

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente
Post Spring Football Media Conference
April 24, 2019

Opening Statement

“First of all, thanks again to everybody who came to the Spring Game. It was a fun day, a great celebration and there was a lot going on. We got plenty of good work and many more reps than we traditionally get which I really liked. I actually ended up liking how all that stuff worked out, we got good work on some specific things after the spring game. We made tons of progress, but we have a long way to go.

“Obviously, touching on the Brock Hoffman situation, I spoke with Brock and his mother last night. They are understandably upset their request was denied. They still have, we still have an appeal left. Our administration is going to do everything we can to support him in that appeal. We understand there is a process that goes with this, we respect that process, we are trying to do everything we can to support Brock and his family. Through this time it is important to know this is not a portal question, this has nothing to do with the process of how you enter your name in the portal and that sort of thing. This is an eligibility question and a family matter.

“I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you I was disappointed, for a lot of reasons. The first one that comes to mind is the way Brock and his family tried to handle this was really professional and above board. This wasn’t an issue of Brock being upset about playing time, or using a coaching change, or moving from center to guard, or any other issue other than a very private personal family matter. From the very beginning it was never about lawyering up or any of that sort of stuff, it was about him trying to get closer to his family as they dealt with some very serious issues.

“When you see a kid who tries to go about it as you perceive the right way for very real reasons and it doesn’t work out, it’s very disappointing. He tried to do this the right way, hopefully what we can hold on to is that he has an appeal and we can hope that through the appeal process that what many people view as a wrong can be righted and we can move forward. We are here to support Brock and his family, I think they are great people and I have really appreciated how they have been through this entire thing. Hopefully we will have better news as we move forward.”

On whether Coastal Carolina been supportive of Hoffman through the process:

“Here’s what I’ll tell you, I’m not involved with the appeal. That goes through our administration and goes through compliance. To my knowledge, everybody has been supportive of Brock [Hoffman]. It would be in poor taste for me to go through everything that is involved in this because that is not how this works. Hoffman wants to leave (Coastal Carolina) and tells our compliance office why and provides us that and we submit it. I can’t say with great certainty all the details of what is going on.”

On whether there is anything he can do to help and who he can call to voice his disappointment:

“It goes through compliance, that’s the way it goes. My disappointment is pretty far down the importance list. It’s about Brock Hoffman and his family, not about me and how I feel, that’s really not very important. We tried and will continue to go through the proper channels to support him.”

On his expectations and goals from spring practice:

“We had three simple things we wanted to emphasize through practice as a team. One was the football, both taking care of the ball and taking the ball away. The second one was getting as many guys through to push through to make it through 15 practices. And the third one was doing extra. I thought our guys really embraced all three of those things and took a tremendous amount of pride in being out there every single day. I forget the actual number but we were in well over a thousand in examples of guys doing extra through their extra time to help themselves be better players and help this program. We took good strides we’ve still got work to do as we turn to finishing up the semester with final exams and testing week. Then the kids get a little time off and they come back for the summer time and it’s when you can really turn your team over to the strength staff and the leaders on the team.”

On what he wants the team to accomplish between spring practice and fall camp:

There is a physical part of it in terms of the conditioning level. There are guys that aren’t here right now that are going to play roles, we’ve got to welcome them in and get them up to speed. We’ve got individual development that we need to get done at every position in terms of body weight and body composition. There is an opportunity for them during our throwing drills they run to take ownership and really take some strides forward. I said this in 2016, the strides that team made between the last days of spring ball and the first days of fall camp were remarkable in terms of not just their work in the weight room but in terms of their understanding of what is going on both sides of the ball and special teams. That is because they did a great job throughout the summertime twice a week with their skills and drills work. We’ve got a huge challenge. Our kids have a huge challenge to live up to that model to try and make the same strides we made that year.:

On what he’s still looking to see from the quarterbacks before naming a starter:

“We aren’t even sure how many eligible guys we have in that room. With the guys that we have, I’ll have my spring meetings with them starting this afternoon and tomorrow. They’ve already met with their position coaches to continue to talk about what we need to see. I think those two young guys need to take another step forward in understanding, reliability and consistency. Along the same lines for Ryan [Willis], he needs to take another step forward. This is his last opportunity. He is approaching graduation. His class load should be a little bit easier and he should really be able to dive in and see how much progress he can make.”

