

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Game 2 – William & Mary Media Conference
September 5, 2018

Opening statement

“First of all, I just want to thank Hokie Nation. I understand that our home opener is a sell out and I know our kids will be excited to know that. Hopefully, we can have a great week of preparation for our home opener. Our kids will be excited to play in front of our own fans. Thanks to everybody that made the trip to Tallahassee. We enjoyed what was left of the rest of that night and now we’re on to the challenge of playing in our home opener against William and Mary on a short week.

“There are a lot of things that go with that. The underlying theme is to get our guys feeling good and knowing what to do through the next couple of days in our game preparation. It’s a little odd today that we haven’t practiced yet, we haven’t even met yet. We’ve got a lot to do in a short amount of time to get ready for this game. Head Coach [Jimmy] Laycock obviously has done a great job at William and Mary for a long time. I talked about this a little bit on the conference call, but I have a tremendous amount of respect for himself and his program. The longevity and consistency that he’s had, I know his kids will be anxious to play for him throughout the season and this game as well.”

On what gets cut out of practice when you have a short week:

“Well it’s tough. It’s the same model we use, which I think we’ve only done once here. I did it several times at Memphis and several times in the Mountain West Conference at TCU when you have Saturday game then a Thursday game. It’s the same model, but your days are just switched up a little bit. Our kids yesterday were rest and recovery and today we’ll go out there and do what would have been out Tuesday practice minus a little bit. There’s not nearly as much physical work. Having been through, without walking you all the way through it.

“When I was with coach [Gary] Patterson at first we really got after it hard in pads in a short week and we weren’t having a lot of success. After a couple years he switched it up to the model that we’re using now. We take the pads off and that makes you a little bit nervous as a coach, but we’ve had pretty good success with that model. Trying to again focus on two things. Number one is getting our guys feeling well and knowing what to do in a short week and then hopefully, next week we can get on a normal schedule. The short answer to the question is that quite a bit of contact is cut out. We do a little bit more closer to the game than we usually would do out of time necessity.”

On what was the decision behind Christian Darrisaw starting at left tackle:

“Christian [Darrisaw] has done really well as has Silas [Dzansi]. They are competing for playing time at that left tackle position and I’ve been really pleased with both of them. Dzansi in the weeks leading up to the game was dealing with cramping issues in practice. As a result of that

he missed a little bit of time in practice and we were trying to get a handle on that and in that time Darrisaw filled his role pretty well. Going forward those two will continue to compete and I anticipate that both will play. I know that Dzansi didn't play any last week, but we'll see as this week goes and they handle it and how they continue to compete."

On how he thought Darrisaw played in the game:

"I think he did pretty well. Candidly, the fact that we played a freshman at true tackle and we're not asking any question about why we gave up 25 sacks. I think he did a pretty darn good job against that defensive line. Are there things for him to improve upon absolutely but he certainly didn't look out of place and the moment didn't look too big to him. He went out and competed as he's done every moment since he's been here. I think he'll continue to get better but he held up pretty well."

On why DL Trevon Hill didn't start on Monday:

"Basically Trevon Hill was completely eligible to play. The other guys had practiced a little bit more or a little bit better. We felt good about playing him we just started the other guys and rotated him in because we knew we were going to play a bunch of people."

On the way the Divine Deablo handled all of his responsibilities during the game:

"Divine Deablo is a guy that I have been proud of ever since he got here. He was emerging into that role of playing more last year before he went out. To see him to handle his full first time role against the speed that we were facing. I thought he held up really well and I was happy for him maybe more than anything. He's such a great kid, he works so hard and has such a good attitude. It was nice to see him do well."

On how did Trevon Hill's offseason go and what does he think of his outlook this year:

"He's improved in the weight room. I don't know how much weight he has added, but just looking at him he looks different. He's improved his strength. The sack that he had, I thought it was a pretty athletic play. To run the hoop like that and his shoulders looked like they were six inches off the ground while he was doing it. It was pretty impressive. He has continued to work hard and I think it showed, certainly flashes of that during the game. Continuing to be a discipline player is something that we're continuing to stay after him on in terms of not trying to do too much. Occasionally he'll do something that will make you say that was pretty darn good."

