

**Virginia Tech Football  
Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights  
Rhode Island Week Media Session  
Oct. 7, 2019**

***Opening statement:***

“Happy to be back to work this week, getting to play at home. Rhode Island comes to town with two wide receivers that could play for about anybody in America, a quarterback that’s thrown six touchdowns and no interceptions the last two weeks. They’re scoring points. Senior-laden defense, that continues to get better each and every week. We’ve got a challenge for ourselves, our staff, our players to go get ready to try and play well, to try and win this game.”

***On true freshman C Bryan Hudson’s performance at Miami:***

“Well it was a big challenge, I can tell you. [Miami] is awfully good, particularly on the inside, the two defensive tackles or the three or four or five or six defensive tackles they’ve got are all really good players. I’m proud of the progress Bryan has made, he continues to get better. He’s a highly intelligent, savvy player. I’m anxious to see him continue to improve, but he’s certainly – in the last couple weeks, and in the last week in particular, taken strides in the right direction.”

***On whether it will be hard to replicate the intense practices that followed the Duke loss:***

“It will not be, I can promise you that. We better practice like that on Tuesday. We’re not going back. Our team is not going back to practicing laid back or any of that. I’m going to go coach – and I’ve told our team this – we’ve got to get mentally, physically, and emotionally tougher. We’ve got to learn how to practice. Tuesday, we’re going to roll out there and it better look the same as last Tuesday. It’s my job to get it done.”

***On how the defense looked on Saturday:***

“Well, we created turnovers. We made plays on balls in the air, 50-50 balls. Obviously, created pressure on the quarterback. Now, we gave up some plays, too. We gave up a Hail Mary at the end of the half. We tried to keep the ball in front of us in our drop eight stuff and didn’t do a very good job of that at times, but we were playing a very explosive offense in terms of skill players. One step in the wrong direction is a big, big play. Particularly early on I felt like we were really attacking and aggressive and putting them behind the chains.”

***On QB Hendon Hooker:***

“The thing I appreciate about Hendon, one of the many things I should say, is just his continued dedication to getting better. He had a great summer. I know we talk about that ‘So and so had a good summer’ all that sort of stuff, but I’m talking about extra work. Hendon put in a tremendous amount of work in his own free time to try and improve. I think it’s really important to him. I’ve just seen him take huge strides and we’ve still got a lot of work to do – he’s played in one game. He was able to have success in the game last week not because of how he practiced last week but because of how he’s worked over the last several years.

“Again, I’ve kind of referenced this before with some of the other players, but it’s really nice for us, because we’re behind the scenes with these guys all the time and we see the effort and the work that they put in. It’s nice to see them get to reap the benefits of that. Has he improved in terms of overall understanding and what’s going on, on the other side? Yes, and he’s put a lot of work into making those strides.”

***On if Hendon’s father’s history as a football player is evident:***

“I don’t want to speak for Alan on this, that’s Hendon’s dad. Alan and Wendy have been very supportive of Hendon, but I’ve always felt like it was all in proper balance. I may be wrong, but I never felt like Alan was drilling him as soon as he could walk about three step drops. I never felt like that – I may be wrong – but I just felt like they were very nurturing and supportive as he went through – he was a good basketball player, too – all his athletic endeavors. [They] let Hendon, for a lack of a better term, find his own way in what he was passionate about.”

***On his assessment of Hendon’s passing vs. Miami:***

“What was it? 10 for 20? If you take 10 incompletions – I’m not going to hit all ten of them off the top of my head – but; one he threw in the ground on a screen, I thought two were drops there on that drive in the fourth quarter, one was an overthrow to Damon [Hazelton], one I couldn’t tell we were trying to throw the ball to Damon again and I couldn’t tell if his arm got hit but the ball landed out of bounds, and there’s a handful of others in there. He was pretty efficient with the ball; the ball was never in danger. One was a curl route that I thought we possibly could have had a pass interference call on third down.

“He could always be better, I know he missed a couple of throws, but he didn’t miss fifteen and he certainly didn’t miss ten. The challenge for him now is can we make those plays as he gets more comfortable and starts to handle the different looks from week-to-week and the third down pressures and that sort of stuff. One of the biggest plays of the game I thought was third and long – [Deshawn] McClease’s run for a first down early – kind of got [Miami] out of their pressure looks, cause that stuff is a pain now, which gave Hendon a little bit easier looks as the game went on. I know I’m giving you a really long answer, but he certainly had some things he could do better, but also was pretty judicious in his decision making. I thought he was going the right place with the ball, he never seemed rattled, and all-in-all played pretty efficiently.”

