

Virginia Tech Men's Basketball
Head Coach Mike Young Q&A Highlights
Media Day
Oct. 22, 2019

Opening statement:

"I'm thrilled for Nickeil [Alexander-Walker], Ahmed [Hill], and Justin [Robinson], as they embark on their professional careers. What great players they were and what great ambassadors they were for Virginia Tech. I told you back in June, I would have loved the opportunity to coach them, but I admire completely their contribution to this community, to this region - as good as people as they were players. I look forward to seeing their progress as we go along."

On what the offensive and defensive vision is for the team:

"It hasn't changed a lot. A big part of coaching is tailoring what you can do with the personnel you have and that is going to change year-to-year. We're not going to be able to do some things that maybe we've done in the past. We've got those things in place. The bottom line is taking care of the ball offensively and getting a good shot each time down here. Like everybody else, that is evolving now. We'll look like a pretty good outfit today and we'll come in tomorrow and I wouldn't want anybody in there without a football helmet on. You're going to catch an errant pass to the noggin. Receptive and coachable - a lot of fun to work with. Nothing fancy now, Mike. Take care of it - get a quality shot from the person we want shooting it. We're going to have to get into that shot a little bit and we'll do so with some different action. Defensively, that's evolving, too. I'd like to play 100% man, but are we going to be able to do that? I'm not sure - will we have to play some zone to protect some guys? Probably. We're learning a little bit as we go. I don't know if that is all that appropriate, but I do admire the willingness to come in every day, and work and get a little bit better."

On continuing tradition of focus on three-point shooting:

"It goes back to getting a great shot every time down. I do think that is a strength of ours heading into - it's hard to believe we play two weeks from today. We do have a number of guys that can shoot the ball. I like how our spacing is coming together. Any time you can space that thing with four guys that can shoot it - I haven't always had four guys that can shoot it. I've had four guys that thought they could shoot it. We will have in most instances four guys that can shoot the ball and that shot will be a big part of what we do. I can't imagine that changing. We're a little thin up front. Three, five men in big John [Ojiako], P.J. Horne, and Brandan Johnson. Those guys are working at it - the three-headed monster, if you will. They're doing well and getting a little bit better every day."

On an idea about go-to scorers, starters, and play-style of team:

"I've got some ideas, certainly. I had some ideas coming into the season and you tweak those as you go along and see guys in different spots. I'm excited to see how it all shakes out. I think I could play nine, maybe 10, on opening night. I hope to. You put the guys on the floor that give you the best opportunity to win. That's what you're charged to do."

"I don't know if that [go-to scorers] has revealed itself just yet. I think we've got enough pieces here that can score the ball, create a little bit for themselves, create a little bit for others on the floor, so I think we'll be fine there."

On excitement of Landers Nolley II coming into the season:

"I really don't know much of his story. I know he's here, he's eligible, and he's playing well. I've said before, he's a big, strong man that is very skilled. Also, I have to keep in mind in those quiet moments that two weeks from now is his first college game. He was here a year ago and he was practicing, and that's a real leg up, but until you're on that floor and those bright lights come on - he's going to be just fine. He's a basketball player. I continue to be impressed with his progress and he continues to get better. A good basketball player - he really is."

He's a three. We're going to have to play him at the four, out of necessity. I'm not a real proponent of that, and that's what we have right now. He will have to guard some bigger people, out of necessity. Now that bigger player has to guard him, or has to guard us at the other end. So, I think that we'll have things in place that will mask those match-ups a little bit. Landers Nolley is doing very well for us."

On counteracting foul problems with smaller team:

"We scrimmaged on Sunday, which I can't talk about because it was closed, but we fouled incessantly in the first half. We came back in the second half and we played a little smarter and didn't foul as much. We kept them off the foul line and coincidentally played better in the second 20 [minutes] than we did in the first. We're a work in progress. Are we going to double the post? Yeah, we're going to do that some. Are we going to cocoon that when it comes in there? Yeah, because we have to limit those fouls and we've got to protect a couple of the guys. that comes back to us as coaches and scheming the thing properly to help them with that."

On use of balloons for punishing turnovers:

"I guess we could use it with fouls, too. We have put ten balloons up there [points to wall]. I got it from Will, when he was at VCU, I think. Whenever they got any turnover, a manager would whack that balloon. We had ten balloons and you turn that over more than ten times, there are consequences. The same could be for fouling, giving up offensive rebounds. Barber, I owe you, man."

