

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Boston College Week Press Conference
Aug. 26, 2019

Opening

“It’s game week. Obviously, we open up with a conference game at Boston College. Coach Addazio’s done a great job with that program. You know what you’re going to get, a tough, physical, well-coached football team. They’re going to present challenges in all three phases of the game. We have to be thoroughly prepared. First thing you see is obviously their tailback is a fine player, probably as good as there is in the country at that position. He’s got everything. He’s got speed, size, athleticism and plenty of components around him with the quarterback and tight ends and skill players. Certainly, going to be a challenge for us on the defensive side of the ball. Kicking game, they’ve been very, very good. Very sound and physical and tough. Defensively, you know what you’re going to get too from just a hard-nosed defensive front. I thought they were as good a defense as we played last year. They’ve got a few new guys in there but I’m sure it’ll be the same type of talent. We’ll have to have a great week as we continue to prepare to go on the road up there.”

On whether OL Brock Hoffman is still getting reps in practice:

“He’ll still get reps until we know if he’s eligible to play. I would imagine, barring any unforeseen circumstances that he’ll play (if he’s granted eligibility).”

On whether stopping the run game is a point of emphasis this week:

“Absolutely, that’s a point of emphasis every single week here. Actually doing it is the challenge. They can get the quarterback involved in the run game as well, which poses a whole other set of issues. We certainly know that that’s one of the keys to the game, trying to find a way to slow down the rushing attack.”

On Chamarrí Conner being listed over Khalil Ladler on the depth chart at nickel:

“Well Khalil is incredibly valuable, first of all. He can play all three safety positions, starter on special teams. Chamarrí’s been working at that spot since the spring and continued to improve every single day. We have total confidence in being able to put Khalil in there at any time as well.”

On showing other teams’ mistakes from other games around college football, specifically Florida-Miami:

“I would say it’s been a point of emphasis. Situational football, intelligent football we try to highlight those throughout the year, throughout fall camp, throughout the spring to continue to generate discussion about situational football and what is smart football. It’s easy to execute those things when it’s 70 degrees and you’re sitting and resting in a chair, but when you’re out there in an emotionally charged, physical game sometimes those things don’t go well. Getting our kids to the point where they can execute what we’re asking them to do in those

environments is one of the challenges of coaching. We try to educate them throughout the year and throughout fall camp. When the season begins, that's a great opportunity to capture those video clips and show them to them. Absolutely we'll do that. Every Friday we have a lengthy meeting about things that happened in the previous week. I charge everybody on our staff if they see things in games they're watching to send me a text and we just go about compiling those for the entire week. I watched the game and there was plenty of material in that game, so we're certainly use that. When they start to see what gives them an opportunity to win or what are winning attributes, it hasn't been – knock on wood – it hasn't been an issue for us here. I think when they start to understand that it does help everybody playing intelligent football, the light kind of goes on and they have a chance to execute on a consistent basis.”

On whether there's been something that's surprised him in the past after watching film of other teams:

“The one that comes to my mind I was really shocked. When we started at Memphis, it was learning how to win so it was a constant battle. Then by my third year we pretty much had a better understanding of all those things. I was a little shocked at the Tennessee game my first year here (Battle of Bristol in 2016). Shocked in a bad way because I thought we were a very mature football team. We jumped out to a big lead – well not a big lead, but we jumped out to a lead and we sort of lost our composure out there. That was the biggest thing we talked about after that game, a lack of intelligent decisions. So anyway, that was a little surprising because I kind of felt like that group was a lot further along. In that game we weren't, but by the end of the year I felt like we were where we needed to be.”

On T.J. Jackson starting at right guard:

“He's been a guy that slowly moved into playing time. He's played on special teams, a starter on two special teams. He's got some athletic ability. He's continued to work hard; this has become important to him. We have several other scenarios where guys could move around and all that sort of stuff. I'm glad we've got him, and this is his time, I guess is the biggest point. He's had that growth and maturation time. To say he was raw would be an understatement. He was a big, athletic kid that has continued to stay after it and given himself an opportunity.”

On former Tech RB Steven Peoples coaching at his alma mater – Galax High School:

“I'm awfully happy for Steven. One of my favorite people that we've ever had here or anywhere along the line. Just truly a guy that's worked for everything he's gotten, scholarships and graduating from college. I'm happy for him. I think he'll do a fine job and set a fine example. I know he's not afraid to roll his sleeves up and go to work. I do think he's passionate about the game. Those young kids will probably be throwing to him because he's got a presence about the game. Happy to have another ex-player in the profession.”

On who will see more time at the left cornerback position

“Jermaine [Waller] or Jovonn [Quillen] will start at one corner and Caleb will start at the other. All the guys get reps. The differentiation between right and left corner is not that big of a deal.”

On Tech's running back group and the importance of having a workhorse running back:

"I would like to have one guy that carries the ball 35 times and if we don't then we won't. You have what you have, and you make the best of it. I've been really pleased with DeShawn [McCleave] and Jalen [Holston], really, really pleased with those guys. We'll see how it goes and they both earned opportunities to play and they're both going to play."

On JUCO transfer DT DaShawn Crawford starting at defensive tackle:

"It's been huge. That's the one spot we knew we were going to have to play new or inexperienced people coming into the season. Getting DaShawn here and getting him working out in our off-season program, getting him acclimated to division one football has been big. So, having an extra spring with him has been very beneficial. He has benefitted from that."

On the difference of experience in this year's team compared to last year:

"I would say they're more confident. They're correct more times on the field. I think at practice they're doing it correctly more often. They got more experience at least and seem to be on the same page. We have to stay healthy in some spots. There are some places where we can get inexperienced really quickly."

On the process of determining the starter at the left cornerback spot:

"Why do you guys get so hung up on who starts. That drives me nuts, I'm serious. They're both going to play. Who cares who takes the first snap. They're both going to play. I don't know how many snaps one's going to play over the other. I don't know how that's going to work out. Who trots out there as the starter to me is almost irrelevant. I think they just want to play; I really do. I'm not criticizing you guys, but I think you make a much bigger deal out of it than it actually is. They're both going to play. They've both earned the opportunity to go play. I don't know that anything is going to happen this week to decide who's going to play more or less. They're both going to go play. They both deserve to play. They're not sitting there chewing their fingernails wondering who's going to trot out there first. They both want to play and they're both going to play. That's the way it is."

On starting off the season with a big game or less formidable opponent:

"I feel comfortable either way. If you really think about it, our first year here we opened with Liberty and not that Liberty's not a big game, but then had the biggest game in college football history the second week. We probably underperformed in that game. I think everybody would agree. Then you look at the other years, you play a big game right out of the box and maybe overperformed. I don't know. Whatever it is what we try to make the best out of. I do like our philosophy and how we prepare for the first game. I think our guys are fresh and have a decent idea of knowing what to do by the time the first game rolls around. It probably depends on the team that you have, how you feel about that on any given year, how much experience you have. Boston College would be a tremendous challenge if they were Week 1 or Week 6 or 9 or 12. They happen to be Week 1."