

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Special Teams/TEs Coach James Shibest Q&A Highlights**  
**Media Availability**  
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***On the depth at the tight end position:***

“We’ve really progressed over the last few years – the bodies that we were looking for. When we first started it out, it was Steven Peoples and Sam Rogers. They were kind of like tailback guys. Through recruiting we’ve kind of built that position up and we’ve always liked to use two in the game as we can. This gives us some options to be able to do that. Maybe create some matchup troubles just through size and stuff. I’ve been happy with Nick just because he’s – of course if you knew his brother, just the intelligence of football, a little savvy in all that helps. James having just a little experience last year, of course Dalton’s [Keene] been great. With Drake [Deiuliis] there too, that really helps us with a good nucleus of bodies to do some things.”

***On the punt and kickoff return options:***

“Obviously, you know we struggled at punt return-wise. Number one we got to field the ball and ball security is going to be the number one issue. Went through about three or four guys and never felt totally great last year. We feel better at this time. We got Hezekiah Grimsley right now there and Tayvion Robinson have been the two top guys right now. Of course, Tay’s a freshman. It always concerns you a little bit there, but he does have natural ball skills and is pretty confident, you know because you’re going to have to make some good decisions back there too. So, they are the two lead guys.

“Kickoff returner – of course you have [Terius] Wheatley and if we can keep him healthy and all that. He showed some great things I thought last year when he was back there. Keyshawn King is a guy that has looked good also. You like to have tailbacks back there if you could. [Caleb] Farley and [Deshawn] McCleave have a little experience doing that too, so I think we’re some guys to choose from. Now it’s going to be the guy that makes some plays and makes great decisions on gamedays that hopefully will be getting most of the reps.”

***On WR Tayvion Robinson and coaching him on the art of punt returns:***

“We did a live kicking scrimmage a week ago where it’s all live tackling and everything. He looked comfortable back there doing that. I don’t know if you totally can completely do everything. You kind of hold your breath sometimes. But that’s our job as coaches, see who does things naturally and confidently. Then you got to throw them out there and they got to go play if they’re young guys. Obviously, you like the maturity of Hezzy [Hezekiah Grimsley] back there and everything, too. He was back there some last year. I don’t know what we’re going to do exactly but it will be one of those two guys more than likely back there.”

***On how starting off with an ACC opponent changes the game plan in regards to playing guys on the return and coverage units:***

“It could. Sometimes you don’t have choices on that. We played Florida State last year (in the opener). They put the schedule out there and you got to go play it and deal with it. Obviously, if there are situations where there’s a backup – it doesn’t have to be game one, it could be game two or three – that you can sprinkle guys in there just to see how they handle the situation in gameday environment. You would like to be able to do that, sometimes you can’t though.”

***On TE James Mitchell:***

“He’s athletic, number one. He’s like a big wideout out there. What makes this thing unique for him is he’ll block. He can get in there and mix it up a little bit in the run game. That’s when things become more valuable, when you can move him outside and still do all the things inside to be able to run the ball too. I think at that position you got to be smart now. We move those guys everywhere. From knowing all the receiver stuff to knowing all the pass protections to knowing all the run game stuff, they’re almost like the quarterback. All those guys are very smart and that’s what’s helped us do more things with those guys.”

***On the incoming freshmen and their potential roles on special teams:***

“I think they’re always involved with the special teams. Now I do feel better with the guys who have covered some kicks, who are a little bit older and that’s offense and defense, too. I think the young guys especially with the four games, you can play four and still get the redshirt, we kind of strategies involved when we use those guys to help you with depth and keep guys fresher on defense and offense. We keep training those guys all throughout the year. Sometimes we’ll play a true freshman in the first four and then decide to redshirt or play him later and still be able to redshirt him later if it is scenario like that. It’s all hands-on board on all the units. Been able to stay fresh and use good people at starters, as backups. Core special team guys that’s all they do basically, and we want good balance in all that. It’s everybody on board.”

***On TE Nick Gallo and if he’ll play as a true freshman:***

“I hate to say anything but we’re telling him he better be ready to play so there’s a good chance you’ll see him and see him possibly game one, too. If we’re playing two tight ends more – I don’t know if we’re going to do that all the time – we’re definitely going to need the bodies in there. As far as intelligence, he’ll definitely be able to do that and physically too. He came in in good shape and strong and all those things you need also.”

***On TE Dalton Keene sitting out during the spring:***

“I think we all, even as older players, need to continue to improve fundamentally. He has got so much better in space, running routes. You can just see the progression with him. He’s always been a tough physical blocker and he’s improved there too just getting his hands inside. The big thing we ask out of Dalton is his leadership. Being able to get in there, he’s an older guy now. The players look up to him and respect him because he’s a worker. Just being a little bit more vocal there, he can really help us as a team and an offense. We count on him for a lot. Him missing the spring, there’s some guys we back off a little bit in camp. We know what they can do, we know they’re tough, we know they’re physical, so we got to get them to gameday, and we try to limit some of the things that we do with him during camp.”

***On consistency in kickoff coverage unit and rotating players in and out:***

“When you got good kickers and they can get some touchbacks for you, you kind of see how naturally they do things if a lot of them are touchbacks. I do think there’s some chemistry involved there but, and a lot of people don’t notice, we rotate guys quite a bit. We’re watching to see if Reggie Floyd’s out there and he’s on a 10-play drive, we’ll sub him on whatever is – kickoff, kickoff return, punt or whatever the scenario is. We do. The key is having as much depth on special teams just like anywhere else is important now.”

***On K Brian Johnson:***

“Brian’s talented. He went into a situation where he made his first six or seven kicks and then missed about four or five in a row. When you look at it, a lot of them are 40-plus but to be a great kicker you got to make them and to help your team as much as you can, you got to make the majority of them. We believe in Brian and he’s done a great job with the kickoff stuff too this fall camp. We’re putting a lot on him. He’s a junior now, been here, we’re expecting big things and more consistency out of him.”