

**Virginia Tech Football**  
**Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights**  
**National Signing Day Media Conference**  
**February 5, 2019**

***Opening Statement***

“Thank you all for coming, I am happy to welcome Raheem [Blackshear] and Dallan [Wright]. Raheem has obviously been here since the semester but we didn’t release that until today. He has been working hard and doing a great job. We are really excited about what we were able to add in December and now. It’s not a huge class in terms of numbers we’ve covered that, but we’ve gotten a great start on the next class as well. I think these guys in the long run will all be looked back on as great contributors to our program.

“We’ve got our new staff in everybody is up and running. I’m sure you all have followed the ‘TNT’ connection on Twitter between [Darryl] Tapp and [Bill] Teerlinck, it’s been fun being around those guys. Tracy [Claeys] is fitting right in and the addition of Ryan [Smith] has really been good. He has local recruiting ties and is a very anxious young bright coach, he has a really bright future. Our kids are in the middle of off-season right now - morning conditioning, running, lifting four days a week, they are doing a great job with that. All of our coaches are excited to be off the road. In February, the dead period gives us a chance to be around our players and get the chance to spend some good time with them.”

***On whether the Hokies expect anyone else to sign on February 5:***

“No.”

***On RB Raheem Blackshear’s eligibility:***

“He is not eligible immediately. He will apply for a waiver and we will see how that goes. He has two years of eligibility, he redshirted last year.”

***On whether RB Raheem Blackshear could potentially play as a slot WR:***

“We have yet to practice, as it stands right now but he is a versatile player. He is a highly intelligent versatile player. He could’ve gone anywhere he wanted and he chose to come here and be a part of what we’ve got going on. He will meet in the running back room. He is a running back that is versatile enough to help us outside. That’s what we will start with, that’s what we have talked to him about. The rest we will play by ear.”

***On being contacted by Baylor about their head coaching job earlier this year:***

“I have been fortunate enough to be a head coach for eight years going on nine, I am incredibly happy with where I’m at. My family is happy, my wife and kids are incredibly happy. I have had opportunities to talk to a bunch of people along the way. In my eight going on nine years (as a head coach) I have talked to exactly two schools, Virginia Tech and Baylor. Do I love that it became incredibly public? No, but do I understand that part of it, I do, I get it. I had a meeting with our team and I told them that. We have a great plan moving forward, we had a conversation and the next day I showed up ready to work.

“I am really excited about what we have and what we’ve built. Through this transition this has been something to behold quite honestly. I’m more excited than ever. We have done everything possible to pay respects to the people who have done such a wonderful job in this football program in the past. You look around and see what we are building, not just bricks and mortar, but as a program and staff wise I

couldn't be more excited. It's like we rejuvenated and feels like our first year. The plan that we've got staffing wise moving forward, I'm excited about. That's how I addressed it with the guys, this is the facts. We had a quick conversation and I showed up to work the next day."

***On the wide receiver position and whether he'd be open to taking a transfer at that position:***

"We don't have a lot of room to play with in terms of the 85 [scholarships], we will see moving forward. We've got some young guys with talent who continue to work hard and they can have a chance. We just have to keep coaching them up."

***On WR Dallan Wright:***

"He had a great senior season. One of the drawbacks of recruiting now is it devalues kid's senior year. This kid is a three-sport athlete, a triple jumper, basketball player and football player. Probably as a young person wondered about his identity, was he going to be a basketball player? Probably as a younger player leaned more towards basketball. Then football-wise I'm sure he had some other good players with him but he threw his team on his back on their way to the state championship. He is an incredibly productive and competitive young man that came onto our radar throughout his senior year. He is from a small town and we really fell in love with him."

***On his favorite part of the recruiting process:***

"You read about things in recruiting, but the fun part of it is the families. The moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, aunts and uncles and people that have helped develop these young people throughout their lives. They all have stories of kids that grew up in other countries or grew up in different backgrounds, different socio-economic backgrounds. That is one of the great things about sports is exposing people from different walks of life to each other. One of the neatest parts of the job is getting to know young people and their families and their stories and sharing in that. That is the fun part of recruiting."

***On the defensive identity of the team following Coach Foster's retirement from coaching:***

"That is a tricky question for me. Bud Foster is the best defensive coordinator that has ever coached in college football. It is a little bit like taking over for Frank [Beamer]. Are you changing things just to try and change things or are you trying to continue to push the program forward? I want our guys to be able to be themselves. Darryl has a tremendous amount of respect for coach and for Bud, but it is also Darryl's job to be Darryl. Bill Teerlinck's resume speaks for itself and it is his job to be himself. We are not trying to recreate the wheel by any means. We just encourage those guys to be themselves, they have to be able to sell themselves as defensive line coaches and their resumes speak for themselves. The 'TNT' (on social media) has been fun. For us, watching Darryl and Bill get along, that is the cool part. Darryl is thirsty to be a great defensive line coach and to be thorough in his notes and what he can accomplish. Bill has been there and done that and wants to come back into the college game. It has been fun watching them interact and watching them sell themselves and our program moving forward."

***On the team's goals for the 2021 recruiting class:***

"Well it'll be larger in numbers obviously. I think it has a chance to be maybe the most important class in some time at Virginia Tech. Our aim is to have it be an elite class, and we're off to a great start. We still have a lot of work to do, but I think we are in great position with some other people that we've been developing relationships with for a long time, so I'm incredibly optimistic. The 2021 class is coming along at a time when all these things will be finished, so we kind of jokingly say they get to be the spoiled class. The new residence hall, the new dining facility, the new weight room, the new meeting rooms, ultimately the refurbished players' lounge, so there's a lot for those guys to be excited about. That's not all of it, obviously there's a lot more to it, but I think it has a chance to be pretty special."

