

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Media Conference
August 21, 2018

Opening statement:

“First of all, welcome back to all of the students who are back on campus. It’s good to have that kind of buzz with the season starting when school starts back, it’s kind of a fun time of year for everybody. We had a really good workout on Saturday with about 50 or 60 former players here. It was good talking to them and I think it’s something (Virginia Tech) has been doing for quite some time. I always enjoy that day and I think our kids enjoy working hard in front of the former players and showing them how much this means to them.

“On Sunday, we had a good scrimmage and got some live special teams work in and some good offense and defense work. We are continuing to trying to improve with working towards this first game. The players were off yesterday, with it being the first day of school, and now we are back in our regular routine. It’s still a little basic in terms of what practices entail but we will start soon tailoring it towards our first opponent. As of right now, we will be working, at least earlier this week, good versus good and try to fine tune some things.”

On where the team stands on punt returners and kickoff returners:

“Well, in terms of where are we Caleb [Farley] and Terius Wheatley have been taking a lot of work at kickoff returners. C.J. [Carroll] and Damon Hazelton have been working at punt returner. We have a whole other pool of guys that we’ve been working with there that we are still evaluating and seeing exactly how that is going to work out. At this moment, those four guys have kind of taken the lion share of the work there.”

On bringing WR C.J. Carroll along slowly back from injury and how that’s going:

“We are still doing it and I would say it has gone well. It’s just kind of been an ongoing thing for C.J. for a long time and we are trying our best to get him through it. So that he can play his final year and contribute. I think that’s really what he wants to do. So, we’ve tried to develop a plan around that and give him those opportunities.”

On when students come back and fall class begins, if some of the student-athletes’ focus changes:

“Well certainly. For us during fall camp you only have one week where we weren’t in school or summer school, it was just football. Then, the fall semester starts and people come on campus and there are more things going on. Our kids have more responsibilities. So, managing that, particularly for younger players is a bigger challenge. Guys who have been at it for three or four years are acclimated to it and understand all of that. But it certainly adds a new dynamic, particularly for the new guys. The good news is our freshmen have been on campus, have been going to school in the summer time so it’s not like they just walked in the door. But that’s part of college life and college athletics, with balancing all of those things and making sure we take

care of our business in all areas of our lives.”

On being complimentary of LB Rayshard Ashby on Tech Talk Live and what he’s done that has caught his eye:

“The first thing is the mastery of what we are doing in terms of few if any mental mistakes. He plays with great effort and intensity. I tried to use the term wise beyond his years because I feel like he is a much older soul than a true sophomore. He’s really taken a leadership role for us. I put him on our leadership council for a reason because I believe in him. He’s been performing at a level higher than most people do in their second year.”

On WR Damon Hazelton working as a punt returner, though he’s at a bigger size than most at that position:

“He can catch the ball (laughing) and that’s the first rule of punt returning, to make sure we have the ball at the end of the play. That’s kind of the first thing, can you judge it and make decisions? There are a lot of decisions you have to make. Greg [Stroman] was incredible at that in terms of balls he fielded, balls he backed off, the communication that goes into short kicks and communicating with those guys who are blocking for you. They don’t know where the ball is and there’s a lot that goes into it in terms of handling that spot before you even get to your return skills and scoring touchdowns.

“I do think he has some size and strength that can be adventitious at that spot. But kind of the baseline level is who in our evaluation can field the ball, communicate and handle the stress that goes with being a punt returner before we even talk about making guys miss and doing some of the things Greg had done over the last several years.”

On having QB Josh Jackson back for a second year as the starter and the comfortability that comes with that going into a season-opening game:

“I feel a lot better, you always do when you have a known quantity. You know a guy that has been in the mix. We’re going to go on the road and play in a hostile environment the first game of the year and having somebody back there that has been in those situations before I think is certainly a positive. Knowing how he is going to react or respond when adversity hits or when things get difficult makes you feel immediately better.”