

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Media Conference

Wednesday August 29, 2018



2017 ACC FOOTBALL

## Justin Fuente Virginia Tech

JUSTIN FUENTE: We started off with a good week of practice in preparation for our opening game Monday night at Florida State. I think everybody around here is excited. We have plenty of work left to do, but there's a good feeling around the office.

**Q. We got your depth chart, and it obviously still has Zachariah starting at center. That wasn't the way you guys opened fall camp. What have you seen from him to give you the confidence to start him there?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: He's worked incredibly hard, one of the harder workers on the football team. He's always doing extra and really has come on in the past year with the knowledge and understanding of what we've got going on. Always trying to put our best five out there, and we feel like he was one of them.

**Q. The versatility of a player like Kyle Chung, how much does that help you as you try to, like you said, get your best five out there, the fact that Kyle can play multiple spots?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I think any time you've got guys with experience and knowledge, whether it's on the offensive line or wide receiver or defensive back, that can give you artificial depth, meaning maybe they're the starting left guard but also the backup right tackle or whatever, they're incredibly valuable to your football team because they can help you when the things that always happen during a season, which is a little bit of attrition, when those things hit, those guys can be incredibly valuable.

**Q. I guess with the way Bud was speaking about Khalil Ladler the other way that we shouldn't be surprised to see him in the starting lineup. What have you seen from him this August? Sounds like he's kind of worked at a number of different spots, and do you think Devin Hunter will still have a big role in this defense, even as the backup at that whip spot?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, two part, one, Khalil is a little bit like I just referenced Kyle Chung, he's just been moved all over and can handle it mentally, is really impressive in terms of understanding and having some savvy as a playmaker. It's kind of like with Kyle, getting your best five offensive linemen on the field. Khalil has shown some ability to move around a little bit. We've

been really pleased with his development, so do I expect Devin to play a role, absolutely. Been really pleased with his development. He continues to improve and work hard and have a great attitude. I still believe everything that's ever been written about him. I think he's going to be a really productive player here at Virginia Tech.

**Q. With Hoyt, him jumping into the picture at center, was that something that developed in fall or was it in the spring? When did you kind of get an idea that he would be grabbing that starting spot?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, we give exactly the same amount of reps with the twos that we do the ones, so those guys have every opportunity to go take spots and prove that they belong. So throughout the spring, he continued to get better. He had another great summer and entered the fall and was really productive. I would just say it's been a gradual process. I mean, we certainly didn't enter the fall knowing who was going to start at certain positions.

I mean, I don't think it was necessarily a surprise to anybody here because of how hard he's worked and his steady improvement in his time here.

**Q. And then with the backup quarterbacks, do you have kind of in your mind who would be the first out, or would it be like a situational thing? What have you told them with Ryan and then those listed with the "or" next to their names?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Sure, I think it'll be a situational deal, or I don't think, I know it'll be a situational deal. And we've had those conversations with those guys, and I've been really pleased with Hendon's improvement from the spring to the fall. Ryan continues to get better and show some really good arm talent. If we were in that situation, we would kind of go off how we felt and what situation we were actually in.

**Q. With the depth chart team, what was the determining factor in Brian Johnson getting the nod?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: At field goal kicker, I felt like it's just a little more consistent. I mean, he's got a little bit more experience and felt a little more comfortable with him.

**Q. With Vinny, how far away is he from getting**



**back, and how confident are you with Jarrod Hewitt there as a backup? Everyone has been raving about him all preseason.**

JUSTIN FUENTE: I feel good about both of those situations. Jarrod has made huge strides. He's become what he's got to be to be a productive player, which is just incredible shape and strong and athlete. He's done all of those things and really taken it to heart to go try and be as good a football player as he can be.

I feel confident Vinny will be back. You think about when the injury occurred so late in the year, you kind of get a feel for why he may not be -- I mean, he's 100 percent, and he's cleared. I certainly don't want to paint the picture that we're putting him in harm's way. We're certainly not.

But he's just -- he needs to be managed right now, and I feel good that in time that we won't even have those thoughts.

**Q. To be a team that competes for the top ratings in the CFP, you've got to beat top-rated teams. I know this is just your third year at Tech, so your history is brief, but it's been a challenge for Tech over the years. What do you feel like you have to do to overcome that challenge and win the big games?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, the big games are hard for everybody. It's two good teams out there battling it out. I think continuing to push our program forward with what we're doing facilities-wise, what we're doing operationally, how we're handling recruiting are going to give us the chance when we play other elite people.

**Q. I guess your guys have to physically perform once they're in these games, correct?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Yeah.

**Q. A lot of coaches want to give all their reps to the ones. How do you carve out time to give the twos an equal amount of reps as the ones?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: I don't know any guys that just give all the reps to the ones, but it's ever since I've been an assistant, that's the way we've done things, because your twos become your ones as your season goes along. We don't like that part of the game, but the bottom line is that's what happens. And when those guys' numbers are called, they have to be prepared to play.

**Q. A lot of youth up and down the depth chart; how much sleep have you lost thinking about how many young guys are going to be on the field for you in the opener?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I'll say this: I'm excited to go compete with our guys. They've worked incredibly hard. Sure, we have some youth, but I like them. I like

the way they've worked. I like the way they're continuing to prepare. There's only one way to get experience, and that's to get out there on the field, and what better way to do it than jumping right in the fire.

**Q. And specifically with the secondary, talk about the development you've seen out of those young guys.**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, there's a whole slew of them. We do have some guys with some experience in terms of Divine and Khalil and Reggie. Even Bryce Watts has got some experience. But we've got some young, talented guys back there that can really run, that have got good size, and have done a great job preparing. There's just quite a few of them. Getting them out there and getting them some game experience is going to be important to their development. There's only -- eventually you hit the law of diminishing returns in practice, and they've just got to go do it. That's a point we're rapidly reaching.

**Q. And the Tech secondary has always been known for guys that go up and take the ball, ball hawkers if you will. Who's that guy on this secondary?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I mean, I think that remains to be seen. I'm not sure there's been a proven guy out there that has done some of those things yet. Certainly Reggie and Divine have played probably the most back there and done a pretty darned good job.