously, with the weather, we were not around the kids today. But hopefully through this week we will get spring break out of them and get them prepared for spring practice."

On the list of guys being out consisting of a lot of wide receivers and how he feels about that group with some key departures:

"Well, I mean there is not much I can do about it. We will put the guys we can out there and go with them. We are going to have to continue to bring those guys along. I like the way Sean [Savoy] and Hezekiah [Grimsley] have worked in the off-season so far. We need some of those guys to grow up, mature and be there every single day, and that's the value they can add to this football team with being here every single day. And we have to get to that point to give ourselves a chance. So we need to get guys healthy so they can know what to do and be ready to play."

On whether WR Damon Hazelton will be fully back to participate in the fall:

"I think he will be a fully back in the fall."

On what he has seen out of Ryan Willis and Hendon Hooker so far with their limited amount of reps last fall:

"I haven't seen [Ryan] Willis much just because he went to scout team and Hendon was borderline throughout the fall, with us trying to redshirt him but you never know when you would need him as the season went along. So, I saw a little more of Hendon. Willis has some natural abilities throwing the football and he has fit in with the football team really well. He works hard and has got some game experience, so I'm excited to watch him go compete. Hendon doesn't have game experience but has some talent. The one thing he did do during the

fall when we would practice on Thursdays, even though he got very few reps throughout the week, he got in there and things would seem to move smoothly. That was a good sign with him showing he could process and communicate in our game situations on Thursdays. I'm anxious to watch them just as they are anxious to get out there."

On OL Kyle Chung getting his sixth year of eligibility:

"Well, I'd say the first thing is, and we talked about this as a team last night when everybody got back, that was kind of expected. We talked about it for a little bit and we didn't know for sure. I felt pretty confident from what I got from the medical people that it was going to go through. The accomplishment was that we wanted him back. I said that to Kyle and I said that to our entire team, that the strides that he has made as a teammate in the last eight months, in my eyes and in the players and coaches' eyes, really speaks volumes about him. That we wanted his leadership and work ethic back, and I'm not sure it was like that to start off with. So, I'm really proud of him maturing and turning the corner. He has graduated from college and did well in the classroom last fall as a guy who has already earned a degree. We will move him around and will probably start him with snapping the ball a little bit. We will see if we can move him back inside and be productive there."

On how he feels about the offensive line as a group this spring:

"I'm anxious to see them play. We got some guys where it is either put up or shut up time now, guys who have been in the program for a handful of years that need to grow up and be productive, so we'll see if they can do that. I like the way the kids are working as a group and the role [Yosuah] Nijman is trying to take in terms of being a leader. Also, the way the younger guys are trying to work, and they are going to go against some young defensive linemen. We got a handful of freshmen D-linemen. I'm looking forward to those two groups, the second O- and D-lines, go at it and compete a little bit."