

**Virginia Tech Football
HC Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Spring Game Media Conference
April 14, 2018**

Opening statement:

“What a beautiful day. Great day to be a Hokie. So many things going on on campus from the Remembrance Run, dedication of baseball field to the spring game. Kind of cool to be a part of. Getting to reflect on being a part of something special...it was a great day. Obviously we’ve got a lot with recruiting and that sort of stuff going on and the spring game, just my first thought is what a beautiful day, beautiful atmosphere, fantastic fan support—really turned out to watch their kids who have worked really hard this spring. As you guys saw, we were down several people. Everybody that could play, played today, but it was productive.

“We saw some individual improvement. We saw some team improvement. We have a long way to go. This might be the most important summer of any team I’ve ever coached in terms of what we need and moving forward considering our youth and inexperience. Of my years, this might be the most important the next several months of our lives. We will get our guys ready for that and keep moving forward.”

On QB Ryan Willis:

“Yeah, I think he’s excited to get out there. It’s really tough on kids... redshirt year is difficult and it’s even harder when it’s in the middle of your career and when you’ve had a chance to play and then you’ve got to sit back and know you’ve got no chance of playing. I think he handled it really well. It was productive year for him. There’s no question he’s excited to get out there. He’s more athletic than I think maybe we thought based on the way he can run around and move, he’s got some talent at throwing the football. Making some strides, he’s got a long way to go in terms of our comfort level with him operating day in and day out.”

On the receiver position:

“A lot of work to do. We didn’t get to practice with several of them. We’ll get healthy and we show up every day and work hard and improve. Those three guys got better. I was proud particularly of Hezekiah [Grimsley] and Phil [Patterson], in terms of their dedication to improving every single day. Still have a long way to go, but they were very productive.”

On WR Hezekiah Grimsley’s improvements and ways he can improve:

“Well, first of all he’s just been moved all over the place. Kind of a by-product of the season last year, which is kind of unfair to him, but we want to put him in one spot and leave him there. There’s a lot that goes into playing on the inside. He’s got some physical maturation in terms of physical strength, but he likes it in there. He’s just a slender guy, so it’s going to take a longer time to get him as strong as he needs to be to play at this level. In short, there’s plenty of fundamental work, technique work and strength work that he’s made strides in, but needs to keep working.”

On the cornerbacks, particularly Jermaine Waller:

“Jermaine [Waller], I think has a chance. He’s kind of a microcosm of our football team right now: he’s got talent, he’s young... we don’t have the time to pull him aside and say just relax, we’ll call you in a couple of years when it’s time to play. But, I love the way he’s approached this spring. He’s missed some time with a hamstring and he still got some work, but obviously it was limited. In short, I’m excited about him. I like the way he’s going about it. He’s got a long way to go, but you know, we are going to play tight coverage out there with no help and we’ve got to be able to play the next play if something bad happens and if something good happens, but I like his progress so far.”

On being productive in the Red Zone offensively, specifically what happened in the first half:

“I couldn’t tell from where I was standing. I knew what the look was from defense and I knew what the play was on offense was, so that particular play bothers me that we didn’t execute it, but it didn’t really correlate in my mind as in the Red Zone. But yeah, we did work on it quite a bit. I think it’s going to be a key defense. We are going to be quite a bit younger defensively and we may give up more yards than we have the last couple of years, so we have to play well in the redzone. We’ve got a little more work there of both sides of the ball. It comes down to tight coverage because they put too many guys in there and they line up close to you when you’re on the eight-yard line, so you’ve got to go in there and make a play.”

On whether the amount of reps that quarterbacks Ryan Willis and Hendon Hooker got are indicative of their ranking behind QB Josh Jackson:

“I don’t know that I would read anything into that. I don’t know what they are if that helps you — I don’t know how many reps either one of them took, but we’ll sit down at the end of spring and evaluate everyone’s performance and go from there.”

On how QB Hendon Hooker is handling the difference between last year and this year when he was in a “full-blown competition” with QB Josh Jackson last year and this year he’s got him in front of him:

“He’s handling it really well. He’s focused on continuing to get better. I mean no jobs are taken. We are going to play the best people and all our guys know that. The best guys are going to get out there to play.”

On progress of QB Josh Jackson:

“I think he’s taken another step in understanding what we are trying to accomplish because he’s as bright a guy as I’ve coached. I think he’s taking a step forward, but there’s still room for him to be pushed. I think he still needs to fall more in love with the process.”

On what “Falling more in love with the process” means:

“He needs to fall more in love with preparing. He does a good job of that, but I think there’s another level of detail that he can reach in his level of preparation, but I’ve been really pleased with him.”

On linebackers Dylan Rivers and Rayshard Ashby:

“I think we’ve got a lot of work to do. Rayshard [Ashby] seems to have a very good understanding of what’s going on. We’re going to have to continue to evaluate, coach, teach and develop there with Dylan [Rivers] and Rayshard [Ashby] and the rest of the crew. No matter who it is, we’re going to be young.”