

Virginia Tech Football
Defensive Coordinator Bud Foster Q&A Highlights
Pre-Spring Media Conference
February 28, 2019

Opening Statement

“It’s exciting to be back. This might be year 25 for me as a coordinator. Where did the time go. I’m really looking forward to this spring. We’ve already met as a defensive unit, talked about what we need to do to accomplish – where we want to go and who we want to be. Hopefully, last year was an opportunity for a lot of young guys to play and gain experience. I’m hoping we will take a big step forward. That’s going to be our challenge for the spring, to improve every day and have the discipline to consistently do the right thing play after play, all the time. That’s really our goals for the spring but I’m looking forward to getting started.”

On younger players stepping into leadership roles:

“Part of leadership comes with confidence. When you’ve played a little bit, when you know what you’re doing, when your mind isn’t tying up your feet, you’re just playing and performing and then it’s easy to be a leader. I would like all of our guys on our side of the ball to be leaders by example. There are some guys that have better vocal skills than others. That’s part of it too. We just challenge from within to know what the expectations are, and then challenge each other to live up to those expectations. I think that’s what leaders do. The big thing is that they have to understand when they’re encouraging or challenging their teammate or even us as coaches, there are three fingers coming back at you. You have to set the standard and the example for what you’re asking for. I think that’s a big part of what we’re looking for this spring.”

On LB Rayshard Ashby and the other young linebackers:

“I’m excited about Rook (Ashby). Other than the stretch where he got nicked up in the middle of the year, he really didn’t miss very many tackles. He’s really been a take-charge guy. I see him in a lot of ways like I did Andrew Motuapuaka or Jack Tyler ability-wise. Then I see a guy right now that’s already taken over leadership wise. That position demands that you communicate and do a lot of things verbally and take charge. I see a guy, because of that experience, is taking that next step. I see Dax Hollifield the same way. Dax playing for the first time – if you look at him now, obviously he was a big guy last year, he still has that big body, but he’s leaning up. He knows he needs to play a little bit faster. When your football IQ sharpens, I think you can play a little bit faster. Regardless of what your speed is, you can play fast.

“As I’ve said before, the best teacher is experience. That’s the one thing those guys were able to gain was obviously valuable experience. I’m looking forward to Dylan Rivers being healthy and competing at that spot. I’m excited about Keshawn Artis. All those guys so far in our early phases of our offseason workout have been outstanding and are in what we call our hardhat category, kind of our elite group. I’m really excited about that. That takes in, not just their physical things they’re doing in the weight room, but also their attitude, their leadership

approach. Those types of things are factored in to putting them in that status. That's where I'm really pleased. All of those guys are being very competitive. I like who they are and how important it is to them. It's going to be very competitive in my (linebackers) room and on the field, but I'm excited about that. Competition is healthy and we need that on our football team."

On adjusting to the younger players:

"You're doing that all the time every year. Obviously you have a scheme and a philosophy and expectations, but not every year are they clones. You have to play to guys' strengths and hopefully minimize their liabilities. That's not just individually, but also as a defense. Every unit is a little bit different from year to year. That's part of what we have to determine as coaches. Are we a better blitzing team this year compared to last year. Are we a better coverage team – zone coverage, man coverage. What are our strengths. Those are things that we have to do a good job of evaluating. Also, I think part of it coming back for us hopefully is the experience that we had last year. There was a lot of unknown with some things, or guys being inconsistent in their technique and fundamentals. That made it kind of hard sometimes to pinpoint exactly what are their strengths and weaknesses. I'm hoping, like I said, that we will take a big-time step this spring just because experience is a great teacher. Now, these kids that played last year understand the expectations. We're not even talking about championships, we're talking about getting better. We always broke on nasty d, we're just talking about getting better. That's what we need to do. Get better and do it on a consistent basis."

On Devon Hunter and where he fits best positionally

"I don't know if it's the short side or the wide side. I think obviously we looked at him at nickel particularly when we lost Mook Reynolds. That's a critical position for us, our nickel spot. Having a guy that can cover, having a guy that can play in space or can make tackles in space, having a guy that has a little gamesmanship and some savviness or some instincts, that's critical for us. I don't know if Devon – probably wasn't fair, we kind of threw him to the wolves without having that kind of experience before. He's always been in high school a deep safety. I liked what he was doing at rover for us. We just thought that was an opportunity to get him on the field.

"I think the Rover spot is a good position for him. With Reggie Floyd being a senior, we need to groom a guy to step forward. With Devon redshirting, he still has three years to play. I'm excited. He's worked extremely hard. He's been really focused. He's got a lot of abilities. Now, he has to put that on the field. He has to be able to process and perform and execute. That's what we're expecting from him, and it's extremely important to him. I think that's a good spot for him and for us."

On the depth at defensive back:

"You've got guys who played for the first time. Like I said, I'm hoping that experience will be the best teacher and they will take a step forward. Obviously, we have Jovonn Quillen. We have Waller still. Those are the same guys that were all there. I'm sure Coach Fuente mentioned it to you, we have a couple guys still that are out, that I would love to get back there and get some

experience. Nadir Thompson, a new guy that we were really excited about, but had ACL surgery. Jeremy Webb, obviously. Those are guys that we would like to see what they can do. That's my only question. Those are two potentially dynamic guys that we don't have any information because they've been on the shelf. We do have Brion Murray who I'm really excited about, but we're going to look at him at nickel starting right out. That's kind of my thought there. We're actually going to look at Chamarri Conner. I know he can play rover and can be in that spot. Maybe just looking to see what Devon Hunter and Chamarri – maybe Chamarri is a guy that can have a little bit more ability to play in space at that position. Evaluating, that's what spring practice is all about. We're going to look at Brion Murray there, who I've been really impressed by his movement and his work ethic and everything so far in our winter program.”