

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Fall Camp – Media Conference
August 2, 2018

Opening Statement:

“Thank you all for coming today. Obviously, it’s an exciting time of year. I just want to touch on a couple things before we start talking about football. Congratulations to DeAngelo Hall and his fantastic career. I know he announced his retirement. I’ve been around him a little bit. I look forward to opportunities to be around him a little more, but he’s done a fantastic job. Not only as a player, but as a great ambassador to Virginia Tech. I just want to make sure he knows that he’s welcome here any time and I look forward to having a little more time to visit with him here in the future.

“It’s also nice news that coach [Frank] Beamer will join us an honorary captain for the Florida State game. I got to spend a little time with him the other day. He looked a lot better than I do. He looked well rested and ready for the season.

“I’m sure every coach says this, but it was a particularly big emphasis for us heading into this summer, considering some of the lack of experience that we have, that we have a great summer. I think Ben Hilgart [head strength and conditioning coach] and his staff deserve a tremendous amount of credit and our kids deserve a tremendous amount of credit because we made big gains from a physical, mental, emotional and team standpoint. I’m excited to see them on the field in a couple of days. We will report on Saturday then practice on Sunday.

“We have Ty Nix [Safeties Coach] fully in the fold now along with Mark Diethorn [Director of Player Personnel] a Virginia Tech graduate who’s running our recruiting. I’m excited to have those guys and go through the season with them. And to wrap the summer up with a Hokie club event. I certainly enjoy meeting Hokies across the Commonwealth.”

On does the success of running the ball in the bowl game last year encourage him that the rushing attack will improve this year:

“The first thing on an individual basis it encourages me about Deshawn [McClease] and certainly that’s not the only game he played in. He provided a spark at times throughout the year. I am really excited about his development from a physical, mental, emotional and leadership standpoint. I’ve really been pleased about him, so it excites me about him moving forward. It was nice to have Steven Peoples back. He’s really been effective and efficient when he’s been back there. We just went through a large part of the season without him last year, and I think it’s going to be important that we do a good job of managing him throughout camp because of the type of body type he has and the energy he exerts on every play. We’ll have to do a good job of managing him so that we can have him for a little bit longer. I’m excited about the way that we ran the ball during that game and hopefully it’ll carry into the season.”

On the amount of reliable receivers that he would like to have in his rotation:

“We allocate a certain number of scholarships to each position, obviously that can fluctuate. Sometimes you’re under at one position and over at another spot. I don’t get carried away with that as I do with competent depth. What is our number of players that deserve playing time that can play at a high level? I would like that to be much higher than it has been since I’ve been here. Bucky [Hodges] Isaiah [Ford] and Cam [Phillips] were all good players, very productive, but our pure number of productive players, in my opinion, hasn’t been what it needs to be. I don’t know if it’ll be what it needs to be this year, but I do believe with all of my heart that it will be in the coming years up to what we would like it to be.”

On what is the target number of receivers:

“I don’t know. I’ve never really put number on how many guys play. We’ve played eight or nine guys at that position but I’ve never put a number on it.”

On whether he voted for Virginia Tech in the USA Today coaches poll where Tech was ranked No. 17:

“No. I just knew I would be asked about it so I thought I wouldn’t put us in there (laughs). I mean who knows. It’s a preseason poll. I don’t know how good any of those teams are so I picked the ones I thought were the best and put them on there. I think we should earn our way into that as I think everyone should. I don’t think there should be a preseason poll. They should take it after week four and we’ll figure out after the first four weeks who the best teams are, kind of like they do the college football playoff committee, so I don’t put much stock in it good or bad. I’m not trying to denigrate the people that run the poll. I do take my time and actually fill it out, but whether we’re in it or not in the preseason has no bearing on our focus.”

On why he feels good about the offensive line and why:

“Well I think we have some really talented young guys coming in there to compete for playing time. We have three seniors and from what I’ve seen we have a handful of young really talented kids. Between Lecitus Smith and Silas Dzansi, I think those two guys are pretty talented. There are a couple other guys that I think have a chance to be pretty special. They’re all young, but I like that mix because I think they have three really good examples in our older players. When you look at our older guys and how they worked, what they’ve been through and the adversity they have fought through. They serve as pretty good examples to some of those young guys.”

On if he feels there is good depth at all positions:

“We’re in the process of doing that. We certainly have some positions that are better than others. It’s never just a flat line. There’s always unexpected things that come up and effect you one way or the other. You have some unexpected attrition. You just never know what it’s going to be. Guys may turn pro, may want something else or may graduate and look somewhere else. Those things are just a part of today’s day in age. They’re hard to plan for because you never know when it’s going to happen. We’re in the process of doing that. I feel good about where we’re going in terms of building quality depth.”

On whether the team's belief in having Bud Foster as their coordinator will help them pick up things quicker:

"I hope so. I certainly don't think it can hurt. I know that are kids know this, but Bud [Foster] is not going to make any tackles out there. He's going to line them up, coach them up and he's going to get them in the right position, but ultimately they're going to have to take ownership of what they're doing. It's the same on special teams and offense, but I do like that they have that belief in what's going on. I mean that certainly is a good thing. He's been through situations like this before. Seasons when we graduated large numbers of guys on the defensive side of the ball and you've got to come back and get ready to go for the next year. As a staff we'll get them coached up, prepared and ready to go. My short answer would be I think that's a good thing. The belief in what we're doing, whether it's our defensive coordinator, offseason program or whatever it is. Believing in it is half the battle."

On whether the offense could potentially take off some of the pressure off of a young defense:

"They could, I just don't know if we will. It would be nice. That's how we have to figure out how to win games. Last year I got a scouting report from that had some of my quotes from one of the games last season and it was talking about this is how we're going to win games. We're going to have to play great defense, solid on special teams and be opportunistic on offense and find a way to win as many games as we can. What the M.O. for this team will be I don't know yet. Obviously, you can infer that since there are more guys coming back on offense than defense. That doesn't necessarily guarantee that's the way it's going to go. That's part of us trying to evaluate camp, games and trying to figure out exactly what it's going to take to pull it off. You go through season where you go for it on fourth down than you normally would because you're better or worse on the other side of the ball. You go through season where onside kicks, fake punts or whatever it is because you have different strengths and weaknesses. To me that's the fun part of it all. What I can't do is prejudice it. I think you can have an idea of what it may look like, but then you have to look at it with open eyes and try to evaluate while you're going through practice and the season."

On balancing DB Caleb Farley playing defense and potentially contributing on special teams:

"That's not a big deal. During special teams period we're not practicing defense any way. He's either going to be taking kickoff return repetitions or standing on the sideline. We are cognizant of too much work on special teams in terms of being on too many of the special teams. I'm not concerned about overloading Caleb [Farley] whether he is or isn't our return man just based on that. He certainly will have a challenge of adapting to playing cornerback."

On having a starting quarterback returning for the first time at Tech and splitting reps for him and the other QBs:

"Brad [Cornelsen] usually talk about that, but we haven't talked about it yet to be honest with you. I'll take his input and make a decision. I know we're a couple days away but Brad and I haven't had that discussion yet."

On what happened with DT Cam Goode who left the program:

“I’m not going to go into any details about that. We wish Cam [Goode] the best and want him to do well. That’s why we gave him a release to anywhere that he wants to go and we’ll be happy to support him.”

On if blanket (scholarship) releases are given to everyone in such situations:

“We do them all on a case-by-case basis. I think that’s the best way to do all of that stuff.”