

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Bye Week Press Conference
Oct. 21, 2019

On what he saw on the blocked field goal vs. North Carolina:

“Well, [Luke] Tenuta blocked it with his head. Being tall helps. We were not happy with our effort or execution on a field goal block two weeks ago. We actually did an extra period of field goal and field goal block on Tuesday. I thought the kids took the coaching really well and executed it with great effort and strain. That’s one of those plays that you may give your full effort for 100 plays in a row and have nothing to show for it, but the one time you get the opportunity you’ve got to make sure you’re in position. We gave great effort the whole night and then eventually, I think we got a little bit of help from a low kick, but to Luke’s credit we got the penetration to block it.”

On QB Hendon Hooker’s injury:

“Yeah, I don’t think it’s going to be a long-term deal. I think he’s going to be okay.”

On DB Caleb Farley’s injury:

“Yeah, he’s supposed to be back, too. So, he should be good, I think.”

On the timing of the bye week after a long game (over four hours):

“I’m kind of the opinion that the bye weeks come when they do, and you make the most of it. But we certainly have a nice little opportunity to get some guys some rest and some young people some work. We’re going to continue to have to, through this last stretch here, play some more people that haven’t played very much. So, we’re continuing to try and get those guys ready. It’s kind of like your last gasp for a big breath of air before you go underwater for a little while right here. We’ve got to do a great job serving two masters – one, getting some guys that have got a lot of mileage on them back feeling good, and then getting some other guys ready for the stretch run.”

On his Sunday after a long overtime win:

“That’s one thing about this business – you don’t have a lot of time, good or bad. After the game, you go to dinner with recruits, you get up the next morning, you come and you host the recruits, you go through the film, analyze what happened, get your teaching points, and move forward. It’s just the way this deal is, you work all year for 12 opportunities and then you know the next one’s coming just around the corner. So, there’s always work to be done – that doesn’t mean you don’t enjoy it. The two challenges are when things don’t go well you’ve got to be able to turn the page and move forward, and when things do go well, you’ve got to be able to turn the page. Sometimes, it’s harder, especially for younger players to turn the page after having success. We’ve got to learn from the mistakes that were made – we should never gloss over them just because we got the result we wanted. We learn and teach off of those [mistakes] so that we can continue to improve.”

On how the coaching staff handles third-string QB reps in practice:

“The one and two guys get the majority of the reps during the preparation week, there’s only so many reps to go around. We still do get our third guy some work, there’s enough opportunities to get him some work, but not nearly as much. One and two usually split it equally. Now, there’s different situations – if you’re in the situation where one guy is maybe not the full package backup but he’s going to play a little bit, then you change things around a little bit. For the most part, that’s the way it works.”

On how QB Quincy Patterson handled playing despite limited reps in practice:

“I was really proud of Quincy, along with several guys. If I didn’t make mention of this, I meant to. Look at guys that filled in roles that either traditionally hadn’t been starters or didn’t start the game as a starter. From Khalil [Ladler] to [Armani] Chatman to Norell [Pollard] to [Austin] Cannon to Dalton [Keene] serving a bunch of different roles in there, certainly Quincy. So, I’m certainly proud of the way those guys were prepared and ready to play. It was interesting having [Quincy] in there for that time and overtime, crafting a plan. You know we can call anything, but things that we feel confident that we can get executed. He did a great job. He was into the moment. Under no circumstances at any time did it seem too big for him. He was ready to play and that’s the most difficult job. To go into a game and know you’re going to play is one thing, to not be certain if you’re going to play one play or one hundred plays – it’s hard to get ready for that, week in and week out, and we had several guys do a good job of that.”

On the play call for the final score knowing Patterson hadn’t repped a two-point play recently:

“First of all, it’s kind of ironic. In the last bye week, we had a session of two-point plays – good vs. good, that I thought was a really productive period for us. What we didn’t know was that several weeks down the road, it would be Quincy in there at quarterback. You fall back on what you know you can execute. It doesn’t have to be a two-point play. It doesn’t have to be some crazy ‘Philly Special’ play to go execute to get three yards. It can be, certainly. So, you fall back on things that he’s repped time and time again that you feel good that he can go out there and do.”

