

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**North Carolina Week Press Conference**  
**Oct. 14, 2019**

***On whether he's crossed paths with Mack Brown since they were both coaching in Texas:***

"Well, I was an assistant [at TCU], I was the running backs coach. One of my first two years at TCU we played him, but other than that, no. I mean, we've crossed paths in terms of – we've been at a few events together and he called some of our games when I was at Memphis. So, we've had several conversations, but not too many interactions competing against each other."

***On Brown's reputation at Texas:***

"Well, I mean they were really, really good. I don't know, the years kind of run together for me a little bit, but there was a time there when Oklahoma and Texas were not just good, but were really elite – both of them at the same time – which I don't know if that's happened very many times. There was a time when Coach [Bob] Stoops and Coach Brown were there when they were both not just good, but in the top five. Obviously, he had a fantastic run at Texas and had one of the best college football players in the history of the sport at quarterback [Vince Young] there and had a heck of a run."

***On whether there are candidates other than Devon Hunter to replace S Reggie Floyd in the first half:***

"Yeah, I mean Nasir Peoples has worked there, too. Devon [Hunter] just shows up every single day and works hard, continues to improve. I think that's the spot for Devon, moving forward. He's kind of been in a couple different places, but I think that defensive staff did a good job in the spring putting him there and leaving him there and he continues to get more and more comfortable. Certainly, Khalil [Ladler] has great versatility and knows the entire defense, can really play all three spots and has."

***On what has been the difference in the past two games:***

"Zero turnovers. I mean, that's pretty evident in the statistics. We've done a better job the last two weeks taking care of the football. We did not take the ball away last week. Obviously, the week before we did, so we've been holding our own and winning those battles. I think it's given us a better chance to win games."

***On whether limiting turnovers requires coaching or players simply holding onto the ball:***

"I think it's both. They have to understand the point of emphasis. You can't just do that on one week – I don't think you're going to get that point across. I think from the very first day of spring ball, from the very first day of fall camp, making it a point of emphasis – there is some technique involved. Your quarterback touches the ball every play, he's got to set a great example for taking care of the ball as well."

***On North Carolina's freshman quarterback Sam Howell:***

"Larry [Fedora] did not leave the cupboard bare there, but what they hadn't had the last couple years was consistent quarterback play. They've gotten that and more from Sam in the first six games. Composure, intelligence, he's athletic, they'll run him some – just enough. He can really stand in there and deliver the football. He's showed some strength in the pocket. There have been a couple teams that have had shots at him that haven't been able to get him down. I think he's been the catalyst for them making rapid improvement because for the last several years, really, they've been very good around that position. They just haven't been that consistent since [Chicago Bears QB Mitchell] Trubisky left – they just haven't gotten that consistent play and they've gotten it immediately from their freshman."

***On WRs Tre Turner and Phil Patterson's outlook for this week after not playing last week:***

"I'm optimistic that we'll have everybody."

***On QB Herndon Hooker's role in the improvement of the run game:***

"I think he's certainly helped it out, I really do. I think he's helped that. I think we continue to get more experience for those young guys up front, they continue to improve. The numbers played a little better at running back – just continuing to refine the nuances of the running game. I think all three of those groups (O-line, RBs and QB) deserve a little credit for that getting better."

***On the status of OL Christian Darrisaw:***

"We'll see. I've got a staff meeting later today. I don't know what his status is, I think he'll be fine, but I'm not going to get into every single one of them [the injured players]."

***On K John Parker Romo's performance on kickoffs and his path to Virginia Tech:***

"Last week was better than the week before. We kicked two balls out of bounds and kicked one in the middle of the field. I think he did a good job of handling the adversity there and responded back. We're happy to have him on here. He has a unique approach, he has a little bit of a bounding, skipping approach which caught the eye of the team early on in fall camp which was fun. He's done a great job. I don't remember how initially we found out about him. The kicking community is all tied in together so I'm not really sure, but I've been pleased with his progress and he enjoys being here and has been a productive member of what we're doing."

***On how Romo developed his unique approach to the ball on kickoffs:***

"I didn't ask him. It's unique, but I don't know. I showed a video to the whole team I think it shows great self-confidence – I'm being serious. Everybody embraced it. It was one of those days in the middle of fall camp where everybody was tired, and he steps up to go kick. We were working on taking the line or something like that. He skips up to the ball and everybody noticed it, and it immediately gave us a little juice."

***On Jerry Kill's impact on the team so far:***

"He's been great, he has so much experience. He's helping us in every area. I don't think there's a part of our program that he hasn't touched or had an influence on, whether that's on the field or off the field. I think he's been a great addition for us."

***On QB Hendon Hooker's recruiting process:***

"I really enjoyed the process with Alan and Wendy [Hooker] and Hendon, they're a great family. He has a younger brother that's a good athlete as well, so they're an athletic family but centered around education. So, we had a common ground there really quickly. I don't want to put words into the Hooker family's mouth, but I felt like staying in the region was important. He could've gone to many other places far off, but my take on it was that he was going to stay in the region. He really wanted to be coached and to continue to develop as a quarterback on and off the field. There's been a lot of trust and a lot of honest conversation with their family and us. More than just him playing on the field, it's a relationship that I think we both enjoy."

***On visiting RB Tajh Gary last year after the injury he sustained in high school:***

"Well, he was on crutches, and he was remarkably positive. He was showing me rehab video and how far he'd come in the short time since his surgery. So, I left there feeling much better about his frame of mind, quite honestly. Sometimes you find that – I talked about that with Caleb Farley and his knee injury, too. Sometimes you pay a kid a visit to try and lift his spirits, and he lifts your spirits with his attitude and approach. That's how I felt with Tajh when I went to go see him. There were several people from the school who showed up just to support Tajh which always makes you feel a little bit better. He was just incredibly optimistic. He showed me the video of the hit which was pretty rough, and we talked in depth about the surgery and what they actually did. I found him to be uniquely positive in his outlook. He certainly wasn't sitting around feeling sorry for himself."

***On what Gary could contribute to the running backs corps this season:***

"I think the first thing is that he has some size. We're not very big at tailback. Hopefully we can continue to bring those guys along, whether it be Caleb [Steward] or Tajh to fill a little role in there with size and power. That's what we're looking for."