

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Wake Forest Week Press Conference
Nov. 4, 2019

Opening Statement:

“After looking at the film, I’m awfully proud of our guys and the way they battled. We had a great workout yesterday, talked about it, got to turn the page and get ready for Wake Forest. It’s going to be an incredible challenge for us here at home. We’re celebrating a fine football coach in Coach Foster, obviously deserving of having a special day. He’s meant a tremendous amount to Virginia Tech, we all know that.

“Our focus is on the big challenge that we have in front of us. You’re talking about a team (Wake Forest) that’s only lost one ball game that’s really good in all three phases of the game. Offensively, one of the better offenses in America. Defensively, they do a great job at taking the ball away, I think they’re like +7 in the turnover margin. They are just well-coached and playing well. They had one little blip in the shootout in the Louisville game. They made a tremendous comeback to give themselves a chance. They gave up a few plays on special teams, but other than that they’ve been really successful. I’m excited about the way our kids approached yesterday. We know we have a huge challenge and we’re ready to get to work.”

On the most impressive part of Wake Forest’s offense:

“If you look at what they’re doing it’s unique in terms of – it’s kind of hard to describe, you have to see it – the tempo in which they operate in the backfield. It’s just a little bit different I’m not sure I’ve seen anybody else do it. They’re having huge success with it, heavy into the RPO game, the quarterback run game, running the ball on the inside and the outside, and then pretty darn good throwing it around. All of that combined with them operating at high, high speed. They are really pushing the tempo every single down, every single play. I did not look up how many plays they’re averaging a game, but I know it’s a lot watching the film. You combine that with the formations and the unbalanced stuff, all that sort of stuff, it can make it difficult on you communication-wise, getting lined up, and having a chance to be sound against both the run and the pass.”

On QB Hendon Hooker’s availability for this week:

“We’ll see. I stepped out there twice so far this year on the injury deal and I’ve been wrong on both of them with Damon Hazelton and Hendon. So, I don’t know, we’ll see. If he practices all week and does well, then Hendon will be the starter, I don’t know if that’s going to happen or not.”

On the play calling in the fourth quarter at Notre Dame:

“There are plays on both sides of the ball that we analyze and talk about and would’ve, could’ve, should’ve, done differently or better. We hash all those things out. The bottom line is we came into the game 17.5-point underdogs trying to get it into the last five minutes to try and win the

game. That's what our team was talking about, that's what we were preaching that if we did that, we'd find a way to pull it off because that's what we've done before and [we] came up short. Now the challenge for us is emotionally and mentally is to go get recharged back up because we've got a great football team coming into our place now."

On keeping the players focused moving forward:

"Well I tell them that [the media] will handle all of the distractions for us. You'll talk about all the stuff and I mean that sincerely and out of respect for your jobs. That's what you guys do. Our job is to take care of us. We have more than we can say grace over this week in terms of Wake coming in here. Our guys understand, they can feel the confidence rising. The [belief in the] ability in each other, the feeling of trust in each other, continuing to build. We've got to go out and focus on what we can control and get ready for this one."

On OL Silas Dzansi's injury & potential availability:

"I don't know yet, we'll see. We'll have a meeting tonight and I'll have more information, I just don't know yet."

On defensive coordinator Bud Foster:

"What you see is what you get, he's an intense competitor. I've enjoyed the relationship, he does a fine job not just schematically, but with our kids. He is competitive, I'll say that, on a daily basis. He's fun to be around."

On the heads-up special teams' play by RB Terius Wheatley on kickoff return:

"Every Friday, we do this in preseason, we have a huge catalog of all the 'squirrely' things that can happen, and we watch them. We don't sit down and watch two hours of it as a team, but we watch them bit by bit through fall camp. Some of them are special teams oriented, some of them are offensively and defensively oriented situations. Then, every week on Friday, after we finish our Friday walkthrough, we get together and I'll show [the team] clips – strange things, odd events – that have happened across the country in the previous week, just to keep us up to date."

