

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
UVA Week Media Session
Nov. 25, 2019

Opening statement:

“Thanks to everybody that came out Saturday to support our kids and Senior Day and obviously Coach Foster’s last game at Lane Stadium. We sincerely appreciate that and we look forward to all of the Hokies that make the trip to Charlottesville for our game Friday. We’ve got a little bit of a short week here getting ready for the game at noon. We pushed back practice a little bit to give us more time for preparation.

“We certainly face a daunting challenge with Virginia. They are playing well in all three phases of the game. Joe Reed on kickoff return has been fantastic this year. Bryce Perkins is running and throwing the ball with accuracy and confidence and defensively they continue to do a great job mixing up looks, causing problems for other offenses. Our guys certainly understand what’s at stake here. We certainly understand the rivalry and we’ll need a great week of preparation as we move forward.”

On OL Austin Cannon as a player and emerging into a bigger role this season:

“All Austin has ever done is everything we’ve ever asked him to do. [He is] probably one of the best teammates on the entire team in terms of caring for and helping other people out. Physically, a strong person with great weight room numbers. Started off getting to contribute a little bit on PAT/Field goal and the punt team and now has found a role playing on the offensive line. He continues to be a coachable young man in terms of understanding what we’re asking him to do, being able to put it out there on the field and really has made huge strides in his time here.”

On Cannon’s struggle with depression and what role he had in helping him recover:

“It was like nothing I’ve ever been a part of. Scary. I don’t know what role I played or didn’t play, I just tried to be there for the kid. I don’t know, I guess I let Austin talk about it, I’m a little uncomfortable talking about it just because it’s a pretty personal thing with Austin. He seems very comfortable talking about it. I just tried to do what I would try to do for any one of my players or my own children if they were struggling.”

On scouting Virginia QB Bryce Perkins and who will simulate him in practice:

“Well Braxton [Burmeister] is a pretty good athlete, really good athlete actually. He’s been doing a great job all season long. When we played Georgia Tech and played those athletic guys, and it’s hard to simulate, the guy makes so many plays, designed and improvised. He seems to keep his eyes downfield when he needs to and can tuck it and run when he wants to. He’s a strong runner you watch him film after film, opponent after opponent guys just seemed to fall off of him as they’re trying to get the angle. He does. Great job, he cuts back on people all the time. Braxton

will do that job for us to the best of his ability but I don't know if you can fully simulate how efficient he's been."

On WRs Tayvion Robinson and Tre Turner:

"They're all doing great."

On LB Rayshard Ashby winning ACC LB of the Week for the fifth time and being the leader of the defense:

"He mentioned something the other day about being a graduate assistant and I just said 'Yes, yes, yes when you're done playing'. We recognize guys on Sunday after the game and we put their stats up and a couple plays – because I want guys on both sides of the ball to see that kind of stuff and we watch special teams all together. It's a nice time for guys to see each other and puff their chests up a little bit. For Ashby you put all the statistics up there and at the bottom I just put 'He runs the show.'" He just communicates, gets people lined up, has a great understanding of what we're trying to get accomplished and gets other people to play well around him. He has unique, I guess you could call it vision for a linebacker. That's the term Bud [Foster] has used in terms of in smaller spaces how to avoid blockers and find a way to make tackles. It's really a unique talent in terms of his vision and mental understanding of the game."

On UVA's effectiveness in the kickoff return phase & how to counteract that:

"It starts with a great kick. I think what has separated them in their kickoff return unit is when people have tried to kick the ball all over the place. Most of the time when we go out there – it's happened a little bit to us – most of the time we know where the ball is going to get kicked. Sometimes people will try to kick it across the field or sky kick it or whatever to mix up the returns. To me what they've been able to do, what they've done is they've hurt people when they've tried to do those things which has only added to the danger they have on their return unit. For us, first of all it starts with a great kick and kick placement. Winning with speed down the field is paramount. Avoiding contact with the proper leverage is really important. It's going to take a group effort, it's going to take all 11, not just 10. The kicker is going to play a role in it, too. Amare Barno is a guy who has been playing the last couple weeks who has been getting down the field. There's a bunch of other guys, too. We play starters on the unit and we're going to have to have it. They have really helped their team – not just with points – but also with field position on that unit."

On the rivalry and whether it's more intense when both teams are playing well:

"I do think it's good. There's a lot at stake no matter what, we understand that. I think it's good for the Commonwealth that both teams are having fairly successful years. The thing about competition, rivalries and all that sort of stuff is that when you're in it, it still comes down to execution. There's emotion involved and there's all the things that come with big games, but it still comes down to preparation and execution and being able to focus on being able to do your job on a consistent basis regardless of the circumstances. It's as heated and as important of a rivalry as there is. When both teams have had some success I think it enhances that and makes it a better spectacle."

On the role the departures from last year's team have played in helping galvanize the players who stayed and are now enjoying success:

"I'm really done with revisiting all of that. We're in the spot we're in and I think it's pretty obvious, you watch our team and they're a pretty tight group, believe in each other and believe in what we're doing. I'm not going to say bad things about the guys who aren't here and about people who aren't in our program. I'm not going to say anything about guys who aren't in our program. The guys we've got here believe in each other and are working hard every single day and I think that's been evident by what everybody's seen. I'm excited to be around them and coach them every single day."

On whether Bud Foster has changed or not as his coaching career approaches its conclusion:

"I'd say he's the same. If we didn't know this was his last go-around, I don't know if you'd be able to figure it out, competitive and fiery and working hard. I think it's important to him. He's the kind of person when he signs on to do a job he goes and does it. He signed on to do this job. He's got a lot of pride in it. He's got a lot invested in it. He cares for our kids. That's the kind of person he is."

On whether UVA has changed its scheme in the secondary with personnel changes in the defensive backfield:

"They have always been multiple going back to the BYU days. They've always done a tremendous amount. They kind of are multiple all the time. They've moved some guys around and have done a great job with that. They must do a great job teaching those schemes to their defense because they've always seemed to be able to adjust or go with the flow or play to their strengths through the many years that we've seen them."

On facing UVA's 3-4 defense up front:

"We've played a couple this year. It's the same deal with the front, they've always been multiple in the front, as well. They don't just play three down, they slide the front and cover the guards, as well, which always poses a challenge when you plays teams that do different stuff. I anticipate we'll put together a plan and get guys pointed in the right direction and see how it goes."