

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**National Signing Day Media Conference**  
**February 6, 2019**

***Opening Statement:***

“It’s a great day. I’m just awfully proud of the guys we’re bringing in to our program combined with the guys that signed in December. I think it’s got a chance to be a really special group of people. You all know me well enough now that I’m not prone to hyperbole when it comes to these things. Obviously, they’re all young and have a tremendous amount of work to do but this is the byproduct of relationships that have been built over multiple years.

“Today we welcome Knox (Kadum) to Virginia Tech. First and foremost, he’s a guy that we’ve been tracking for some time. Obviously, we’ve recruited that school for a while and have had a lot of success. He’s had a lot of success. He played at an early age. We knew that there was a chance that we may find ourselves in this situation with a limited number of quarterbacks. Even though we had four, we knew there was a chance that this could happen. We tried our best to inoculate ourselves by continuing to evaluate guys and be prepared. In some ways this happening now is better than it happening at the end of spring, so we actually have an opportunity to fill one of those spots. I’m excited to get him in here and get him going.

“Jaden Cunningham as well, a big defensive tackle. Obviously, that was a point of emphasis for us. To fill those needs on the defensive tackle front, someplace we’ve been really, really thin. Jaden’s a big body. We brought him on an official visit some time ago and we’re happy that he’s joining us hopefully in the summertime.

“And the one that probably everyone wants to talk about is Doug Nester. Congratulations to Vance Vice. Pretty quickly we hand off recruiting to position coaches. Our assistant coaches are in charge of their positions, their recruitment, development of those positions. Doug’s signing with Virginia Tech is a byproduct of the job Coach Vice did with Doug. It’s also a byproduct of the way Doug was raised and the values that he has - a fantastic family. I think distance played a factor in terms of them staying close together but you know I think the biggest thing was his relationship with Coach Vice and his belief in us.

“Quite frankly when you look at the offensive class that’s come in it’s not hard to figure out why we are becoming more attractive to these types of players. You look at what’s happened here statistically over the last three years in terms of where those offenses have ranked, some with veteran players some with young players, it’s pretty impressive. You think about total offense in the history of Virginia Tech the last three years we’ve ranked one, five and eight. When you start to talk about that with young people they start to understand what we can do. We’ve ranked in total touchdowns first, fourth and seventh within the last three years. As far as wide receivers wanting to come here, we’ve ranked first, second and fourth in receptions per year. It goes on and on passing yards wise, passing touchdowns first second and sixth. I think that’s

become appealing. Now we've got to be better absolutely. Now combine that with running the football. I think that's been a point of emphasis for us and that starts up front. I think this offensive line crew has got a chance to really help push that forward combined with the guys that we have here.

"I'm excited. Our kids are back obviously in school and offseason programs doing well. We've got a jump start on the 2020 class and things are really going well. We are in the midst of self-evaluation. We've been through that some in terms of our program. Everything as a whole, as a team, when you come off a season that was not what you wanted it to be I think it'd be wise to check yourself and go through everything with a fine-tooth comb and that's what we're in the process of doing. I like the way everybody's responding."

***On re-establishing a relationship with Nester after his commitment to Ohio State:***

"We just continued it. He came to a game this fall, early in the season. He was really focused on winning a state championship. We had recruited the young man since he was 14 years old so we had a pretty good baseline relationship and we just continued to develop, not being pushing, just wanting the kid to be happy. Knowing that we had a great opportunity to provide him something here that unique and different and if it was something he was interested in we were willing to go down that road."

***On what makes Nester stand out over other recruits of his caliber:***

"I don't know how he compares to everyone else but I know a lot about him. I know he's a good student, he's diligent. Part of the reason he stayed back was to play basketball with his friends this season which I think is pretty cool, also he gets up at 5 a.m. in the morning to get his lift in. He's a big driven person. He cares about relationships and he is a hard worker. You combine that with talent. He's got size, athleticism and drive. I think he was raised really well by his parents and I think he has a chance for something special."

***On the differences of recruiting someone after they're committed:***

"If a guy is going to visit other places, he's not committed. Let's be real about this. That's not an overnight flip or a miracle happened or a Hail Mary. It's not like Coach Fuente walks in and one home visit and all of a sudden, that's not how it works. I mean occasionally I'm sure it does. Whatever it says on their Twitter pages or not on their Twitter pages, if they're actively looking and still trying to make a decision, then that's not committed. That's how we handle those things. We're never going to be pushy. We're never going to be demanding. We're never going to force ourselves into somebody's home that doesn't want us in there. If people are interested and continue to be interested then we'll be there."

***On Coach Vice and his success in recruiting:***

"He has a unique style that appeals to our kind of people and I believe all of these guys are our kind of people. When he gets in there, whether they're highly rated or not. We have two guys playing tackle for us that nobody wanted that I think are pretty special. Whether they're highly rated or not, when he gets in there with our kind of people then he does pretty well. It doesn't take us very long to figure out what they are and who they are. We don't let other people tell

us who they are. We feel like when there's a match there, whether they're highly recruited or not, we can get in there and duke it out with anybody."

