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2017 ACC FOOTBALL

Justin Fuente

Virginia Tech

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Virginia Tech head coach Justin Fuente. Coach, please give us an opening statement, then we'll open it up for questions.

JUSTIN FUENTE: I guess first of all, on behalf of everybody here at Virginia Tech, our thoughts and prayers are with everybody affected by this storm, whatever path it may take. Thankful for our leadership here on campus with Dr. Sands and Whit.

With all that said, we're not playing this week, so we are in kind of self-improvement mode, getting ready to turn our eyes towards Old Dominion.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Are you open to adding a game in your bye week now that you've lost one?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I don't know. We'll look at all that sort of stuff. I mean, it's not a traditional bye week anyway because we have a game that Thursday against Georgia Tech. All the scheduling stuff, our administration will look at and try and figure out.

Q. As far as this week, what do you plan for a schedule? Will the guys get any days off?

JUSTIN FUENTE: We'll practice this week like we would during a normal bye week. Our coaches will get on the road, do a little bit of recruiting in areas that are safe. The guys will have a little bit of time off.

Q. Have you ever had a game canceled? You said you're kind of approaching it like a normal bye week. Any thoughts of doing anything differently?

JUSTIN FUENTE: No, I've never had this happen. When we got the word that East Carolina wasn't coming, we just immediately turned it towards a self-improvement week. We've got plenty of things that we need to get better. Kind of shifted our practice plan and our focus towards getting some of our inexperienced guys work, kind of preparing for the long haul of the season.

Q. I know after C.J. muffed a punt on Saturday that you made a change. What are your plans moving forward in punt return?

JUSTIN FUENTE: We'll continue to look at those guys and let them continue to go. I haven't lost faith in C.J.

He's done a good job of it in years past, filling in for Greg, and I'm confident he'll continue to do a good job. I felt good about the way Damon handled his opportunity. Then we'll probably look at Hezekiah Grimsley back there a little bit in this next week in kind of self-reflection before we turn our attention to ODU.

Not positive who will go out there for the first punt next week, but those guys will get the lion's share of the work this week and next.

Q. On the special teams theme, Chris had a huge impact, Cunningham, at Florida State. If memory serves, he did not see the field on Saturday. Why was that?

JUSTIN FUENTE: He was just banged up. He was available to play if we needed him, kind of in an emergency role. We were going to try our best to hold him if we could. He dressed out and traveled, the whole nine yards, could have gone in. We were going to try -- the plan was to try to get through the game without putting him in. He'll be good to go this coming up week.

Q. There has been talk recently about extending the season, making it 14 weeks so there could be double bye weeks. Maybe in instances now where we've seen hurricanes impacting games, that could be beneficial. Wondering if you had any thoughts on whether you'd like to see a double bye week for college football?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I think having two byes in and of itself is worthy of consideration. I would want to see the entire schedule kind of in its entirety, exactly how it would work out most years, when that would affect fall camp starting. Obviously it would affect championship week, all those sorts of things.

Big picture-wise, I would want to look at that and understand a little bit better what our calendar would look like. Kind of the short answer to that question is I'd be interested in looking at that. But I don't really know that I understand the big ramifications of that right at this moment.

Q. Were you involved in the discussions about what to do with the game in terms of trying to play it?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I was informed of what we were



trying to accomplish. Whit and I have a really good relationship. We talk often. We had pretty open lines of communication of what we were trying to do.

Q. After your first couple games, what is the biggest concern you have about your football team right now?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Oh, I think the biggest thing for me is can we continue to get better. We're just playing some inexperienced guys. We've been fortunate in the first two weeks. We made plenty of mistakes that have not manifested itself in big scoring plays or big plays for the other team. Continuing to improve on that I think is going to be really important for us, getting those younger players more and more comfortable is kind of what we're focusing on.

Q. The rushing attack in the first couple games, what can you say about the rushing attack as a whole?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I've been pleased with their performance. They've run hard. They want the ball. They've continued to compete. All three have a little bit different skill set which I think makes it kind of fun.

I've been pleased with Terius as he's continued to improve. We really needed another guy for us to feel comfortable about putting in there. He certainly made some strides after redshirting last year.

I like the way those guys are competing, trying to run hard.

Q. As far as you're going to use this week as some self-reflection, what are some of the key pieces you're keying in on from the first couple games?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I think the primary thing is player development. We've had two weeks of getting several true freshmen in games. Some of them we'll probably redshirt, most of those guys will probably play throughout the year. They have to continue to play a bigger role as the season comes along.

I think they'll be a big focus for us in all three phases of the game, special teams, offense and defense. Can that group of guys continue to develop so that when we need them, which we will as the season goes along, they're ready.

Q. What is the mood of the team like? Do you worry about them losing focus a little bit? When you told them the game was canceled, how do you channel that, have them refocus?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I think they were anxious to play. I mean, I think they understand there's other factors out there. I did not love our workout yesterday, quite honestly. I'm hopeful that we'll have a much more

focused and disciplined workout today.

But we just changed our message almost instantaneously from focusing on preparing for an opponent to focusing on preparing for the rest of the season, which is essentially what we're doing. Maybe I need to do a better job of delivering that message today, and hopefully they'll do a better job of taking that message and we can have a little bit crisper workout this evening.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.