

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Media Conference
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Opening Statement

“Four days in and another good day today. The kids seem to be handling the change in schedule with the morning practices pretty well. We’ve got Pro Day coming up this weekend on Friday with some of our current NFL guys coming back, which we’re looking forward for that. We’ll practice Thursday and then Saturday will be our first scrimmage. Continuing to do to good work, we still have a lot of work to do, but I enjoy being around these guys.”

On how he evaluates the first few practices of the spring:

“First of all, there’s just a lot of teaching going on. We try to break it up into individual, group and then team work. Whether we’re doing half-line drills, individual drills or just the front seven working against each other we’re just trying to break up the teaching and teach those techniques. I don’t get as concerned with scheme, in terms of who gets a better call, whether that’s the offense or the defense, but more into teaching and trying to get it to where there are 22 guys doing what we’re asking them to do on a consistent basis. As far as practice, are we getting development with our young people, are we attacking the day in terms of our enthusiasm and communication. Think those are the kinds of things we look for moving forward.”

On what does he look for in a scrimmage compared to a practice:

“It’s their first time to really tackle. We do a lot of drills centered around tackling, but there’s no substitute for live work. You put the kids on the field and take the coaches off the field and it’s a whole new world. It’s one thing when they’re standing behind you and it’s another thing when you’re out there by yourself. In the first scrimmage, we don’t get caught up scheme as much as who can go out there on their own, go play and do what we’re asking them to do on a consistent basis.”

On what held back RB Jalen Holston last year:

“I think the first thing was that he missed a good portion of the off-season and I think that hurt him. He was a true freshman that didn’t redshirt and that missed a large portion of the physical development that he needed after the season last year because he was coming off of an injury. That hurt him a little bit. This has been the off-season that he’s needed to have and I don’t just mean physically, I mean within the team. He’s much more confident, much more vocal in a positive way out there on the field. He feels better, his body feels better, he’s stronger, in better shape and he’s been rearing to go. I’ve been really pleased with him. We singled him out before practice that he made it into the top 10, as of right now, in our Hard Hat competition, which is a pretty elite group (based on performance in the strength and conditioning program). There’s still a long way to go, but he’s certainly deserves to be recognized for the work he’s putting in.”

On getting DB Divine Deablo healthy:

“I think it was two years ago, he was really making progress. He had an interception and then he broke his foot. That was when he was creeping into being a every down player for. Last year, we were just trying to get him through a week of practice and on to the field. The thing about Divine is that he has such a great outlook and such a great work ethic that we pulled him out of most of our off-season running. We even sent him across campus to have him tested for any imbalances because I felt that since he dealt with so many lower body issues that he was dealing more issues because he was compensating for the other things. We just removed him from that and tried to get him balanced out strength wise as much as we could. Hopefully, that continues throughout the spring. Hopefully, he continues to stay healthy and have a good spring, have a good summer and ultimately be the player we all know he’s capable of. He’s highly intelligent, tough and he’s very popular with our kids in terms of just being well liked and being very mature. We’ve all got our fingers crossed that it continues to go well. No one deserves it more than Divine in terms of deserving opportunities to have success since he’s been through so much and he’s such a great person.”

On DL Jarrod Hewitt stepping up into a leadership role on the defensive line:

“I think he’s done a great job. Jarrod [Hewitt] is probably more comfortable being out there in front of the group then Ricky [Walker] ever was. Hewitt is a more vocal person. It hasn’t been like Hewitt has had to act out of character. He’s been enabled and has taken that mantle, has run with and has done a really good job with it.”

On what has he seen from Hewitt football-wise:

“He’s one of those guys that has to maximize his talent threw work. Jarrod and I had a meeting about two and a half years ago and I said if you want to be a good player and a productive player here at Virginia Tech, these are the things that you’re going to have to do. He’s just taken it and run with it. He’s reduced his body fat and increased his strength. He knew he wasn’t a big enough to be just a big guy, he had to be athletic and he’s really worked hard to do that. He has a quick first step and he’s a great example of what hard work can do for you in terms of trying to become a good player.”

On what has he seen from OL Silas Dzansi:

“He’s worked extremely hard. He is a very mature young player. Not just physically mature, but emotionally mature. He really wants to please and wants to do well and is rapidly becoming one of the many leaders, not just in his [position] room, but on the team. I just think it’s been a maturation process for him. He’s not only gone from playing different levels of football, but his body has changed a lot since he was in high school. He weighed 242 pounds on his visit here and there’s a lot that comes with moving around with that weight and learning to play at this level. He’s taken it all in stride and has not gotten discouraged, has just continued to work hard and do what we’ve asked him to do. If he continues to do that, I think he has a chance to have a really bright future.”

On where QB Quincy Patterson is in the development process as a passer:

“It’s an ongoing process, as it is with all of those quarterbacks. He continues to work, get better and have an understanding of what’s going on, on the other side of the ball as much as what his players are supposed to be doing. He’s going to have to continue to get repetitions. He’s going to have to continue doing that and I think it’s in there. At what rate that happens I do not know, but I do know that I marked improvement from him on a consistent basis, as I have with Hendon [Hooker] over the past couple of years and Ryan [Willis] to some extent. That rate that which that comes, we don’t get to determine, but I do know it’s in there.”

On whether the quarterbacks be splitting reps at the first scrimmage evenly:

“We haven’t had that discussion. Standing here right now on Tuesday, I don’t see why it would be any different. Obviously, leading into that scrimmage, we’ll have that discussion, but right now that is exactly how it would be.”

On TE James Mitchell’s first spring:

“He looks pretty good out there. It’s not just James [Mitchell], it’s also Drake Deiuiliis. Those guys have similar body types. Ultimately, the thing about that room is when you have more than one good one, you can put them on the field at the same time. It’s something we have talked about and we have yet to have all of our guys there together, and we won’t have that until the fall. Those guys are competing against wide receivers and running backs for playing time. I’m pretty excited about those three guys and their development as well as bring in Nick Gallo to help. That room is healthy and healthy with talent, great attitude and work ethic. I’m excited to watch those guys continue to get better.”