

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**Belk Bowl Week Press Conference**  
**Dec. 21, 2019**

***Opening Statement***

“Alright, first of all congratulations to all of our Virginia Tech graduates yesterday. We had a few of those guys walk across the stage, fantastic accomplishment for them. Thanks to Dr. Sands for coming out to practice today, both of them, both Dr. Sands (Tim and Laura). It was good to see them. Dr. Sands is sporting a nice Bud Foster-esque beard. It was good to see him out there at practice. We just walked off the field, but we’ll go out there again tomorrow. Then, we’ll take three days off over Christmas and have everybody meet us in Charlotte the day after Christmas and get ready for Kentucky.”

***On whether he’s been able to get in all the allowed pre-bowl practices:***

“It’s different every single year. There’s a lot of diminishing returns, you know what I mean, and needlessness to say we have several irons currently in the fire. There’s a time for us to practice and work on getting better and preparing for the bowl game, but we got to give our guys some time off, too. Between finals and the holidays and recruiting and all the other things going on. As soon as we know what date we’re playing and what date the bowl site expects us to be there, we just build the schedule accordingly.”

***On facing Kentucky:***

“They’re playing great team defense. They’re huge up front, I mean humongous. Very few people have been able to run the football. Some very good offensive lines in the Southeastern Conference have not been able to get much movement really at all. I’ve watched some games where the other team it seems like they never cross the 50-yard line. They just can’t get much going on. Very well coached and comfortable in their scheme there. Offensively, obviously their quarterback who was a wide out, he’s a unique and special talent. I turned on the film expecting to see a small guy, and he’s certainly not. He’s over 200 pounds, he’s - I don’t know - 6’1”, something like that and he can really run. I think it’s a pretty cool study on not just scheme and what they’re doing on the offensive side of the ball, but how they’ve adapted and ultimately about him as a player. For him to go from playing wide out to quarterback is a pretty big stretch and he seems to have done it seamlessly.”

***On his satisfaction with the production of the running back position:***

“I think Deshawn [McClease]’s been really productive. He’s done a great job. He’s a smart, heady player and he’s been really efficient and effective for us.”

***On how he’s managing the vacancies on the defensive staff for bowl prep:***

“Yeah, I’ve let Bud [Foster] tell me what he wants to do, how he wants to handle it over there right now. [Darryl Tapp and Tracy Claeys] are in an observing role. We’ll handle it in house for the bowl game.”

***On who is taking on coaching roles***

“Pierson [Prioleau], [Zach] Sparber and Jack Tyler.”

***On who is overseeing the defensive line***

“Sparber.”

***On his theory of whether occasional changes are good for a coaching staff:***

“I would say that I do not believe in change just for the sake of change. I do think it’s important that we continue to evaluate things on a consistent basis, you know with open and honest eyes, kind of like what we were talking about with recruiting. Recruiting in the state of Texas, if you’d ask me when I got here, I’d say no, but we continue to evaluate those things and have those discussions. I would never say blanket statement that it’s good to liven things up or freshen things up where we’re going to make changes every so often. I think trying your best to evaluate what you’re doing and who’s doing it yearly or more often than that is the way to go about it and try to make the best decisions for the group.”

***On QB Hendon Hooker’s development as a passer:***

“We haven’t limited him. We saw it a little bit heading into the bowl game last year. I thought he made a stride in terms of development and understanding a year ago and he’s just continued to do that. So no, we have not limited him. He’s capable of handling all that stuff. We still play to his strengths, you know. He just continues to be more comfortable - I don’t know if efficient is the right word, but accurate throwing the ball too and mechanically continues to improve. You stand behind him at practice and you figure out very quickly that he absolutely knows. The play may not work, the end result may not be positive, but you stand behind him and you know that he knows what’s going on in all phases of what we’re trying to accomplish.”

***In retrospect whether he wishes he would have named Hooker the starter to begin 2019:***

“Well, here’s how I would answer that, I would answer that question the same way I answered the one two before. I think it’s important that we sit down and evaluate how we came to those conclusions, what the results of those decisions were and I think it’s fairly obvious, right? And make sure we discuss so the next time we’re in that situation hopefully we can make a good decision.”

***On the benefit of having a month to look at the bowl opponent:***

“I do think it’s nice to be able to really dive in to an opponent when you don’t have a six-day turnaround. I do like that part of it. The shoe is on the other foot as well. You have a defensive coordinator looking at the offense for almost a month. I know when I was an offensive coordinator that what was the feeling I had. We were playing in the Rose Bowl, or we were playing in the Fiesta Bowl and it was like a month and a half. That was when the games were played on Jan. 10 and you feel like you need to change some things up because there’s another person in another city that is spending the exact same amount of time on you. There is a little bit of that in terms of making sure you don’t do too much, that you’re prepared to handle wrinkles. It’s nice for the quarterback to slow down a little bit.

***On how excited the team is to play in the Belk Bowl:***

“I think our team is anxious to play. It's still a ways off, and I think our team would really like to play well. That's the feeling I get from them. They know that we have a bunch of guys that are coming back next year. They are excited about that as well and I'm anxious to get to the bowl and really get into the preparation week of playing the game. Me personally, I'm honored that we get to go. This is not a complaint, but my plate has been so full I haven't had a chance to get excited. We have just had a lot going on. We are anxious to get to that preparation week right now.”

***On how you frame this bowl game in terms of just this year or something that could provide momentum going into 2020 with so many players coming back:***

“I feel like I would like to win so we could springboard off of it. I think our team would like too as well, and I think for us with a large number of guys coming back, the message is let's not wait until January 21st to start improving. We have this opportunity right now with many guys who will still be on this team next year, so let's not waste all this time leading up until we are coming back for the spring semester. Let's start that improvement now. That's what we have been working towards, and I've been very pleased with how we have practiced with an eye towards Kentucky. That's our talk that we would not be doing our team in 2019 or 2020 due service if we are going to wait to get better. We are playing this game for next year as well, but we get to do it with a few seniors who are on the roster.”

***On some young guys who have made strides in practice who haven't heard much of:***

“Well, the person who comes to mind first is Amari Barno. He is a junior college kid who we are going to redshirt, and he will have two years left. He made a couple of plays today, and it was pretty crazy. He still has a long way to go, but athletically he has built some plays that are eye-popping. That's the one because today he was pretty impressive. Gerald Walker is another one who continues to improve that we are going to be able to redshirt. He will play in this game, but he is the one who continues to get better.”