

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Pitt Postgame Press Conference
Nov. 23, 2019

Opening statement:

“Thanks to everyone that came and braved the weather. We celebrated Senior Day, and obviously, it was Bud [Foster]’s last home game as well. I’m just proud and happy for our guys to battle like we battled. Obviously, we played phenomenal on defense. We made a few plays, enough plays, on offense and our guys found a way to win the game. That’s a good Pitt football team – their defense is really good. We’ve got a quick turnaround – got to get ready for the next game.”

On talking Coach Foster out of retirement:

“I think his mind is pretty made up. You know, it wasn’t a decision that came about because of how good or bad we were on defense. It was obviously a decision that he deliberated on for some time. Our guys are playing with some confidence right now – it’s fun to watch.”

On the team’s defensive turnaround since last year’s Pitt game:

“It’s a different scheme – there’s a lot of things that go into that, but to hold them to 60 yards [on the ground] and make them one dimensional is huge. Our guys executed the plan really well and played a pretty complete performance there.”

On pinning Pitt inside the five -yard line on back-to-back punts:

“I do believe we are a tougher football team than we were when we started. I do believe that. I think we have more confidence and I think it shows at times. I’m proud that we did it two times in a row because we work on it every single Tuesday. Those are big plays and we coach them like they’re big plays. To see the guys execute like that was pretty satisfying.”

On getting to play for an ACC Coastal title after the slow start:

“I can’t say enough good things about our guys. I thought that way about them early in the year too, though. I really did. I’m enjoying every moment with them – they’re a special group of young men. They’ve been through special circumstances and stuck together. My feelings towards them haven’t changed because we’re winning games now. I’m more happy for them because they are getting some affirmation for their hard work.”

On QB Hendon Hooker’s development as a passer:

“I think he looks comfortable out there. He continues to evolve. He’s got good leadership skills and throwing the football, he continues to come to work every week and focus on his improvement. Hopefully, we can get that to continue.”

On being a part of a team outscoring opponents 96-0 as Tech has been:

“I don’t know if I’ve been a part of that before. When the teams were evenly matched, we had a run there at TCU when we were the best team in the league by a long way, except for a couple games – the Utah and the BYU game. They probably were comparable statistics to that, but as far as what you just said, no, I haven’t been a part of playing good people [that well]. What we’ve got to understand, our team, is that that resets on Friday night. We’ve got to go be ready to play and what should carry over is the confidence, the belief in what we’re doing, the confidence in each other, and understanding that it works if we execute it really, really well. So, we’ve got to fight that – all those pats on the back that we’re going to get, we’ve got to understand why we’re getting them. We’ll roll our sleeves up, so to speak, and get ready to go back to work.”

On the difference in preparing for a rainy game:

“It’s a little bit difficult if you know it’s going to rain – what does rain mean? You know, is it going to pour down rain? What does an inch of precipitation look like over 12 hours? Like I know it’s going to be wet, but is it going to be like the North Carolina game in 2016? You just don’t know the details of it. You’ve got to have those discussions ahead of time. Those are the discussions we have – ‘if it looks like this, what are some things we can do that maybe we haven’t practiced this week?’ But we’ve practiced all along and everyone knows what to do. We just have those discussions, and obviously we make the kids are aware of what the conditions could possibly be and try to simulate that during the week. Later in the week, we get wet ball work and that sort of stuff.”

On evaluating the role that the field conditions would play in the game:

“Well, it was a two-headed monster out there. That defense we played against is pretty good. They’re going to challenge you, add more people in the box than you can block, and it’s raining. So, it was the defense we played against, and a little bit of the weather.”

On if the late hit on DB Chamarri Conner should be reviewable:

“Was he out of bounds? No? That’s what I told him. I understand why they’re hesitant, except for targeting, to start reviewing penalties. But I felt like he was clearly in bounds. It’s hard, [the refs] have a hard job. There are vicious hits that sometimes instinctually get flagged. I think that’s part of it, and I understand it – it’s about protecting the players. It’s a bang-bang play and it’s hard on [the refs]. It’d be nice to get it right, but I think it’s a slippery slope to start [reviewing penalties]. I don’t watch too much NFL, but they’re reviewing pass interference now, right? I don’t know how well that’s going, but I’d be a little hesitant to start reviewing all the penalties.”

On what changes when preparing for a quick turnaround to the next game:

“Well, it’s more about getting the guys feeling good and knowing what to do. When you have a normal week, it’s a little more physical. It’s just a little more getting in the flow of hitting. So, it’ll be less of that. It’s not all that complicated. For us, Thursday becomes Friday, Wednesday becomes Thursday, and you count it all the way back. Tomorrow is a busy day for us. We will not practice tomorrow, but as coaches we’ll be in there in the morning to start game planning

and start working. The kids will lift and run and we'll meet. Fortunately, we don't have school this week, so we'll back practice up to give us a little more preparation time."

On how QB Hendon Hooker's demeanor has helped the team:

"They tell me it's 'swagger.' I don't know what that means. Hendon is the same way [at practice] as you see him in the game – focused, serious, concentrated, but also encouraging. He does do a good job of that. I think when he's not in the arena he's maybe more verbose or outgoing, but he's serious. When he's involved with football, he's very serious. He's serious about doing a good job, he's very serious about listening to what the coaches are saying, and he's serious about helping his teammates – both know what to do and play better."

On QB Hendon Hooker's leadership qualities:

"I would say that he's had leadership skills since he's been here. One of the first things I noticed about him and talked to him about was that I thought he had that. I didn't give it to him – it was obvious that he had some natural leadership ability. Obviously, when you play, and play well, you can carry more clout. Ish Seisay doesn't play very much for us, but he's a good leader for us – he really is, he's great. So, you can do it both ways. [Hendon]'s always had leadership skills. I think the fact that he's playing and been efficient and done a good job has probably enhanced his ability to influence others in a positive manner."

On how patience has been a big part of the team's turnaround:

"I don't preach patience to our kids. I preach urgency in whatever task that we're taking on, to try and do it as well as we can. The bottom line is, at some points we have played guys before they were ready. What you try and do as a coach is that when they don't perform well, you don't want that to 'break their sword' so to speak, or crush their confidence. You've got to continue to build them back up. I think that's one of the things our team is starting to get – is confidence in each other. I can't give them that. They've got to go through it themselves and you've got to kind of earn that. I think we're earning that. Again, I stop short of going overboard. We've still got work to do and we've got goals left to accomplish. And we've got that keep that same mindset heading into next week."