**Virginia Tech Football**

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

**Rhode Island Game Press Conference**

**Oct. 12, 2019**

***Opening statement***

“Thanks to everyone that came out. We want to thank our fans for supporting our kids on a beautiful night. Happy to find a way to get the win. I thought Rhode Island had a great plan in terms of slowing the game down, holding onto the ball, and using those skills. That’s what we talked about early in the week. Those guys can play for anyone and I still believe that.”

***On playing Rhode Island:***

“They came out and played in one high. They’ve been a quarter’s team with a bunch of one high so we moved the ball a little bit more.”

***On QB Hendon Hooker:***

“I thought the biggest thing is that he’s taking care of the football in both starts. He’s done a great job of that. There’s some passes today that I know he wishes he had back and there’s some guys around him that could have made plays. A few more plays that would’ve helped everybody feel he played even better. He continues to understand what we’re asking him to do and continues to put the ball where we’d like to. Obviously, at times, he’s a weapon with the ball in his hands.”

***On Hooker’s passing game and using it against other opponents:***

“I don’t know, I’ve never thought of that. We’re just trying to execute what we’re given during the game and find a way to win it. He threw one poster out in the first half, I thought. I didn’t see the replay, but I thought he had it in his hands perfect with the stride. I may be wrong, but that’s what I felt like on the field.”

***On starting the game faster:***

“We punted one time. Our first three possessions we kicked a field goal and scored two touchdowns. Getting the ball on the 50-yard line certainly helps. That’s absolutely true but I thought our guys showed up ready to play.”

***On WR Damon Hazelton getting back to where he was last year:***

“I think he’s getting there but I’m not ready to say that he’s there. I’ve certainly been critical of Damon. He hasn’t practiced a lot and we’re trying to work him back in. But we certainly needed him today. We basically had four healthy scholarship receivers today. We certainly needed him to be good and he was. I think he knows he had an opportunity to be really good and have a special night. That’s part of the process. He is coming along, he is feeling more comfortable getting into game shape which certainly helps.”

***On the 93-yard drive and the impact of keeping it a two-possession game:***

“There were a couple of third down conversions in there is kind of what I think of it. They kind of run together on me, but I was thinking James Mitchell made a play on the far sideline on third down. That was a big momentum deal. I think we had a couple third down conversions in that drive and it was a nice response by our kids.”

***On WR Tre Turner and his injury status:***

“He dressed out and could have played.”

***On empty seats in the stands:***

“We have great fans. They do a great job supporting our kids.”

***On WR Tayvion Robinson’s versatility and having him throw the football:***

“I would say it’s abnormal. I really felt like we should have just burned that play. Our snap was off, we were behind. I told Hendon, ‘Something like that, when the snap is off or you’re just barely getting if off, just eat it. Go get back to the line of scrimmage and play the next play.’ In regards to Tayvion, he’s shown a high IQ in terms of being able to digest information. He is starting to play faster. I didn’t feel like he was really playing as fast as he should have played early in the year. His thinking seems to be more reactionary now and caught up to the speed of the game. No, that’s not normal for young players. Everyone is different but quite often it takes a little more time to get caught up.”

***On RB Tahj Gary’s health compared to signing day:***

“It speaks a little of the miracle of modern medicine when you think about what he’s been through. He ran with us in the summer, he wasn’t in very good shape understandably. I have marveled at what he was able to do in the summer. He’s just continued to get more confidence and stronger throughout fall camp, which we kind of cautious with him. But now he’s ready to go see if he can contribute and if he’s up to speed. But he brings something a little different than what we have. He’s got size. It’ll be interesting to see how he continues to develop as the season goes along. I do think it’s pretty remarkable. I would’ve never even considered that on signing day that we would have discussions about playing him in a game.”

***On tight ends Dalton Keene and James Mitchell’s importance to the offense:***

“They’re huge. They’re really competitive, highly intelligent guys that wind up all over the field. We ask them to do a little bit of everything. I think their production is a product of getting around the football, in addition to their talent. I’m certainly not taking away from them. But in general terms, if you’re able to run the ball, it’s a little bit easier to get the ball to the tight end position. The last couple weeks we’ve threatened people enough that we’ve been able to get some easy completions to those guys that have turned into bigger plays.”

***On OL Austin Cannon’s importance:***

“We kind of refer to that as artificial death. When you back up more than one spot, it’s as if you have more guys. Austin has proved his worth time and time again for this football team and it’s nice to see him down there contributing.”

***On Reggie Floyd’s targeting call:***

“I hate the rule. We usher them out. I wish we could bring them over to the sidelines and not play them, but we usher them out. It’s not good I don’t think. I’m not talking about the call, I’m certainly not being critical of that. I understand the safety and all of that. I don’t know. I didn’t see him. They threw him out and he walked out. I’m not sure, I can’t speak to that. I’m sure he’s upset that he wasn’t going to get to play. As far as the call, it looked like the definition of targeting to me.”