

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Media Availability
August 15, 2019

Opening statement:

“Thanks to everyone that came out to Fan Day on Sunday. It was a good and fun to see our kids interact with the fans and it was great to get the chance to meet many of them. We’re back to practice today after our second scrimmage and a recovery day. We’ll go through three more days and have another scrimmage, which will be our final one.

“There still a lot left to work on both sides of the ball and in the kicking game. We’ll start to do some crossover work in the kicking game. For us, there is still a tremendous amount of ground to cover before we’re game ready, but I’m excited about the way things are progressing.”

On if he is ready to name a starting quarterback:

“Ryan [Willis] and Hendon [Hooker] are the two guys taking the most reps with the first team. We continue to evaluate that and see how it goes, but I’ll tell you this, I have been really impressed by Hendon and the work that he’s out in this summer. He continues to improve and Ryan has had a good camp, as well. We’ll continue to look at it, get through the last scrimmage and see where we’re at.”

On how proud he is about the way the team has come together:

“I really enjoy watching them interact. We have vested relationships with these guys and are enjoying coaching them. They’ve been through adversity and that can do one of two things. When you go through hard times it either separates you or brings you closer together and I think that definitely brought those kids together. It happened not to us, but for us and it’s been fun to watch how they’ve responded through the off-season into fall camp.”

On has he seen a change in Coach Foster’s approach since he announced his retirement:

“I have not seen one lota of difference. I haven’t seen one reference. We’re in a pretty sheltered part of our lives right now. You get up early and go work on football, but I haven’t heard or seen a joke or anything different. I don’t know if he feels better about it, but I haven’t seen anything.

“Bud [Foster] wants it to be about the football team and we’re trying to respect those wishes, but I think there is a general focus on what we’re trying to accomplish right now. I’ll be interested in what Bud says because I haven’t brought it up.”

On how he feels the team’s run defense will be this year:

“First of all, the defense in general, talk about heading into a season last year where at every position you know you’re going to play people with little or no experience. It doesn’t mean you don’t have Ricky Walker, you do, but at defensive line, linebacker, safeties and corners, we

knew we were going to play people with little to no experience. Heading into this year, before we even began to practice, there is really only one spot that we know that we will have to play young or inexperienced people at defensive tackle.

“That makes you feel better right of the top. I do think there is a feeling of comfort. We have to stay healthy and continue to develop the second and third teams, but we have a comfort with the scheme. We’re no longer doing things for the first time. There were a bunch of guys doing this for the first time last year. You can see some overall understanding. It’s letting them play faster, with more savvy and with in-depth knowledge as opposed to just being right.”

On who has he been working at kick returner:

“We have worked Caleb [Steward] Terius [Wheatley], Deshawn [McCleese], Nadir Thompson, Jaden Payoute and Tayvion [Robinson]. We’ve repetitioned several guys at that spot and we have some guys that are productive. Wheatley was really prodctive when he was healthy last year at kickoff return. Caleb also had some opportunities for some big plays. I don’t know how it’s all going to shake out until someone separates themselves in a game. Keshawn [King] has also been back there a little bit. We will have a kicking scrimmage in a few days and hopefully get a couple specific reps for a couple of guys and maybe have that paired down a little bit more.”

On how has he adjusted to last year’s new redshirt rule:

“I do think it’s a good rule. You do have to put some thought into what you’re doing. You can’t put it on auto pilot as the season goes along. You have to continue to have those conversations, particularly with special teams. It helped us last year with as thin as we were. To be able to play guys like Armani Chatman and have them still get to redshirt was huge for us and Chatman. The same thing happened with Nadir [Thompson] even though he got hurt he was playing. It’s a good rule and we’ll continue to evaluate how we use. It seems to me in general terms, assuming you don’t have a disaster where you lose several guys at one position, but just a general maintenance of your team. It’s mostly surrounded by the quarterback position and all of those guys that cover kicks on special teams. The defensive backs, linebackers and some of your wide receivers which I think will be good in the long run for those guys.”

On any young players that he and the other coaches feel like they need to get on the field this year:

“I’m always hesitant because I don’t want to leave anyone out, but I think Bud [Foster] is going to talk about Alan Tisdale a little bit. He’s not a true freshman, but I have been really impressed with him. He’s really come on strong doing a really, really good job for us. I’m excited about what he can be. Certainly, those three freshmen defensive tackles have shown flashes of what we hope and need them to be. I’m not sure how that’s all going to shake out with all three of them, but they have all shown to be capable. They cause you to be excited about that in the same way that Doug [Nester] and Bryan [Hudson] are advanced for their age. It’s not very often that you talk about that on the offensive or defensive line, but those five guys are pretty far along.

“I don’t know how it will all work out, but in some shape or form I expect to seeing some of them. Tayvion [Robinson] certainly and Nick Gallo is another one that seems to pick things up incredibly easy. He’s really smart. He has been slowed a little in camp buy he’s making his back and I anticipate that development to continue. I’m sure we’ve talked about Keshwan [King] a little bit. J.R. [Walker] is a guy that continues to do good things and has a chance to help this football team.”