On how the offensive line handled the change at quarterback:

“Well, we had our hands full with their defensive front – they’re big and strong. A completely different scheme than say, Miami, who is also very talented on the defensive front. Miami’s more of a penetrating defense, North Carolina is more of a ‘50 on the line of scrimmage’ defense. I think [the offensive line] continues to improve, I’m really pleased with our ability to continue to get better. For them, it doesn’t change though. The plays are the same, it’s the formation and handling of the ball and all that sort of stuff. It’s not a huge change for the right guard based on who is in. They have enough to worry about, we’re not going to ask them to switch based on who is in. But I thought they handled it well, we’ve got to continue to get better, but some of those young guys are continuing to improve.”

On RB Deshawn McCleese and the offensive line playing well:

“They’ve given great effort, I think where we have made some strides in the past several weeks is from a technical standpoint. There’s a lot of technique involved in playing those positions, and I think they’ve taken the onus on themselves to embrace that level of coaching to improve. On a side note, I was really proud of Deshawn. Not just for how he played, but also, he was in the game and all of a sudden there’s a large switch in what we’re trying to accomplish. Dalton is now in a lot at tailback because of Quincy, and you have a guy in Deshawn that’s being productive and now his reps got diminished a little bit. I think how he handled that spoke volumes to the rest of the team. He was just continuing to support, and I thought it was worth special recognition with the team yesterday.”

On Deshawn McCleese’s health:

“To my knowledge he hasn’t been unhealthy. I think he’s gaining a little bit of confidence and so are the guys up front. I think the combination of those two has led to Deshawn maybe feeling a little better. I don’t want to say he’s running harder because I don’t want to imply that he didn’t run hard to begin with. But I just think there’s a level of confidence in both those groups right now with which we can be productive.”

On RB Keshawn King’s health:

“He was a little banged up for the game. We dressed him and had him ready but tried not to play him. He should be ready for the next game.”

On DB Devon Hunter’s performance against North Carolina:

“He’s another guy I should’ve mentioned earlier with Khalil [Ladler] and Armani [Chatman] and the rest that were not full-time starters but had to fill in. I thought he did a really good job. He was where he was supposed to be, he was reading his keys, and he filled in really well.”

On his comfort level on field goals, especially from beyond 40 yards:

“We’ll certainly look at that, you take that into consideration in play calls as well when you get down there to that gray area. So, we’ll continue to work Brian [Johnson] and [John] Parker [Romo] in there, and through this week that will be a point of emphasis of well. We’ll see as we head towards the next game.”

On OL Austin Cannon’s journey and the role he played against North Carolina:

“It’s a pretty remarkable story. He’s probably one of the best teammates we have on the entire roster. He loves the program and his teammates. He’s about as team-first as you can get in terms of playing on special teams and always being ready. To get to play as much as he did and play as efficiently as he did, it’s a nice reward for him.”

On DL Norell Pollard’s confidence:

“He is not lacking for confidence. He’s got some personality. I’m not one for all the extra stuff, but he certainly believes in himself. When he gets opportunities more often than not, he makes plays.”

On any moments that stood out from the six overtimes after watching the film:

“I don’t know, speaking just about overtime it’s kind of hard because each series was crazy. I did feel like we were playing really well on defense. Our Red Zone defense – I don’t know what we are statistically – but I felt pretty good. Even when teams have scored, they’ve had to earn it. I felt like we were playing pretty well, and if we could just find a way to get the thing in the end zone or get it a little closer, I felt like we were going to be okay. There were so many big plays. From Ladler’s two-point stops to holding them to field goals to blocking field goals to the fourth down touchdown pass, it was one right after another. I’m not doing a very good job of saying there was only one or two things that stuck out to me. You saw the game, there was just a lot going on.”

On the previous longest game he had coached in:

“I know I’ve coached in a double-overtime game, but I’m not sure if I had been past that.”

On the physical strain of a multiple-overtime game:

“Fortunately, we do have a bye. We had the kids in the weight room and did a little moving around yesterday, but we didn’t practice and we’re not practicing today. We’ll take it into consideration in making our schedule for this week. It certainly was a taxing ball game, there’s no question about it. Like I said we have to serve two things here. We have a few days before we go on the road recruiting, and we have to get them feeling good. But we also have to improve, we can’t just lay on the couch all week. That’s part of the head coach’s job is balancing those things and trying to figure out what the team needs in order to get the best results.”