

2019 Belk Bowl
Virginia Tech vs. Kentucky
Dec. 31, 2019
Postgame news conference
Virginia Tech head coach Justin Fuente quotes

(Part of his opening statement)

“I’m proud of our squad. I’m proud of everything they accomplished. I don’t know if there is a better term than we were left for dead early in the year, and then we battled back. The fact that we didn’t come through in this game doesn’t diminish my pride in them, my excitement for the direction of our program, and my belief in them. We’re awfully close on both sides of the ball – today – but ultimately, one play here or there on either side of the ball, and they ended up winning it.”

(On Lynn Bowden Jr.’s performance)

“That’s what he’s done to everybody. He’s a great player. He’s competitive. He’s tough, he’s strong. He never looks like he’s in a hurry out there. He’s patient. He’s an explosive and physical player. He’s a competitor.”

(On kicking the field goal in the fourth quarter and not going for it)

“There’s just so much time left. I don’t know what the time of possession is after that. I feel that they had the ball for so much time. Yeah, I thought about it. I thought there was so much time left in the game, so I kicked it.”

(On having a lot of players returning for next season)

“I think it’s important that we understand that it doesn’t guarantee us success because we have people coming back. We’ve tasted both sides of it, this group. With a large number of them coming back, they’ve tasted the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. I think that should fuel us moving forward. I’m excited about our character. We performed really well in the classroom this semester. There’s just a lot of really good things going on here with a group of kids that care about each other and care about this football program.”

(On the defensive breakdowns on Kentucky’s final drive)

“We were straining our tails off. We had guys all over the place in the game. We had been on the field – I don’t know what the numbers are – but a large portion of the fourth quarter. It kind of goes back to the field goal question. We just couldn’t get off the field in the end. It wasn’t like they were ripping off big chunk yardage plays. We’re in the situation of using timeouts or not using timeouts, but the ball never really got down there very close. In terms of clock management and what we’re trying to accomplish, you’re in no-man’s land the whole drive. There wasn’t an individual thing. They just executed a little better and continued to inch the ball down the field.”

(On what Bud Foster has meant to Virginia Tech)

“What has Bud Foster meant to Virginia Tech? I mean, I wish I was eloquent enough. People are going to write books about it – several hundred page books. He’s just a fantastic football coach. He does a good job of relating and teaching. He and Coach Beamer have ... I’m not sure people quite understand, and maybe I don’t fully understand the ramifications of how far this school has come not solely because of those two people, but they had a lot to do with it. The fact that we’re in the ACC, some of the things that have been developed, some of the exposure given to the school, is immeasurable on top of the effects he’s had on countless people’s lives – the young men that have come through this program that he’s mentored and taught and been demanding of and ultimately helped them be better people. He’s a Hall of Fame football coach. That doesn’t mean because he knows when to blitz, but because he knows how to handle people, and he’s passionate about his work. He’s the best.”

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Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster quotes

(On Lynn Bowden Jr.’s performance)

“A really special football player. Tremendous skill set. We couldn’t get him to throw the ball enough. That was the bottom line. If we could ever do that, we would have them where we wanted them. We had some opportunities to get some stops and finish the game, and we didn’t. We had fourth-and-5 or fourth-and-6, in that range, and that was the one completion he had, wasn’t it? I don’t know how many he had ... My hat’s off to Kentucky. They fought their tail off, and to their coaching staff, they did a great job of putting him into position and then putting an offense around him. Just a really special athlete. We had some opportunities on both sides of the ball, and we didn’t get it done – and that’s the unfortunate thing. There’s a few plays in this game that make a difference. We had a pass interference on an interception, and two or three plays later, they score a touchdown. I blitzed in that situation, and we had a guy free and he couldn’t make the play. We had two turnovers in the second half and only got three points out of it, and I know offensively they’d like to have that back. We didn’t capitalize on those things. Then we had two fourth-down opportunities that we didn’t convert on defensively and gave up an easy score on that last play. It’s just disappointing for our kids because they worked so hard. You can watch bowl games and you can see teams that are excited to be there and want to compete and you get some teams that are just happy to be there. I think you saw two teams that really improved the last half of the season, two teams that are striving to get better. This team that we played, they beat Penn State last year in the Citrus Bowl. This is a quality football team and Mark Stoops has done a great job, but you saw two teams compete out there today, and it was a hard-fought, physical football game. Unfortunately, we came up on the short end of the stick.”

(On playing Alan Tisdale more instead of Dax in the second half)

“They both played well and played hard. I felt with them running the ball that I needed a little more speed maybe to chase a guy down. That was it more than anything. It was more a speed factor rather than was he playing better than Dax. I think they both played about equal. Alan is deserving, and he’s played well for the most part, and so has Dax. But that was kind of my thought.”

(On the game being his final one)

“I’ve been so fortunate and so blessed, and Justin’s been so good to me, so gracious. He’s got this program going in the right direction. I’m excited about the leadership we have there with him and our staff. I’m excited about our players. We’ve got one senior starter on defense. We’ve got a good group coming back. We had five seniors on this football team ... so these guys, they’ve taken the steps that we want them to. Would we like to have finished a little better? Yeah, but we lost some really tight football games this year, with the exception of one football game (Duke), and that makes a statement about the direction we’re going. It kind of reminds me of that 1998 group. I’m not going to put the pressure on them and say they’re going to go play for the national championship, but it reminds me of that group of how close and competitive and what gut-wrenching losses we lost that year. That was such a learning experience and growing experience and you know you don’t want to get back in that situation. The only way to do that is to out-work and out-prepare and have a big-time offseason. And you’re every-day approach needs to be to push yourself to be the best. I think that is what this group is moving toward, and I’m excited about that.”