On whether spring gave him any more clarity at the running back position:

“I was really pleased. Jalen [Holston] finally has had a full off-season. He was hampered last year and I thought it hurt him and I think he realized that, which is a credit to him that he realized how important the off-season is to his development. Hopefully, we’ll get [Terius] Wheatley back. He played a role when he was healthy for us last year and I hope we can do the same with that, he just has to be healthy. We have Caleb [Steward] coming in there and really pushing to try and earn his way into the group of Deshaun [McCleese] and Holston. We’ll see how it all shakes out, but I was really pleased with McCleese even though he can out towards the end of spring. He did practice, I don’t know what the numbers where, a good portion of spring and looked good, as well.”

On what do players that missed spring football with injuries do so that they don’t take a step backwards in the fall:

“I think the first thing is that they were all hungry to get out there. You look at Christian Darrisaw, Dalton Keene, Khalil Ladler and Tyree Rodgers, they did as much as they were allowed to do. They certainly will have some rust. We have those 15 practices because they are important. The good news is that those guys have played quite a bit. The focus is them getting back healthy and understanding that gives them a chance to be better than they were last year.”

On how much was DB Jeremy Webb able to do this spring:

“We didn’t do hardly anything with him in terms of we’re concerned. He may be on the zero-gravity treadmill now or not. I don’t exactly know where he’s at. They [training staff] gives us updates on those guys every week.”

On his opinion on the new NCAA rule changes that were recently announced:

“On the overtime rule, I mean, it happens once every how many years. Personally, I don’t see the need for us to legislate that anymore, but somebody did. The targeting rule, I like the replay part of it. However it’s worded, if there’s any element of it that’s not seen then it’s overturned essentially is my understanding of it. I think that’s good. They never provide us statistics, but I don’t know how many repeat offenders there are. We talk about needing more penalties of repeat offenders of the targeting rule, but I don’t see that as an issue where there are guys that have multiple targeting issues throughout the entire season. I didn’t see that as a huge issue.

“The biggest rule change is the blocking. You can’t use forcible contact on a blindside block, so I do not know, as we stand here right now, what a legal blindside block is. I’m hopeful that at our ACC meetings we’ll get some video of what that looks like because I don’t know. The other one was the two-man wedge on kickoff return which my personal opinion is, the backline two-man wedge is dangerous and I’m glad we have gotten rid of that. It is a dangerous play. The frontline double team or two-man wedge is not nearly as dangerous, but whatever makes it best to officiate it I am for.”

On whether he saw anything from WR Hezekiah Grimsley this spring that makes him believe that he will step up into a bigger role:

“Yeah sure, I have been pleased with him. He’s been a guy that is a tireless worker and continues to improve. There are some nuances of playing on the outside that he needs to continue work on and he knows that. He knows that he has to continue to get better. He can always continue to be a smarter player, but he is a smart player now. He can just continue to improve that way. We have moved him around a little bit. We talked about how his freshman year was unfair because of the numbers we had (at the WR position). We left him in the slot and he’s been productive. Now he’s to the point that he can start to move around a little bit to create some depth and now there are some other guys that can move around. Tre [Turner] is another guy that can play inside or outside.”

On what has he seen from OL Lecitus Smith:

“He continues to get better. He has talent, is a good athlete and is a big, strong young man that is still learning the nuances of the position and trusting it so that he can really cut loose. He cares, he wants to be right and that sometimes slows him down because he wants to be perfect and do things the right way. Through repetition and time, I’m optimistic that his natural ability, explosiveness and athleticism combined with confidence in knowing exactly what to do. There’s a lot that goes into playing in the offensive line and if you don’t believe me ask any line coach. They’ll tell you how hard it is. Combining that technique with the ability to cut it loose is what he’s getting towards.”