

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Pitt Week Press Conference
Nov. 18, 2019

Opening statement:

“Thanks to everybody that made the trip to Atlanta. It was great to see the support there for our kids. We sincerely appreciate that – it’s not like that everywhere, but it’s like that here and we sincerely appreciate that. We have a huge challenge this week, we have Pitt coming into town, playing really well in all three phases of the game. They lead the country in sacks, they’re very good against the run, and they’re really throwing the ball much more than maybe they have in the past couple years. It seems like about 40 times a game they’re throwing the ball now. They’re always very good in special teams and it’ll be plenty of a challenge for us on Senior Day. Thanks to our seniors – it’s a small class but I know our staff, our coaches, and our players are anxious to celebrate those guys and all they’ve done for Virginia Tech.”

On CB Caleb Farley’s season:

“I think practice has been the biggest thing. He just continues to work on his craft. We know he’s talented. He continued to embrace the things that he knows he needs work on. He’s taken coaching and focused on details of playing the position and it’s nice to see him get to reap the benefits of that hard work. I think he and Jermaine [Waller] both are great examples of practicing and continuing to not be afraid to put yourself out there in practice – go against good people, to focus, and really try your best during the preparation time to give yourself a chance to have success on the field. I know your question was about Caleb, I’ve been really proud of both of those guys that have done well and it’s good to see them have some success.”

On what makes Pitt’s defense line so effective:

“They have a great third-down package where they mix up the looks and bring guys from everywhere and then also drop out in coverage. They’re talented pass rushers. They’re not just third-down scheme rushers, they are a penetrating defense, an aggressive defense on early downs as well, and they’re able to get pressure with only four people. So, that can make for a dangerous recipe if you get behind the chains. I don’t know what the statistics say, but watching the film I think they force people to throw the ball more than they want to because they are so good against the run. It’s going to be tight down the field, we know that going into the game, but they’ve certainly done a good job getting pressure on the quarterback.”

On whether the young offensive line is ready for a difficult matchup:

“Well, we better be because it will be on Saturday. I like the way we’ve made progress. There are plenty of things we need to work on to continue to improve. This is a very talented defensive front and a very aggressive scheme that we’ll need to play our best.”

On what QB Hendon Hooker has shown now that he may have not shown in fall camp:

"I haven't gone back and gone through all of that. We're onto the next game. But I will say this, it was very evident in camp the work that Hendon put in in the summertime. We're really pleased with him. I'm not sure what comments I made during fall camp about Hendon, but I'm pretty sure they were complementary because I really, in all honesty, felt like he'd made long strides towards improvement."

On what Hendon Hooker has done better than expected as the starter:

"He's handled the emotions, he's played on the road, he's been calm and been able to play the next game and for the most part execute what we're asking him to do."

On if Hendon Hooker has displayed the "swagger" of a starting QB:

"I think so. I don't know what "swagger" means, but I do think he has confidence in himself and the kids believe in him – yes, I do. He's played competitive sports for some time – I say that meaning he was a competitive basketball player, he's been in the arena in terms of playing quarterback and playing basketball in competitive situations. He doesn't back down from the competition part of it and seems very comfortable in his own skin. The kids respond to that and enjoy him."

On the feeling of Senior Day as a coach and as a player:

"Well I don't know. As a coach you're in this long enough and you have enough great personalities that they affect you. It's our job to try and influence young people, which oftentimes gets lost in today's day and age. We do take that very seriously, we take a lot of pride in trying to influence young people in the right way and teach them what's truly important for the rest of their lives. Every now and again you come across players that influence you, they make you a better coach or maybe make you look at things a little bit differently. There have been a lot of them, but the ones that stick with you the longest are the ones that you admire. They may not be the best players or the guys with the most accolades, but they are the guys you've watched for years work hard and have great attitudes. You always appreciate those guys and they stick with you for a long time."

"As a player, I wasn't a good enough player to recall tales of yesteryear. I know there's a finality to it, I know that. I know when you take off your helmet for the last time – this won't be the last one for our guys but it'll be the last one here in Lane Stadium – but when it starts to come to an end, that's the realization that hey I'm going to have to get a job and work for a living, or find some direction here because this thing is coming to an end. And you don't get to play this sport on the weekend. You can play pickup hoops at the YMCA, but it's pretty tough to find those pickup football leagues when you're 35 or 40 or 45 years old. So, there's a definite finality to it, particularly in this sport, that I think starts to hit home. It certainly did with me, I knew it was coming to an end."

On whether he would start a pickup football league:

"Oh no, I don't want any part of that. The liability would kill you alone, could you imagine carrying insurance on that? When I was playing arena ball, we did have days where we would have an open tryout. Guys from the community would come out and pay 50 bucks or

something to play and there were pulled hamstrings everywhere, guys rolled up, it was rough. I don't want any part of that."

On DB Reggie Floyd's impact on the team:

"The first thing I think of is in this game during Reggie's freshman year. I'm almost positive he took one snap and that was on the punt team with five minutes to go in the game. They were coming all block, he wasn't a starter on the punt team, and through whatever the other circumstances were, he ended up in the game as a true freshman, he executed his assignment, and we got the punt off. We've used that as an example several times of being prepared. That might've been the only rep of punt he took all year, I'm not positive about it but I'm pretty sure. To me that said a lot about him as a young player, that he was going to be prepared, that he was eager to get his chance, and he's continued to improve both as a player and as a leader. He loves playing football and that shows in his work ethic throughout the offseason, at practice, and ultimately on gameday."

On how close RB Jalen Holston is to returning:

"I would say he's closer, but certainly not this week. There are obviously not very many weeks left, but he hasn't gone out and practiced with us yet, and he's still doing some work on the side. I don't know far away he is, but it certainly is not going to be this week."

On DB Jeremy Webb's tackle at the end of the game against Georgia Tech:

"I think it was a neat moment for everybody on the sidelines. I was really proud of our guys on the sideline, as the other guys were in the game, I thought our starters were still into the game encouraging our young players. It was good to get Jeremy in on a play and let him get out there and have a little bit of success because he has been through quite a bit."

On whether there is a preferred kickoff time:

"One way or the other it doesn't matter to me. We adjust the schedule accordingly. It's kind of like the weather, there's not much you can do about it. Television controls it, they tell you when to play, you better be there and be ready. Kind of like the Good Lord controls the weather, you better be ready and be ready to adapt. Mid-afternoon is fine with me, I'm sure the fans enjoy the occasional night game, and I would guess they prefer a mid-afternoon game, they probably don't like the noon kickoffs. Whatever it is we'll adjust, and we'll be ready to go."

On P Oscar Bradburn's value to the team:

"He's certainly become a weapon. In terms of Red Zone punting and in terms of flipping the field, he is still giving us good hang time and giving us an opportunity to get down there and cover the punts. It doesn't do you any good if you kick it a long way and the guys are running it back on you. He continues to get the ball up in the air, which certainly helps. I think he's a testament to his work in the weight room. You all that have seen him for a couple years know his leg strength has improved. That's part of the development of a guy who's a kicker and takes everything that we do in this program seriously, and he's reaping some of the benefits of his hard work in the offseason."