

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**Media Conference**  
**September 10, 2018**

***Opening statement***

“Again, I want to just say thanks to our fans for coming out Saturday. It was a first experience for a large portion of our team in Lane Stadium. It was good that many of those young guys got to play in front of a great home advantage there.

“Finally, a normal week for us, so we’re excited about that. We’ve got a big challenge with East Carolina coming to town after a big win versus North Carolina. We’ll be challenged in all three phases of the game this week and we’ll need a great week of preparation.”

***On preparing to play in a potentially torrential downpour of rain and the advantage of having rain games in the past:***

“Well, we will, first of all, we need to get the notion across to the team that we can’t worry or assume anything. We just don’t know what’s going to happen and we have no control over that. We’ve got to worry about the things we can control. Obviously, the first thing that comes to mind is we have to take care of the football in wet conditions, or handling the football in wet conditions. Every Thursday we do, whether it’s supposed to rain or not, wet ball drills at the end of practice in the quarterback exchange, play a little catch, snap and kick a little bit. I think there is a key move in effect to that. Obviously, this week there will be a special emphasis on that and I don’t know if we’ll practice every period with a sloppy, wet ball but we’ll certainly have time each day to work on it.

“If you really think back, well, the (2017) Duke game was pretty wet in the second half, but I was thinking of the (2016) North Carolina game. A lot of those guys are not playing, or are not handling the ball anymore. We could probably draw a little bit from the Duke game in the second half particularly, you know that was some pretty serious rain. Hopefully, derive a little bit of confidence and understand that it takes a little bit of effort and concentration, just because you did it before doesn’t mean you can do it again. You have to do it every time out and understand the focus and concentration and discipline it takes is important.”

***On the status of OL Christian Derrisaw and concern of back-to-back DL Ricky Walker injuries in two weeks:***

“We’ll know more as the week goes on. Am I concerned about him (Ricky)? Yeah, sure. Absolutely. We want him to be healthy, he’s a really good player for us, so yes, absolutely. And I’m not being a smart aleck, I mean we want him to be ready to go, he’s awfully tough and he’s a guy who has always fought through things and we know if he’s able to go he’ll be out there and if he’s not, he won’t.”

***On his thoughts on the kicking game so far from both punters and kickers:***

“I would answer that in two parts. You know, our kickers and punters have done a really good job the first two weeks. There were some things that happened in our first game in terms of our coverage units, our blocking units that we have to get corrected. We took a step to correcting some of those in the second week. We didn’t have an opportunity to correct some of them in the second week and we’ll need to improve there, or they will manifest themselves in issues. I think we were quite fortunate, honestly, that it didn’t hurt us in the first week. We got away with some things that are uncharacteristic of us, but the guys doing the snapping and kicking have done a pretty good job. One that is one you could hope for in the first two weeks.”

***On what to think of East Carolina’s first two performances this season:***

“Well, I don’t want to take anything away from North Carolina A&T as they did a terrific job, but there were a lot of things that happened to enable them to win that game. When you go back and look at how many times East Carolina had that ball inside the five-yard line, twice they turned the ball over, a couple more times they came away with just field goals. I’m not devaluing North Carolina A&T’s performance, they made those plays, but they had plenty of opportunities to finish that game off. They put it all together in the North Carolina game in all three phases. They were ready to play with emotion and intensity, you could see it on their sidelines. They responded to adversity and played really well in the North Carolina game.”

***On noticing anything different in DL Trevon Hill’s approach this year:***

“I think part of it is he’s becoming an older player, you know. He’s more comfortable with what we’re asking him to do. You know, playing defensive end has changed a lot in the last 10-15 years, it used to be a lot more simple. Now with what offenses are doing combined with what we are asking him to do defensively, there are quite a few things to it. I think he’s more comfortable with the techniques and that has let him play a little more free. Letting him free himself more defensively so he can go be the athlete that we know that he is. You combine that with what I alluded to last time we talked I believe, his overall strength level has increased dramatically in the past two years, along with the work he has put in. I think he feels good and confident in what he’s doing and starting to become more productive.”

