**Virginia Tech Football**

**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**

**Media Conference**

**September 17, 2018**

***Opening statement***

“Obviously we still have thoughts and prayers for those who are affected by Hurricane Florence, players’ families and people in the area. In terms of our team, we had a good practice yesterday. We’re kind of in our bye week preparation mode so we had what is usually our Tuesday practice yesterday. The kids are off today. We had a really good week of work, getting a bunch of young guys a bunch of reps. We are excited about this game, excited to get back on the field and to head to the 757 area. We’ve got several kids obviously on our team that are from that area. It will be good for them to get to go home and play. We’ve got a tremendous amount of respect for the ODU program and the job Bobby (Wilder) has done, literally building it from scratch. You can see on film that they are well coached and they play incredibly hard and we’ll need to have a great week of preparation this week.”

***On if the schedule change allowed the coaching staff to prepare for later weeks in the season, particularly the matchup with Georgia Tech and its triple option:***

“This is the approach we took because of our inexperience: we took last week to focus on ourselves. Now certainly we did some work as coaches for the next game in terms of game planning ODU. But we really tried to get back to some fundamentals, evaluate some of the young guys that have played in the first couple ball games. If we didn’t have a little bit of extra time for Georgia Tech (on a Thursday following an open Saturday), then I think that might’ve entered into the equation, it’s something that we talk about all of the time. Even in fall camp looking at the schedule, do we need to a lot some time to prepare for that sort of stuff. So for this kind of impromptu bye week, we decided to just really turn our focus inward as we focus on player development and evaluation to see who we’re going to go with moving forward.”

***On the ECU game and the chances of it getting rescheduled:***

“I think that’s an ongoing process. Whit (Babcock) has done a great job of keeping me informed of where we’re at. I don’t know where it’s going to go. I met with Whit this morning and we don’t know where it’s going to go. I know that the administration here will do a great job of keeping me informed where it’s at and all that sort of stuff. I would love to explain to you all what was going to happen and all that kind of stuff, I just can’t. I don’t know where it’s going to go.”

***On working with younger players and using the extra time last week to focus on their development:***

“Well that’s the way we treated it. I really believe that it has a chance to be a blessing for us and this week in terms of playing two games and getting a look at a bunch of people. It probably has as much to do with special teams as anything. There certainly is some offense and defense in that and there are some guys that need plenty of work there. Who can really contribute to our team on special teams? This is the situation we’re in and the way that we can make the most of the situation is focus on ourselves for this three-day stretch here Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday of last week and the kids did a good job of that. I think two of our three workouts were pretty sharp.”

***On concern for the team because there hasn’t been a “normal” week yet due to the schedule and Hurricane Florence***

“Sure, we haven’t had a normal week yet. I sat right up here in front of all of you all and talked about how excited I was to have a normal week and that fell apart in short order. I am anxious to get into a little bit of a routine. I’m a creature of habit as much an anybody. For this game, our kids are genuinely excited. It’s been a long time since Virginia Tech has played in the 757. It’s been something that has been talked about for a long time, so the excitement of playing this game helps us with the ups and downs of playing and then turning around and not playing. So we still have a team that doesn’t know what it’s like to go through a normal week of preparation. We just pushed it back. Next week hopefully I’m standing here saying ‘We’re excited to get into a routine and everything moves smoothly from there.”

***On keeping the team focused on ODU with a primetime game with Duke and a matchup versus Notre Dame on the horizon:***

“Well, the first thing I would say is, the thought of us just focusing on the next task is not foreign. We do it in everything we do. In offseason, in spring, in fall camp, the notion of taking it one step at a time is not new to us. Look across college football and see what happened last week. Look at the teams that beat other teams. I think it’s eight non Power 5 teams won, I might be wrong on that but North Texas and Arkansas, Nebraska losing, you just go down the list of teams losing. We are not in any situation to do anything other than focus on our next step. We can ill afford to be anything other than completely devoted to what we’ve got going on right now and quite honestly I don’t think that is going to be an issue. I don’t get that sense from our guys, we’ve got a tremendous amount of respect for the team we’re about to play, the environment we’re going to play in, the fact we’re playing in our home state, there is no reason for us to have our attention on anything other than our next step.”

