

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Media Conference

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ACC FOOTBALL

Justin Fuente Virginia Tech

JUSTIN FUENTE: Our guys are excited to head to Norfolk this week against ODU. As we know, it's been a long time since Virginia Tech has played out there, and we're looking forward to coming out there and playing the game. I know Coach Wilder has got his team ready to go, and we need to continue to finish this week of preparation to give ourselves the best chance of finding a way to win the game.

Q. I wanted to know, there was so much talk going into the year about your inexperience at cornerback. What have you thought about the way those guys have played out there, and how much do you trust them one-on-one, man-to-man situations?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I think we continue to get better with experience. That's going to be key. We knew they were good athletes when we recruited them. They just didn't have any experience. And I think continuing to get that experience is going to be important for them. We obviously feel good about them, but I just think the more live reps they get, the more practice they get, the better chance they're going to have to continue to improve.

Q. Old Dominion, I know they've struggled, but they have three fifth-year seniors at wide receiver, including Jonathan Duhart, who's broken a lot of tackles, made some people miss. What do you see in their receiving corps and that match-up?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, they've got two important ingredients, and that's size and speed, and they've got some experience out there. No. 15 is their kick returner and really an explosive player for them, as well. We'll have to do a great job on the perimeter. I just think it's a matter of time before ODU hits their stride. I watch them play, they've got good players, they've got some people with experience. They've got some good young players mixed in there. Like I said, I just think it's a matter of time before they start clicking on all cylinders.

Q. Bobby Wilder was saying this week, just his observation from your two games, is how effective you guys are blocking on the perimeter. How would you assess how Eric and Damon are blocking in the run game?

JUSTIN FUENTE: It's been a big point of emphasis

because I don't think we've been worth a darn since we've been here, quite honestly. Even when we were old and talented my first year here, I didn't feel like we were very physical out on the edge. It's been a huge point of emphasis. I think those guys have embraced it. We've still got plenty of improvement to go, but the first two plays of the first game this year, we got the ball out on the edge and were able to run with some physicality and run with some technique and some toughness. It kind of made everybody feel a little better like the hard work we've been putting in on that was going to pay off. We've still got plenty of room for improvement, but it's been a big source of emphasis for us.

Q. On the Old Dominion side, Steve Williams made his first career start as a true freshman last season at Lane Stadium. As you look at Old Dominion's subsequent tape, what kind of progress do you see from him at that position?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I think he's gotten better and he's going to continue to get better. As he continues to feel more comfortable and they continue to get that running game going, it can be the best friend for a quarterback. I know Elijah Davis is going to play, and he's a guy that we really liked in high school. I think he's going to help their running game. As that comes along, I think Steve will continue to get better. But he's made strides, and I think he's going to continue to do that. I still think he's got a chance to be a really special player.

Q. Obviously with this past week and everything that happened, the storms were bigger than football, and connecting families, making sure that people are safe and sound and can get in touch with your family, just what you can say about from that leadership standpoint as a head coach and being a father figure to these guys? Just what you feel in those moments and how you try to navigate through something like that that you can't control.

JUSTIN FUENTE: Sure. Well, when you have a group of 120 or 110 kids, they've all got something going on, whether it's a hurricane or something at home or whatever it is. And trying to make sure that they understand that we're here for them in those situations, and whatever we can do to help ease their mind, we want them to know that we're here for that. We kind of had twofold. We had some parents from far -- that are from a little further away that were a little uncertain

about what the weather was going to be like here in Blacksburg and kind of easing their minds that we felt like we were going to be perfectly safe. And then you have the group that's from the affected area and trying to make sure that their families are safe and everything is going to be okay. It certainly will put things in perspective.

But we just try to be here for our kids and let them know that this thing is -- obviously there are a lot of things that are bigger than football, and making sure they know that we're here for them and we're here to help in any way possible I think is important.

Q. And then to speak on Terius Wheatley that you and I spoke about last week, what did you see from him recruiting him, just what type of player he looks like and why he was the right fit for you because he's had some early success?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I just think he was a guy that carried the ball like 30-some-odd times. He'd been at a bunch of high schools. He's the son of a coach, and they'd moved around all over the country, and we felt like he was a guy that we could get him in one place and get him in a system and get him lifting weights on a regular basis, that he had the potential to grow into a good player. He's not finished with that maturation process. He has been productive for us so far this year. I hope that that continues.

But from a physical development standpoint, I think he has another level or two that he can get to that can help him be an even better player. And that's kind of what we thought when we were recruiting him is we thought he had some talent, obviously, but we felt like in two or three years from now, he would have a chance to be a pretty darned good player.

Q. Just talk about playing these Commonwealth games. Before the storm you played William & Mary, now you're playing Old Dominion. What is it like playing all these Commonwealth games?

JUSTIN FUENTE: I think it's great. I enjoy it. I think it's great for our state. We've got great football and great schools in Virginia, and I think kind of keeping things close, it's good for both fan bases, that they can travel to and from either home or away games and get a chance to see their teams. I'm for continuing that when we have the opportunity down the road.

Q. Talk about Old Dominion, what you see on their defensive side of the football.

JUSTIN FUENTE: The first thing that stands out is their defensive line. I mean, they've got a bunch of seniors over there that are good football players. They're tough and physical, and they understand their team. Those defensive ends are probably the ones that jump out

even more, their athleticism and size, and they shuffled some pieces in the back end a little bit through the first couple games. But on the defensive side of the ball, that defensive line stands out. In your opinion with all the cancellation of games due to weather issues, does the NCAA need to start the season a week early and leave the week before Championship Saturday as a national makeup date?

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I'm not sure if that's the solution. I do think -- and it has been talked about a little bit -- I think maybe with some of the cancellations, it'll maybe get moved up to the forefront this off-season. Talking about adding another bye week to the season. I was asked about that last week, and I'd be for all those conversations. I'd just like to know, really lay out the calendar, and see how it would affect when we would start fall camp, how that affects summer school and the start of school. I mean, there's just a lot of moving pieces when you go to moving the calendar around, but I don't think there's anything wrong with having those discussions.