***On RB Terius Wheatley’s effectiveness in the first two weeks:***

“Certainly, he’s been productive in the first two weeks. We redshirted him last year, but felt like there was something there. He continued to work on his body and gain some strength. He was a slender guy, he’s improving his overall strength level, which I think has helped him be a more productive player. As we’re rotating those guys through in fall camp and spring and trying to evaluate those guys and find out who’s the next guy that can step up, we felt that he had earned an opportunity to have some touches of the football. I think that the offensive staff has been creative in a short sample size, creative in some of the ways they’ve got him the ball in different packages and getting around. If he continues to be productive and do those things and handle those changes from week to week, then I would anticipate he continues.”

***On the challenges ECU offers, especially scoring 20 unanswered points last week:***

“They’ve always been a dangerous offensive team, even through their struggles last year. They have guys on the outside, with all the plays they made one-on-one against North Carolina on the outside, it’s pretty impressive. They’ve always had a fairly clear identity in what they’re trying to accomplish on the offensive side of the ball, with them being very dangerous. To me, they’ve made the most improvements on the defensive side of the ball in the first two weeks, compared to last year. I know they were going through some things last year, getting it figured out. They have an identity, they can really run, defensively they have an attacking defense and that will pose a challenge on both sides of the ball and the kicking game. They’ve always been East Carolina offense, but I think they’re getting back to East Carolina defense, which makes them pretty potent.”

***On Fork Union Military Academy, specifically the four offensive linemen on the current roster who spent time there, and any differences between prep school players compared to others:***

“I have very little experience with it before. I think it has been fantastic with Virginia Tech for a long time before I got here and I think it will continue as we move forward. There’s something about what is demanded from those young people when they go there that sets them up for success, wherever they go. The way that program is run and the discipline level and the things that they have to do in terms of getting up in the morning and marching, their academic requirements. I think that benefits those guys when they get to a four year school, whether here or somewhere else. We have a special affinity for that place and will continue moving forward.

“I do think that is more of a developmental position and I do think that extra half year and that they don’t use a year of eligibility is beneficial, in particular, to those bigger guys, just another year of growth and strength in those more developmental positions, which offensive linemen definitely is.”

***On the status of the redshirt rule with the 12 true freshman:***

“Sure, well I have a spreadsheet and it has all the true freshman on there, it has a little ‘x’ next to, you know, several that haven’t played, several that have played one game and a whole bunch that have played two. We’re keeping track of that, as we go through it, you know I’m not going to tell you what guys, but there’s a guy or two that have played that we feel comfortable that we would like to try and redshirt.

“We have a couple guys that we would like to play throughout the season, we know that now. I still say it is something we will have to look at every week. Making definitive statements right now I think is really difficult, we just don’t know what’s going to happen, those things change so quickly. Your depth can change with one snap of the ball and you’re looking at it completely differently. We’re keeping track of it, we take a look at it every week. On Sunday, for example, we sat down and I looked through them all. I talked about each of those guys and how we feel about them and what we’re feeling about doing.”

***On improvements in the running game this season:***

“I think that the key is adapting to the schemes we see each week. I don’t think we just line up and move people out of the stadium. It’s going to be can we execute the schemes required versus the looks we’re seeing, continue to balance enough. I’ve always believed when you truly become dangerous is when you can throw the ball on running downs and run the ball on throwing downs. I’m not sure we’ve gotten there yet, but when you have the chance to run the ball on third-and-four and the defense thinks you may get it, it opens up a whole new world for you. I think we’ll continue to evolve and we’ve looked at some things schematically and some things have changed over the last couple of years. We’ll see as we face the different schemes as the weeks go by, if we can continue to be consistent.”

***On any surprises from the unique start to the season and the short week and any adjustments that had to be made:***

“I think the first thing, just from my notes quite honestly, I have been pretty familiar with short weeks but that was the shortest of short weeks. That was a real strain and you know, please don’t take what I’m saying as complaining, you know I keep these notes on how we’re practicing and what we’re doing and I look back on it. That was different from an ordinary Thursday game coming off a Saturday game. The emotion, how early our next game was, I think I underestimated a little bit, quite honestly in retrospect. We made some adjustments to our schedule later in our week, I think I realized as the week went on. I think the biggest thing so far has been positionally, I like as a group we’re continuing to teach some of the most rudimentary things with our team. We just have so many new guys that continuing to improve has to be our focus. It’s so many guys first college season and it’s long and handling that is going to be really important for us.”