On what impressed him the most about Khalil Ladler in the first game:

"We obviously changed his position and he's lined up at several different spots, but he was really active. He has been a good special teams player for us. I thought he played the perimeter screens very well. There was one early in the game when they were in quads, they had four guys out there and he just really wanted to make the tackle more than they wanted to block him. He blew the perimeter screen up and I was really pleased with him."

On his early scouting report on William and Mary:

"When you look at their game last week, they held the ball for 37 minutes. They held Bucknell

to 11 first downs. It was a low scoring game but it felt like they had it the whole game. They are sound in their assignment and techniques. They know their assignment and adjustments. You can tell that they are a well-coached and disciplined football team that can cause you problems if you can't execute yourself. It's going to make for a really good challenge for us. Those guys will be excited for us as will we. We've got to a great job in preparation to give ourselves an opportunity."

On what goes into rotating wide receivers and did anyone stand out last week:

"You could probably pick a highlight of each guy and a lowlight of each guy in the game. Wide Receivers Coach [Holmon] Wiggins handles the rotation of those guys. We talk about it ahead of time and try to keep those guys fresh so they continue to play fast, hard and well without the ball in their hands. They did a decent job blocking on the perimeter and getting to some cut offs to spring some big runs. As a group I would say there was some good and some bad as well as individually. [Damon] Hazelton had a touchdown catch and then a drop on a slant. Hezekiah [Grimsley] played a good game but there were a couple things that we need to get cleaned up. Coach Wiggins and [Offensive Coordinator] [Brad] Cornelsen lay out what they're thinking as we get into the game and we rotate them through."

On does he believe having a sibling on an opposing team distracts guys:

"I would say that it's different for every family. I don't think that it will be a distraction for Coleman [Fox]. He does a great job preparing and I know he's going to want to play well and find a way to win the game. I think it is unique circumstance and I think the family is very proud and be excited. I'm sure mom and dad will be torn. You don't get to pick favorites, you love them both the same. I don't anticipate it being a distraction, but a unique quirk in the schedule that lets a family hopefully enjoy a Saturday together."

On what did he think was the problem with running in between the tackles at FSU:

"Well that's the way their defense is designed. It's the same scheme as Pitt, Michigan State and maybe one or two other teams that run it across the country. The defensive ends get up the field and the whole thing is designed to keep the whole thing inside where the run support is. It's a difficult task to begin with and When we did have some success they did a couple of different things that hurt us a little bit. Their speed hurt us on a couple plays where we would have had the chance to have a little bit bigger play that we were one step off of busting one out of there."

On what did he see from Dylan Rivers and the linebackers group:

"There focus needs to be on continuing on improvement. They did a very good job, I'm not taking away from the performance of Dylan [Rivers] or Rayshard [Ashby], but there are plenty of things for us to coach off of big-picture wise to. On special teams there were a ton of mistakes that we were fortunate didn't hurt us offensively and defensively that we've got to continue to improve on. I think the linebacker core is kind of a microcosm of the entire team right now in terms of continuing to improve. I was pleased with the physicality, effort and all if those sorts of things that have to be a given any for you to have a chance to succeed at linebacker. Both of those guys did a good job and we need them to do a good job this week."

On adjusting to William and Mary's defensive plan:

"Well we'll have to because it's a different scheme. Each team has different strengths and weaknesses and you try to do the best you can to give your guys an opportunity to succeed. You have to alter your scheme, the way that you're blocking or what you're trying to accomplish. Based on William and Mary's scheme and personnel they looked pretty good in their opener and we'll have to be on point."

On talking to Jovonn Quillen about being careful about running into the punter:

"Absolutely. If we had not blocked it, it would have been a 15-yard penalty because he hit his plant leg. That would have been a major mistake. We will certainly get that highlighted in special teams meetings. Those are the types of mistakes that didn't hurt us in the game but will hurt if we don't correct them moving forward."