Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Georgia Tech Week Press Conference
Nov. 11, 2019

Opening statement:
"Before we start, I do want to take a minute just to say to all the men and women who have served in our armed forces, Happy Veterans' Day. A particular thank you to Strat Tolson in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, a World War II and Korean War vet. The only one in Pawhuska that is a proud owner of a Virginia Tech flag. He's also my grandfather. Ninety-seven years young and still married to my grandmother, living in Pawhuska and living and dying with the Hokies every single day, but also many years ago was ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. So, thank you to all the veterans out there.

"That being said, we have a huge challenge this week moving to Georgia Tech. Coach Collins has his guys playing extremely hard, you can look at the Virginia film as great evidence of that. [It was] a really close ball game that they had a couple of opportunities to pull out. They've got skill players, as Georgia Tech has always had, guys that can run. As they make the transition from the triple option, James Graham playing at quarterback is continuing in my opinion to get more comfortable every single week with what they're asking him to do. He's a former teammate of [OL] Lecitus Smith, so we're familiar with James, we've had him in camp and loved him coming out of high school. So, we know what he can do. He can really run and is getting much better in the passing game. He had a big long touchdown pass early in the game against Virginia. [Georgia Tech] has had some close losses. I think Coach Collins is doing a fantastic job. Those guys are really playing hard in all three phases. We are 0-3 in the last three years against Georgia Tech. They came into our stadium and beat the mess out of us last year. So, we've got to have a great week of preparation as we move forward for our next challenge."

On scouting Georgia Tech QB James Graham as a skill player out of high school:
"Yeah, that was kind of our projection [for him] as a skill player – either a wide receiver or a defensive back. He's competitive. You love those guys that play quarterback in high school and he may have gone on to be a quarterback, obviously he is now and having success. He played for a good program and was a good, tough, talented player coming through the high school ranks."

On Special Assistant Jerry Kill's impact on the running game:
"I would say there have been several factors that you alluded to [that have improved the run game]. We have two true freshmen on the offensive line that have now played in almost a full season. That's certainly helped, and it's not like the other guys that were playing were old, seasoned, veterans either. So, we're gaining some experience. Certainly, we made a change at quarterback. We haven't done anything really new, schematically. I do believe our execution level has increased. Our technique has gotten better. You can look at a bunch of different factors for that, some of it is experience. I can't overstate, or I shouldn't understate, the effect that Coach Kill is having on our program across the board. Whether it be the running game, or operations,

or just anything that we've got going on. He's such a valuable resource for us in really all areas, continuing to help force the offensive staff to ask questions and to make sure what we're teaching and how we're teaching it has been thoroughly vetted is just one of the many things that he's done in his short time here."

On the difference in preparation for Georgia Tech without the triple option:
"It's certainly different knowing it's not on your schedule, I mean I guess a little bit with the Furman game, but [Georgia Tech] has a different identity that they're now recruiting to and developing. [Coach] Bud [Foster] could probably answer that question better and that doesn't mean that they can't go run the ball up and down the field. Those offensive linemen know how to run block and they've got a quarterback that runs a 4.4 [40-yard dash]. They've been recruiting to that so they certainly can run the ball it just looks a little bit different."

On how the team has changed since the Duke loss:
"I know it was different for me, just being 100 percent candid. The meeting we had [after the Duke loss], I just put it up there and told them it was my fault. I told them, 'We are not a tough football team right now, we're not mentally tough, we're not emotionally tough, and we didn't play physically tough. Here's examples of it on the film and this is not your fault. This is my fault and it's changing right now. I've let you down, and that's on me. I encourage everybody to look at themselves in the mirror when things don't go well. I'm doing it right now and I'm telling you, we're changing this. I'm going back to being myself. I'm not worried about anything else and if you want to go be a part of it, then I'll see you on the practice field.'

