

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**Spring Practice No. 1 Media Session**  
**March 20, 2019**

***Opening Statement***

“Man, it felt good to be on the field today, I don’t know how good or bad we were but it was just fun to be around the guys and get to go practice. The kids had great energy, flew around, it was just fun to get back out there.

“I do want to thank everybody who helped us bump practice back. [Rob] Porcher is getting much more work in then he would of a couple weeks ago, Damon [Hazelton] is working his way back in, Elijah [Bowick] I think is going to end up being able to do a lot more this spring because it’s bumped back. Aiden Brown is another guy, he didn’t get to do much today, he did some stuff today, but we are going to end up getting much more productive work out of some of those guys because we moved it back. I know that it is a little bit of a burden on some of our support people but I certainly do appreciate that. We go back in helmets tomorrow and then we will be off on Friday and then back at it Saturday and then pretty much from here on out its Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. I like our schedule I like where we are at.

Obviously it’s March Madness time, congratulations to Buzz [Williams] and the success they’ve had this year, looking forward to watching them in the tournament. Kenny [Brooks] as well, he’s got a good squad in the Women’s NIT.”

***On the first day of spring practice:***

“It’s awfully early but everyone should have a good first day of spring ball. But I just felt like there was an air of excitement, of communication that maybe was better than it’s been before in terms of the kids back and forth. It was just a good energy. We are in the fundamental stages of installing everything now in all three phases of the game but if we can maintain this level of attention to detail and work and energy then I think we will have a productive spring. Now that is easier said than done the key to anything is being able to repeat it and reproduce quality practice to give yourself the chance to have success. That’s difficult to do so, we are anxious to see them tomorrow and see how they do the second day.”

***On Aiden Brown moving to defensive line:***

“Aiden [Brown] is a guy who we had in camp so we have a really good feel for his athleticism in camp. He is one of our more explosive guys when you see him in the offseason run and lift, he’s got good strength numbers. He has always been a guy that had the athleticism to do those sorts of things. And played on the defensive line in high school, he played both ways so it wasn’t completely foreign to him it was also something he was eager to take on. We will see how it goes, he has been dealing with a foot issue for a little while and he hasn’t gotten a lot of consistent work there so getting him back is going to be big for his development.”

***On whether anything will be accelerated with spring practice being moved back:***

“No, I don’t think it will be any different. We don’t have the spring break to kind of divide it up so the draw back to that if you do get a guy with a sprained ankle he’s going to miss more practices then if you had that time, nine days no practice which we do when we have it over spring break so that’s kind of the draw back as far as the schedule what we are going to go try to accomplish, it will be a tad bit different because we will have three practices after the spring game. We will not scrimmage after the spring game. We will practice Tuesday Thursday Friday after the spring game, that last Friday practice will be helmets only so that will be an introduction of summer time. So what I am saying is usually the 15th practice is your final scrimmage, so it’s moved up here so the intensity will be compressed just a tad.”

***On the depth at cornerback:***

“Certainly there are a couple guys that we want to get back healthy. You look at the DB room and what we do with the exception of one position, they are all kind of cover guys for us, they have to have coverage skills. It has been like that for a long time for Bud [Foster], especially in the advent of spread offenses needing less linebacker bodies and more defensive back bodies on the field. My point is they are a little bit interchangeable. Having six guys for two positions that is three deep, more than we are in other places. I am anxious to get those guys that are out back and see what they can do and really kind of evaluate where we are at with all of those guys. There are five positions in the backfield that have got to have some coverage skills. I think that is the fun part about what we do on defense is trying to figure out how those five pieces should fit together the best.”

***On the competition at the center position:***

“We have a transfer [Brock Hoffman] that will be coming in as an interior offensive lineman, we don’t know if he will be eligible or not, and a couple of freshmen coming in this year. We will see how it goes at center. I think Brock having the chance, if he is eligible this year to compete for the center position is certainly on the table I would say. Continuing to find a little bit of quality depth there between Zachariah [Hoyt] who got his first considerable playing time this year but also trying to get him some work at guard and finding somebody else that we feel good about snapping the ball.”

***On who he’ll be looking to for leadership:***

“Well what we’ve got now is a little bit of young experience we’ve got still a relatively young roster, a rather big junior class. I think it’s important for us while we want to make sure we do great job with the guys that are playing their last year, I think it’s important that we facilitate some of that growth amongst the younger players as well that have experience. We’ve got quite a few guys that played a lot as either redshirt freshman or true freshman that need to feel comfortable to fall into those roles. But leadership is important across the board for us continuing to try and bring that along, not having the guys worry about if they are second-year sophomores or fifth-year seniors I think is important for our success because there is not that number of seniors out there.”

***On whether it’s time for some defensive ends to step up:***

“It is time for Nate Proctor it’s time for [Tyjuan] Garbutt and Zion Debose to take a step forward, absolutely. And they have done that in the off-season. Those three guys having a good spring and feeling more comfortable with what we are asking them to do. I said this before but the defensive end position not just for us but for everyone across the country has just changed so much in the last 10 or 15 years. It used to be the easiest thing in the world, you use to line up in a sprinter’s stance and rush off the edge. There are so many new things and techniques those guys have to feel comfortable with, not just taking on blocks but you play read plays and those sorts of things. It takes some time to get comfortable with what they are asked to do because they are asked to do more than they use to be. It certainly is time and they have done a good job this winter and have been encouraging and now it is time for them to go put it on the field.”