"We have a network of coaches and support personnel that text me whenever they're watching a game and see one. Anything from blocking a punt and having it go over the line of scrimmage – it happened to Notre Dame against Michigan and they tried to recover it and Michigan ended up getting the ball and getting a first down. So, that play specifically has been on there several times across the country. It was pretty cool because when he did it, not only did we gain about 25 yards, but the whole sideline had been sitting in those meetings time after time and you would've thought we scored – they erupted and were all patting [Wheatley] on the head and happy because we try to cover all those things. There's a lot of things that can happen on a football field but we try to do our best to educate our guys on all those situations."

On K John Parker Romo punting against Notre Dame:

"I was incredibly proud of him. It wasn't even a deal where he had all week to prepare. He has taken reps with the two punt squad throughout the year, but it literally happened on Thursday right before practice. Our starting punter [Oscar Bradburn] tweaked his groin, and Romo

jumped in there and had a good Thursday. He actually handled a snap that was a little off and got the ball off quickly. I was really proud and happy for his performance.”

On separation between receivers and defenders and how to create it:

“It’s the distance between them and the person covering them. We didn’t have a lot of distance. I mean, some of it is technique, some of it is I thought those defenders were good players. Some of it is when we had separation, we could’ve had better ball location. Some of it is maybe we could have done a couple other things and made it easier on our receivers. It’s all of those things. Some of it is we aren’t going to get much separation versus good people, and we are going to have to make contested catches. Tre [Turner] made a big contested catch down there in the fourth quarter, so it’s a little bit of everything.”

On whether he thinks his receivers should catch passes if they can touch the ball:

“I would say our receivers feel that way. They feel like if they can get to the ball, they should be able to bring it down. We’ve made a bunch of those plays and we will need to continue to make them moving forward. I love that group of guys, they’re out there competing, but we’re just a little off.”

On Virginia Tech football retaining its stature with high school programs once Bud Foster leaves the coaching profession & moves into a new role.

“Well, that’s an interesting question certainly. I haven’t projected this forward really, we’re just in the moment right now. I’m anxious for this season, doing everything we can to send Coach Foster and our seniors off the right way, and continuing to build for the future. I haven’t really projected things forward very much.”

On the execution of the trick play kickoff return at the end of the Notre Dame game:

“Well, we got beat by the right guys if that makes sense. We knew what we were doing. I would have rather it gone for a touchdown, but we executed it in terms of what we were supposed to do. We just didn’t block enough people.”

On CB Jermaine Waller missing the first half of the Wake Forest game and the backup cornerbacks’ preparation:

“It’s going to be a challenge and we have to get them ready. I have been really pleased with how Armani [Chatman] has continued to come along. I made special mention of him in the meeting as he continues to work and get better. Jovonn [Quillen] has played in a bunch of games. Jermaine [Waller] is coming into his own and he’ll be missed. That’s part of the job of a team though is the next guy has to step up and perform at a high level.”

On what about Quincy Patterson’s performance impressed and what needs work:

“The moment wasn’t too big for him, he didn’t get rattled. We have to make more plays and the execution level has to continue to increase. But he got in there, he was tough, and he competed in a tough environment versus a very good defense. I’m encouraged by that part of it and we have plenty to work on moving forward.”

On Wake Forest WRs Sage Surratt and Scotty Washington:

“It’s a two-headed monster. It’s not just the passing game. They can run the football as well, which creates one-on-one matchups. Those guys have been really good in those situations. They both have the ability to get the separation that we talked about earlier and make big plays down the field.”

On facing Dave Clawson and how he has improved the program at Wake Forest:

“I have not coached against him before, but we have a good relationship. I enjoy visiting with him at the meetings. I think he’s done a great job developing players. Those guys are in their program eating, lifting, and developing. Obviously, he’s done a great job coaching them and putting them in good situations. They’ve developed physically while staying true to what they’re trying to get accomplished as a program.”