"The guys have done a great job with it. I don't know how they feel individually. That was my responsibility and I just told them like it was and told them, 'We're never going back to that. Doesn't mean we're going to win every game, but we're not putting that on the field anymore.' I know I had [gone away] from the way we went about things. The way we went about things was different than what I had always done and that's my fault. So, I quit worrying about all that other stuff and worried about getting our guys ready to play."

On how the team decided to use the "pop pass" to RB Terius Wheatley:
"It really doesn't matter who the quarterback is for that play, it's all about the defense. A couple years ago we ran it quite a bit and we didn't really get those looks much more since then. We had the look that we needed and almost pulled it off, I guess."

On dealing with success with a developing team:
"For us, the difference between winning and losing is so small. You look at the Coastal Division and the people we've played, the difference is so small. But the difference in how you feel if you win or lose is miles apart. So, you've got something where there's a very small margin for error in what the results are, but the difference in your feelings is miles apart based on that result. What we can't do is let our preparation be affected by how we felt after that result. That's what we've talked about the last couple weeks and we'll talk about it again. It wasn't that long ago that we had been given up for dead and we all remember that. We also understand how we've given ourselves a chance to play meaningful games in the month of

November and we have to stick to that. It's very easy to say and very difficult to do, but it's a huge point of emphasis for us moving forward."

On Geoff Collins making Georgia Tech competitive during the transition away from the triple option:
"I think the first thing is he's got his guys playing hard. We're however many weeks into the season, and you turn on the game versus Virginia last week and you know immediately that they're there to win the game. He deserves a tremendous amount of credit for that. Those guys are continuing to battle, and they'll be ready to play on Saturday."

On the progression of developing young offensive linemen:
"I mean there is certainly a physical development part that for those two young guys [Bryan Hudson and Luke Tenuta] in particular we're not focusing on right now. They're in the middle of playing 70 or 80 snaps a game. Most guys their age are in the physical development part, also known as redshirting and lifting more. Those guys are in the other part of the development, which is learning the technique and the scheme, seeing the pictures over and over again, and being able to communicate to the guys next to them. They've made great strides in that. I mean, Bryan had to play a whole new position. You can imagine what that was like for him. So right now, we're in that segment. When the season is over, they'll go back to the physical part of developing as offensive linemen. Right now, they're in the middle of learning the technique in order to give themselves a chance to have success."

On Coach Collins' job of transitioning Georgia Tech away from the option:
"Well the one thing is – and I don't want to speak for Coach Collins. I don't know the ins and outs of all that stuff and I don't pretend to. The one thing is that it's on one side of the ball. That doesn't mean that they aren't different, they are, but the change in terms of what they're asking their players, what they're recruiting to, it's not as dramatic as on the offensive side of the ball. I think they deserve a tremendous amount of credit for the way they've been creative and efficient on the offensive side of the ball as they go through the transition. Again, I don't want to pretend to speak on someone else's program. There's probably a lot of things that Coach Collins has done and changed but for that one side of the ball it's as drastic as you could probably get. They've done a great job of giving their guys a chance to have success and playing to their strengths in terms of their skill guys. Their offensive linemen are blocking different than they probably ever have, in terms of everything from their stances to their techniques. They all continue to get better every week. You can watch the film and see them get better as the weeks go on, really everywhere on that side of the ball."

On the recent successes of DE TyJuan Garbutt and LB Dax Hollifield:
"Well Tyjuan feels better, that's the first thing, and Dax is always hard on himself. But those guys continue to show up every single day, continue to work on their craft, and try to help this team. Dax is also playing on special teams, and we all know that if we ask anything of him, he's going to give it his all. TyJuan continues to show up every day and work and try to continue to improve and that's the key to anything. To have the consistency to do it every single day to give yourself a chance. It doesn't always come immediately, we don't know when it's going to come

or in what form or fashion it's going to come. Having that stick-to-it-iveness every single day is what those two have done, and they're getting to reap some of the benefits."