***On players looking good in the off-season and how that translates to the field:***

“Every year across the country you fall in love with a guy in shorts and t-shirts in the off-season because he is doing everything right and then he goes and he really struggles playing. Or the other way around, he struggles with the offseason program and some of the rigors of that sort of stuff then he puts a helmet on and he’s a productive player immediately. Those things are kind of interesting, you have to take it with a grain of salt when you are thinking about those guys and evaluating those guys trying to put them in position. There is so much time as a coach watching your players when you’re not actually playing football, think about that. The offseason is so long. You are watching them lift weights, you’re watching them run around cones, you’re watching them do offseason program, watching them run in the summer and lift and all sorts of stuff. You are developing this opinion of them but it doesn’t always translate into being a great player, making sure you take that in to consideration is important.”

***On whether anyone has dramatically transformed their body during winter workouts:***

“A lot of them have continued to work hard. Dax [Hollifield] has made a conscious effort to slim down a little bit. I think you will see that the biggest transformation comes at the end of the summer. In terms of guys really taking that next step forward. Jalen Holston has had a great winter for us. If you remember back to last year, he had a nagging knee injury and he missed a good portion of the offseason and he’s a had a great off-season thus far. I think he’s understanding of how important that is for him and all of our players. There seems to be some realization of how important that is.

“James Mitchell is another guy that continues to look better in terms of playing tight end. His body continues to change and get stronger and get a little bit more broad across the top. Nasir Peoples is a guy, that as a freshman had a nagging hamstring that never really allowed him to get full speed. He’s out there running around and is much more confident with what is going on. There are a bunch of guys that have worked really, really hard. Thinking of guys off the top of my head, Nate Proctor is a guy that’s been a developmental guy from a physical standpoint. He was a highly recruited guy and all of that type of stuff, but the bottom line is, he had a long way to go from a physical standpoint and he is making those strides. He looks much better.”

***On his personal goals for the team in the spring:***

“For us in the spring, which is what we are concentrating on right now, I haven’t really touched on anything past what we’re working on right now. For us as a team as we go through spring, we’re going to emphasize the football. That may seem very simple, but it is the number one statistic in terms of wins and losses. The offense has to take care of it and the defense has to get it back. We started our first meeting talking about that. Showing them our statistics from our games. I don’t have them in front of me, but it’s pretty staggering in the games we win versus the games we lose in terms of how many turnovers we created, how many we didn’t create or how well we did or did not take care of the football.

“The second thing that we’ve got to be able to have is be able to do it every single day. There’s got to be a level grit and discipline to do things. To give that effort and understanding how important that is to do it through 15 practices. The third thing we’ve talked about the most is who are we? What do we really, really stand for? Us going back and as a group and talking about that openly. What do we want to look like, how do we want to interact? Let’s define these things and talk about it and try to live and act that way on a daily basis.”

***On DeJuan Ellis transitioning to the wide receiver position after playing QB in high school:***

“DeJuan [Ellis] is one practice into his first spring and he’s got to learn to play full speed, that’s the first thing for Ellis. He had a good job of it today, but it has to be a conscious effort for him. He played quarterback and there’s just a level of, he can run and he’s exceptionally fast, but there’s a level of playing at that speed that he has to make himself go do. That’s easier said than done. You think that you just walk out there and tell a kid to go hard and he’s going to go do it, but there’s a lot of things going on through his mind in terms of technique and what he’s trying to do. Making that concerted effort for him to run off the ball and understand the effort and discipline it’s going to take to play is the first thing that we have to get through with Ellis.”

***On whether there will be competition at kicker between Brian Johnson and Jordan Stout:***

“We’ll see how it goes. If we were going to play right now I know exactly what we would do, but I hesitate at any position to close the door on competition, that’s un-American. I don’t want to say that this is exactly what’s going to happen no matter what because if that’s not best for what we’re going to do then we’re not going to do that. I don’t want to be called a liar. Right now, Brian [Johnson] would go out there and we feel good about him. I also love Jordan [Stout] has brought to our football team as well. He was a weapon for us in the kickoff game. He provides us depth at punter. He is a talented person that’s continuing to mature and develop. I’m excited about all of those guys. How it’s all going to fit I’m not 100 percent sure right now. I feel good about the direction it’s headed and I know what we would do if we were pressed right at this moment.”

***On what he would like to see from WR Phil Patterson:***

“He’s got to continue to get consistent. I thought he’s made strides and I think it’s important to him. This is a great opportunity for him, I think he understands that. To kind of take that next step in his career in his development that he wants to do. He’s got size and natural talent, he’s just got to put it all together on a consistent basis.”

***On how reps are being distributed among the three quarterbacks:***

“We just divide them up evenly. I’ve been happy with all three. They all have things that they have to continue to work on. I still stand by that this is the right way to do it. I think Ryan [Willis] deserves to compete for the job and I think those other guys do to. It doesn’t mean that it will stay like that for the entire spring. I don’t think it will stay like that for the entire spring, I just don’t know. As we get through a handful of practices, if one guy deserves some more time with the first team then we will move it that way and if that starts to fall off we’ll move it back. It’s something that we talk about consistently. [Offensive Coordinator] Brad Cornelsen keeps me up to date about how he feels and what’s going and I’m not hesitant to share my feelings with him. I think we’re doing the right things about how we’re going about it.”