***On P Oscar Bradburn’s play this season:***

“First of all, the two things that I think of with Oscar, one is he is a competitive individual. You don’t often think of it maybe when you think of punters that way – probably not fair. But he is into the game, he’s into competition, he’s into improvement. The other thing is he’s made large gains in the weight room. I think his leg has strengthened over the last year and a half or so, and he’s becoming a weapon for us, he’s taken a lot of pride in that. We’re going to face good returners; we faced a really good returner last week. We’ll continue to face good returners as we go through the season. Not getting caught up in the numbers, but getting the ball up in the air is going to be important, and that’s hard sometimes for players to think about, but giving us a chance to cover the kick without a return because of the hang time is going to be important.”

***On the degree to which the coaching staff changed the game plan with Hooker:***

“I’d say you certainly try to play to player’s strengths. I don’t know if there’s widespread changes in anything, but there’s certainly tweaks and little things that you try and do a little differently in order to capitalize on what each guy – and particularly the quarterback – is good at.”

***On the spark for RB Deshawn McCleese in recent weeks:***

“He’s kind of gotten into the nuances of running the ball as opposed to just pouring it up in there. He’s taken to some of those things that were asking him to do, and he’s reaping some of the benefits of that. Certainly, part of it is his natural ability, but part of it is getting a little more detailed in what we’re asking those guys to do, and his ability to interpret that information and put it out there for everybody to see.”

***On vomiting during games and Alan Tisdale vomiting during the Miami game:***

“No, not me. I didn’t play enough to actually throw up. I’ve seen it before, when I was at Oklahoma, we were playing Syracuse and Donovan McNabb was the quarterback. They had the ball on the 50-yard-line, and he was under center. He just leaned over, threw up, then snapped the ball and probably threw a 50-yard touchdown pass the next play, I don’t remember. Yeah, it happens. What happens to those guys is that we’re on them so hard about hydrating, sometimes they drink too much water and it sits in their stomach. Then they’re out there being active, and it happens. Alan [Tisdale] played more than he’s played too, and he was really effective. He did a really good job, and we’re really proud of him and the improvement he’s had. Because of the type of game we found ourselves in – particularly in the second half – he was on the field quite a bit more and was really productive.”

***On Hendon Hooker’s intangibles against Miami:***

“I think the first thing is just his overall demeanor. His ability to stay focused on the next play, to continue to try and execute whatever we’re asking him to do regardless of circumstance. There was a time in there where [Miami] had a whole bunch of momentum and the game was tight or tied. There was plenty of opportunity for a young guy to panic or press, and he did not take those opportunities. He stayed focused and continued to try and execute, and I think it’s pretty hard to try and teach somebody how to do that.”

***On the defense’s pressure on Miami’s last offensive drive:***

“We did create some pressure later in the game, but to be honest with you I can’t remember 100 percent if we didn’t pressure at all on the last drive. I know they hit the long pass, then completed one more pass of significance, and then had hands to the face. To me that was the big sequence there. There wasn’t a lot of opportunity; it was really those two plays and the 15-yard penalty that really hurt us and got the ball down there. There’s a lot of conversation over the headset about both what coverage to play and what to do. Trying to keep the ball in front of us we felt was the best way to go.”

***On if fatigue played a role in the lack of pressure on the last drive:***

“A little bit. We played a lot. We played a lot of guys, but we played a lot of snaps too.”

**On if the second added at the end of the game needs clarification from the ACC:**

“Like I said, I’m not going to come in here every week and put the officials on trial, but yes, we turn those things in just to ask, not to complain. We say, ‘Talk to us about how this is interpreted.’ Just like the targeting that was waved off, just like several other plays that were nonconsequential in the game, we send those in just to have those discussions. The bottom line is the ball was snapped, and the play should’ve ended with one second left on the clock. That was the interpretation. There were five seconds and the play lasted 4.62 seconds or whatever it was, so there was either less than a second or a full second left for the next play.”

**On how he approaches the analytics of two-point conversions:**

“No, I’m not going to go for two right there, but that’s just me. That is the scenario that amongst coaches always gets talked about, but I can’t come to grips with that, to be honest with you. It’s one thing to have the statistics, and it’s another thing to do the postgame press conference. Statistically that is correct, and when [Manny Diaz] went for it I knew exactly what he was doing. I’m not arguing against math, either. I know five times three is 15 and its going to be 15 forever. I understand that, but that’s one of the many scenarios that in my opinion doesn’t take real life into consideration.”

**On the plan to redshirt LB Keshon Artis and if other players may be redshirted as well:**

“That’s what we would like to do, but to be quite honest I don’t know if we’ll be able to do that with Keshon. There’s a lot of football left to be played, and we’d like to try to do that if we can, but that’s not taking into account a lot of things that could happen down the road. We have a number of guys that I don’t know if they’re exactly in Keshon’s place; most are younger guys. We’re trying to manage that number for them and save them for the last four games when we may be thinner or find ways to alternate those guys through. Keshon is the one we’ve had the most conversation with to try to do that. You don’t have to have a very big imagination to foresee a scenario where we may not be able to do that.”

**On DT Dashawn Crawford exiting the game with an injury:**

“He’s avoided anything serious.”