***On Coach Vice's unique style:***

"I don't know if I can describe it. He's a little bit country but he's also the valedictorian of his high school class, but he'll never tell you that. He's also got more (college) degrees on his wall than anyone else in that hallway. He's a highly intelligent guy that has a unique presence that's built on some very fundamental core values and hard work and toughness and pushing through tough times. He tells those kids the truth and the ones that want to hear the truth are genuinely drawn to him. I've been with him a long time and I know how his players feel about him. It's pretty special."

***On why Coach Vice is coaching football if he's so smart:***

"I don't know. You'd have to ask him. I think he's just drawn to the game. He's got a passion. It's always been a part of his life and it's hard to let go of it. That's probably what'd he say."

***On LB Dax Hollifield and other young guys' role in selling the program to recruits:***

"We take our kids that come in here and we put them in front of our players and we leave the room. We take the parents and put them in front of our players and say to have at it. Go for it. We do that with our junior days because our kids sell the program. Dax [Hollifield] is one of many young enthusiastic guys that has done a good job helping us. Nobody in our program knows more about being recruited than Hollifield because he only drew it out for about six years. 24 visits to Virginia Tech later he finally committed. If anybody should know anything about it he should. I just saw him in the hallway a couple of hours ago and I told him the same thing. Of course, he was busy patting himself on the back, but he does deserve credit. Our players do deserve credit. They do a great job telling the kids what it's like and what we're doing and where we're going."

***On the anticipation of having an opening at quarterback in the 2019 class:***

"We felt like there was a chance that that could happen and you can't sell that to high school kids. You can't walk in there and say 'hey I know you got 20 other offers, but we may have something happen,' it just doesn't work. In today's day and age and where we're at, you got four guys in here that all want to go play and a couple of them are close to graduating. If you understand that those are the chances, you try and deal with it as fairly and openly and honestly with those kids as humanly possible and help them make good decisions. It was based on, in short that we figured that there was a chance that something could happen. We really figured that if we were betting we would have said maybe after the spring. It happened sooner, so then it opened up an opportunity for us to investigate a couple of people."

***On positions of need to he's focusing on in class of 2020:***

"Managing the (scholarship) numbers is the most stressful thing that I do. There are a lot of variables in there in terms of where are we at each position. With some of the other rules that have come about between early entry in the NFL and all of that sort of stuff makes it a little more difficult to get a judge on that. We're essentially looking for one of everything. That's

what I've told our staff in terms of the number for 2020 [recruiting class]. I'm sure that'll change 500 times by the time I get through it. It's just so hard to keep it in stone. I think it's got a chance to be balanced is what I'm saying. This year was not very balanced. If you look at the defensives signing class, we got a defensive tackles, a couple DBs and a linebacker. I think next year has got a chance to be more even across the board particularly on the defensive side."

***On getting to a more stabilized place in recruiting certain positions:***

"Yeah I don't like that. In a perfect world it would be spread out like peanut butter on a piece of bread just nice and thin smooth layer. When you get too many guys in one class, you get locked into having to sign four or five wide receivers. Again, those are all locked in there together. You'd like to have it spread out and hopefully we can get to that but we haven't yet."

***On how much more of a jump is he getting on the next class with early signing day:***

"I think that it's all pushed forward. I'm not 100 percent positive that this number is exactly correct, but I think we only did two spring official visits last year. I don't know what it'll be this spring. I'd like to continue to fight to keep that as low as possible because I want to try and push it back the best we can. There's no doubt that it's still moving forward in terms of the calendar. I don't know what the percentages are of how many student athletes signed in December this year compared to last year, but I feel like it's just going to continue to move up. There will be a few guys who sign in February and everybody's going to sign in December."

***On how much has changed from year to year in regards to the recruiting timeline:***

"It's a lot because in January we're not doing official visits. We're doing all juniors. We have really drawn our focus in, because quite honestly this is how we are going to have to win. With very small personal junior days. It's going to cause us more Saturdays and more time to work but keeping our numbers small when we're working with our juniors so that we can spend more time with them opposed to bringing in 120. You still have to service a large number of people at times, but finding a way to continue to have those small groups has been really effective for us. We're still tweaking that part of it. Part of that is unique to Virginia Tech and us and how we're going to win those battles. We're not equipped to handle staff wise and facility wise to handle a humungous group of people. We're just not there."

***On where he is numbers wise and looking at the graduate transfer portal:***

"We may still deal with a few more. It won't be a lot but, there's still a little bit out there."

***On targeting a specific position for remaining spots:***

"Yes, but I'm going to respectfully decline to tell you."