On impact of having Wabissa Bede and P.J. Horne's leadership:

"They are both wonderful people. Wabissa is a little more outgoing than P.J. I am begging them to provide more, I mean, they are the best, now. I will not walk back one thing I said in June. Wabissa is thrust into a more different role, I'm not sure how different, but a more prominent role. Those guys were here a year ago and they have it. They understand what the game is all about - they've done it. I just want more from them because we are so young in other spots, with John [Ojiako], Jalen Cone, Hunter Cattoor - those guys are working really, really hard. They understand the significance and the importance of what we're asking them and they're doing everything they can to that point."

On how much he's worried by having to play freshman or guys who were role players in the past:

"It worries the heck out of me. The old adage, 'Get old and stay old'. Well, we're young. You can't combat that. We're not going to belabor it, we're not going to pout about it. This is what we have. I've got 15 guys over there that I will go and snap a couple pictures with—which drives me crazy—and then we'll go to practice and we're going to work every day. I've got really good players. They need to see more plays. They need to see those lights come on and those other-colored jerseys roll out there. We're going to get better. I don't know what this thing is going to look like—well, I do know what it's going to look like two weeks from now."

"I have to pinch myself from time to time on my way home, and at times in my office. It's late October. We've got a long way to go. Every day is an opportunity for growth and an opportunity for this team together to learn and get better, get better with one another, and we're doing that."

On if he thinks there are players who are freshman or used to be role players who are going to emerge:

"I sure do. I hope. I've read it: 'Let each man run his own race.' They're not all going to progress at the same pace. One is going to climb ahead, one is going to take a real jump in December, one is going to take a bump in January. That's how the game is played. That's how the process works in this business. I've seen it. It's difficult at times, but it sure is rewarding, too, when you see the lights come on for young people. They kind of come into their own."

On what challenges does starting the season with an ACC game present:

"It's hard. Not a fan. But if you want to play 20 league games, there's no way to cram 20 league games into January, February, early March. You have to play a couple in November and December. I don't like the thought of opening league play on the first night—that's hard. But football does it. And that's what the schedule dictates. We've got to have our team ready and prepared, ready to get down to Clemson in two weeks and play, compete, and find a way to win a basketball game. That's what our intention will be."

On what are the strengths and weaknesses of this team:

"Strengths, we can shoot it. We are going to be a good passing team. We have to be good in the half court. I think our half court man-to-man defense is okay right now. That's got to be a real strength. The transition defense has got to be a real strength. It's not yet, but should be. A team that embraces who we are. We can't beat ourselves, nobody can. A team that takes care of the basketball, gets a good shot every time down."

On will it be an extra distraction playing in Clemson:

“Let me assure you this, there will be zero distractions. None. The only thing that ever matters to me is my team. And the opponent. And how we’re going to defend and play. Like every other season opener, I’ll be a nervous wreck. But I look forward to getting back to the upstate and facing the Tigers. I think the world of Brad Brownell. I’ve known him for many, many years. We’ll look forward to it.”

On what will determine if the season is better or worse than he anticipated:

“I’m not going to cap anything. I’ve told others before, the only thing that matters to me—if I can look back in late March, and this team has progressed as far as we can progress, I’ll take it. Sign me up. That might be a different feel come January. [I’m] very pleased in some areas, and some areas we’ve got to sure up. I think if you ask any coach in the country right now, they’d say the exact same thing. We’re into it. Games are upcoming, and we look forward to that. But certainly a lot of work to be done between now and then.”

On what impact has Ace Custis had on the staff:

“The mayor of Blacksburg. I take him everywhere I go when I go into town. I feel like I’m an important person. Everybody knows Ace, everybody loves Ace. I think one of the best things I’ve done is bringing him on board. He’s beloved. He’s an incredibly class gentleman. He loves Virginia Tech. His contributions are very limited, due to NCAA rules, on the floor. But anytime a person like Ace can mentor this team, and you can look into the rafters and there he is—number 20—with his jersey retired, that’s pretty powerful. Now I ask myself: What the heck took me so long? It took me a couple weeks being here to get to that point. But I am thrilled that he’s back at Virginia Tech as a member of our staff. He’s doing great work.”

On what he doesn’t like about team photos:

“I hate them. I just hate them. Snap a couple, and let’s move on. Not a big smile guy.”

On if he thinks the players will get up for an ACC game to start the season even more so than before:

“That has some extra emphasis on it. As coaches, we’re not easing into this thing. I said I didn’t like it—I certainly understand the league office and their philosophy on starting the season and kicking things off with a bang, if you will. Season opener, but league opener. That’s a huge deal, and something that has ramifications moving forward. We’ll prepare like crazy and have them ready to go.”