***On how special it is to go to the 757 area where there is great support for Virginia Tech:***

“I think it’s need to take the band on the road here. We get a chance to reach out to our fan base. We played in the DC area, the northern Virginia area last year. Now this year we get a chance to play in the 757. Those people have been fantastic fans making that four-plus hour drive to come see us in Blacksburg. I think it’s a great opportunity for us to come to them one time. That’s what I’m kind of getting at, we are excited to get to play in this game, we really are. Part of it has to do with the venue and the location, the other part of it has got to do with the opponent that accounted for themselves very well last year and we’ll have to be ready to play.”

***On tangible recruiting benefits from playing a game in Norfolk where the Hokies recruit:***

“It certainly doesn’t hurt. I don’t know that I’ve ever sat in front of a kid and he said I’m coming there because you have one game scheduled three years from now in my backyard. I don’t know that that has ever been the straw that put the kid over the top, but I do think it’s good. I think it’s great for our fan base. To me, that’s a primary benefit of this. We get a chance to prove that we do want to be a program that reaches out and says ‘Thank you’ to our fan base. As far as recruiting, I certainly don’t think it hurts, but I don’t know that it’s a gigantic factor in the big scheme of things.”

***On the practice last week that he wasn’t happy with and how the Hokies turned it around***

“I’ve always believe in just being frank with our guys and our coaches. I just didn’t think that we approached it in the right manner. Part of that is a little bit of the emotion of not playing. I literally told them right before … we were practicing for East Carolina and we got the final word that there was no game literally minutes before a special teams meeting. There was a little bit of that but we can’t use that as an excuse. That’s what I felt like we did a little bit. We let the emotion of not playing a game get in the way of our preparation and our improvement. It was probably a little bit on us as coaches and myself too. We’ve got to do a better job of getting them ready to go so we just addressed it and talked about those things and why we needed to be better, why it’s important. We don’t just go practice just to check a box, we have deliberate practice. We have things we are trying to accomplish and we need to take advantage of that opportunity.”

***On any guys on the team that put their stamp on practice and showed they deserved more playing time on special teams:***

“I think that by and large the young guys that have played in the first two games needed to work. I don’t know that one of them, we said ‘Oh my gosh after these three days, you can’t do this and you you’re now on all four special teams units.’ By and large just getting them the fundamental work I thought was really important after having had them in the game. There’s a whole list of all of those guys. The young defensive backs come to mind because now they have a bit more of the burden on special teams because of the nature of covering kicks and stuff. It was good to get those guys in there and get work.’

***On Vince Houston of VT Police and the transition from working with Coach Beamer to being on Fuente’s staff and his personality:***

“I don’t know, I think you’d have to ask Vince how the transition has been, but for me it’s been awesome. He is a really calming influence, he’s a very laidback guy and when we’re at our most stressful point of the week or the most high strung he’s a calming influence. Just incredibly friendly and adds perspective on things and just been, I guess the word I keep thinking is calming influence.”

***On what stands out about ODU on film:***

“Well when you look at their team it’s easy to look at their defensive ends. They are senior laden, they’ve got a bunch of guys with plenty of experience and their ends are really good players. Number 15 on special teams is dynamic, can really run. He returned a kickoff against North Carolina last year for a touchdown. I think we’ll continue to see more of RB (Lala) Davis I think he’s got a bright future there. We loved him in high school, he’s now getting in the flow of things offensively. Steve Williams continues to get more and more experience because he’s an athletic guy that has continued to improve and be dangerous.”

***On Fuente’s interaction with Coach Wilder:***

“We’ve been together at a couple events and always enjoyed visiting with him about building a program and what that’s like. I’ve enjoyed our conversations. It’s been a couple of times at various events across the state that we’ve been together and been able to visit about practice and football programs. He’s got some interesting thoughts on some things that are pretty neat, I think quite honestly that I’ve enjoyed listening him talk about.”

***On showing his team coaching moments from this past week’s college football games since the Hokies were off and able to watch on television:***

“Well absolutely. Actually we do that every week. What we do is guys on our staff, support staff, coaches will text me whenever they see a coaching point event. Anything from a guy running into the end zone that drops the ball before he crosses the goal line or a foolish penalty or poor clock management or great clock management, whatever it is. Guys text me and I get with our video guy Josh Bost he puts it all together and we go over it at our Friday meeting. This week I got to watch some more of those games myself. We’ll have probably 10 different ones that we’ll talk about on Friday. We do that every single week, it’s one of those things we’ve done the past few years, I think it’s helped us be smarter football players going through. Yes, I got to see more of it myself but it’s something that we’ve done quite a bit.”