***On the importance of the 2021 recruiting class:***

“I think because of what we’ll have to replace moving forward and the number of players that will ultimately be in that class [it is an important class]. I’m not diminishing what we did today and what we did in December, I think that was incredibly important, but obviously it was during a time where everyone knew we didn’t have a defensive coordinator. There were some hurdles that we had to go through, and our focus was to make sure that we didn’t reach. Let’s make sure we do a great job evaluating, and we did. We knocked it out of the park with a really small effective class. We have some guys that can help us right now and some guys that will help us in the future. But the next class coming through is going to be much bigger in numbers, and they’re going to have to be ready to replace a large number of guys.”

***On recruits playing multiple sports in high school:***

“We love it. It’s certainly not a deal breaker if a kid doesn’t play another sport, but I think it’s great. Whatever it is, track, basketball, or baseball, I tell them I want them to go do those things because they aren’t doing them when they get here (laughs). There are a few exceptions with a couple of our track guys, but those days are over when they get here. So, I want them to enjoy that experience. I love guys that enjoy competing. We used to joke that when you interview a coach you should go play noon hoops with them because you can learn more about them playing noon hoops than you can sitting down and talking football. I think there’s a little bit of that with young people too, getting to watch them go compete. Are they afraid to put themselves out there or do they enjoy going to compete?”

***On TE Dalton Keene declaring for the NFL Draft:***

“Dalton is a great human being. He’s an incredible worker with an amazing family. We’ll always wish him nothing but the best. He was emerging as a great leader on our football team, and he got a lot of feedback about the next level. Not just putting in for review with the NFL but with individual people that we know around the league giving us feedback to continue to help these guys make the best decisions. There was a litany of feedback that he got formally and informally from people in the league that we know and through the formal process. I feel confident that we’ve gotten better through the years at continuing to make sure they have more than an evaluation, but a good amount of information.”

***On the future of the Lunch Pail:***

“That’s an interesting question that I haven’t talked to Justin [Hamilton] about. We want to do a great job understanding what Bud meant and what he’s done and the tradition that comes with that, I get that wholeheartedly. But the Lunch Pail is Bud’s. So, that’s a conversation that we haven’t had yet that we’ll have going forward.”

***On the hire of Coach Bill Teerlinck:***

“Well obviously I’ve known Bill for a long time, but I never thought he would ever want to leave the NFL. I don’t want to put words in Bill’s mouth, but sometimes you get to a point in your life where what you’ve always wanted isn’t what you want at that moment. Bill’s worked a long time to be a defensive line coach in the NFL and he deserves it. It’s not because of his dad [John]. His dad gave him great training, but he got those opportunities because of himself. But I think the opportunity to coach with this staff in this program and add to this tradition, to play attacking style defense appeals to Coach Teerlinck. So, I think it had a little bit more to do with the people he was going to work with every day, the opportunity that we had here, the lifestyle that he wanted to live. He’s married and has a couple kids now, which I never thought would’ve happened knowing him when he was younger. But I think it was more than the emblem on his shirt, it became a quality of life thing. Not that he was unhappy where he was, I’m not talking bad about anybody, but in my conversations with Bill I just said ‘Are you really

sure you want to do this? Give me the reasons you want to do this.' Most of the things that he talked about centered around that."

***On NFL coaching experience standing out to recruits:***

"I think it certainly can be important, but you still have to do the work. But if you're a defensive line recruit what more could you want. You have one guy [Coach Tapp] who played twelve years in the NFL, was an All-American and played here. He honestly got to extend his career in the NFL because he was such a good mentor to young players in the league. You have another guy [Coach Teerlinck] who has coached however many years in the league. A lot of people think he's maybe the foremost expert in the country on rushing the passer. That's a pretty good coaching combination for a young person that's interested in learning how to play the position."

***On the hire of Coach Ryan Smith:***

"The recruiting ties were important but hiring assistants is a puzzle. You think about Justin Hamilton as a defensive coordinator and you have someone alongside him that's been there and done that in Tracy Claeys, he's going to be a great ear and someone for Justin to lean on as he goes through this. Then you talk about Tapp and Teerlinck and what they can do, and then you think about another person in here with more ties to the region, and that was Ryan. That was one of the things I wanted in that spot. It wasn't the only thing that I wanted, and Ryan is here because he's qualified and a great coach and I believe he has a chance to be a fantastic coach moving forward. One of the things I wanted out of that spot was someone with great regional ties. We talked to a bunch of people, not just about Ryan but we went through a rather lengthy interview process. We came away from it convinced that he was far and away the perfect person for this job."

***On the quarterbacks and corners:***

"I could not be more excited about those guys. If I'm not mistaken, we have three guys who have won Power Five football games, if you count Quincy's North Carolina game as a win. All of them are working hard and doing a great job. I'm really excited about their development and I'm interested to see what spring practice is going to look like, I haven't gotten that far yet, but we'll have three corners not out there for spring ball [Caleb Farley, Jermaine Waller, Armani Chapman]. We'll be a little low on numbers at receivers, so it'll be interesting to see how we tweak spring practices moving forward, but we'll find a way."