

**Virginia Tech Football  
Student-Athlete Q&A Highlights  
Camp Media Conference  
August 19, 2020**

***S Divine Deablo***

***On NCAA eligibility concerns:***

“I knew when I came back to Blacksburg that there were going to be risks taken because of COVID-19 and I knew that my eligibility is at risk as well. I just came to play football and get better while I can, and whatever happens, happens.”

***On opting-out of the 2020 football season:***

“I never even considered it. I’ve been too focused on trying to get better and stay healthy myself, so I never even considered it.”

***On how many games should constitute a full year:***

“Honestly, I don’t think there is a right answer right now. There are so many things going on, whatever answer does happen, there is no right answer.”

***On holding each other accountable during the pandemic:***

“We actually had a player team meeting recently that was only players and we just talked about how serious we’ve to take the season, and if we want to play we got to be smart off the field not just on the field. To be honest with you, I’m not even worried about the older guys I just had to get the message to the younger guys since it’s their first year in college. They may want to have fun, but they got to know there’s risk and we got to be smart.”

***On continuing to hold each other accountable throughout the season:***

“The upperclassmen tried to let the younger guys know that there will be some type of discipline if they don’t follow the rules. It was players who made that rule not even the coaches. If you want to be here, you have to be 100%.”

***On stepping up with DB Caleb Farley opting out from the 2020 football season:***

“I’ve had to be a lot more vocal in the team group chats, on the field. A lot of the guys, I think, look up to me. I try to set a good example every day. My message to the team is stay positive and treat every day like it’s the same, come to practice prepared to play.”

***On being a team leader through these times:***

“I had no idea it would be this crazy but I’m always up for the challenge.”

***On the differences between Coach Hamilton and Coach Foster:***

“Different personality for sure, nobody is the same. Coach Hamilton, he’s very big on details. Pretty much the same, same type of coaching, I love them both. [Hamilton’s] my position coach so I’m a little bit closer to him, but they’re both great.”

***On Coach Hamilton's coaching style:***

"Like you all know, Coach Hamilton was a player himself here, so he knows a little bit more what we go through. Of course, he yells too but he tries to yell in a way that we take in a positive manner."

***On what young players he's been impressed with on offense:***

"To be honest, there's too many to even name. They are all working so hard. Receivers, running backs all over the place and on the offensive line. Too many to name to be honest."

***On the new face shields on the team's helmets:***

"I do have one of those actually. It started off with a full visor on the bottom half and the top. First couple days it was good, then it got a little humid, so it was harder to breathe and it got a little foggy. Recently, they cut part of the bottom half so it still covers the mouth but I have more air coming through so I can breathe and it's a lot better. I would advise my teammates and every other team to wear it."

***On policing each other about social distancing:***

"We have a rule about arm's length apart. I try to police it myself whenever I see too many people close together, I yell and say spread out. They usually listen to me, sometimes they're too tired to listen but I'm going to get them right."

***On remembering the safety precautions during practice:***

"It was definitely hard at first, nobody was even giving it a thought. We were all lining up right behind each other, but it's definitely become second nature now. The coaches are policing themselves too so it's definitely second-nature."

***On DB Caleb Farley's decision to opt out of the 2020 football season:***

"Sad of course, we would love to have Caleb but understandable. I respect the guy, I love him, forever my brother. I can't wait to see him play at the next level."

***On the cornerback group without Farley:***

"We look good. Next man up and they're working hard. It's actually a freshman that's looking really good out there. Armani Chatman and Brion Murray are looking really good out there."

***On working at different positions in the secondary:***

"That's the thing about the coaches, especially on the defense, we're trying to learn every position on the field so just in case we need to switch, we're able to. Even the younger guys, I have them out there with me just going over plays, helping them learn and helping them get a better feel for the defense."

***On differences in terminology under Coach Hamilton:***

"Instead of rover it's now just safety, besides that everything's pretty much the same."

***On if football is still an escape for guys even with all the COVID-19 protocols in place:***

“Football is always going to be an escape for me personally, I don’t know about the rest of my teammates. But speaking for myself, ball is always going to be an escape. The only thing I have to remember is to have a mask on when I’m off the field, but besides that, just playing ball.”

***TE James Mitchell***

***On playmakers on the offensive side of the ball:***

“We have a lot of guys who didn’t see much action last year, Nick Gallo, Jaden Payoute and Kaleb Smith. We also have some young guys in the backfield along with Marco Lee who is a transfer. We have a lot of weapons on the offense returning.”

***On social distancing at practice:***

“At first people weren’t used to it. We have hit drills that people like to be involved in so we had to police a little more. It was different at first, but now people are starting to get used to it and they know that it is a necessity for us to be successful this fall on and off the field. I try to police it when I see it.”

***On staying on campus to play if school goes fully virtual:***

“It would probably be easier without all the students here; we would be in our own bubble away from people. In a way it would be easier to get things done.”

***On thoughts to other students:***

“Be cautious, it is bigger than us right now. As football players and students, we can’t be selfish, we have to do our part for the other fall sports that want to play. Wear your masks when you’re out and limit those large group interactions. We have worked hard for this and we definitely want to play.”

***On the uncertainty of eligibility requirements for the 2020 season:***

“Right now, I’m just doing my best to take it one day at a time. I know at the end of the day; those things are things that I cannot control. Lord willing, me and my team, as well as everyone playing will be healthy and nobody gets it (COVID-19) and we all play a full year. The conferences that are playing of course. As far as that is concerned (eligibility), I haven’t put much thought into it because I know that it is out of my hands.”

***On talking with teammates about what should constitute a full season:***

“The Leadership Council had a small meeting with Coach Fuente about it and he read over what the NCAA had released about the rule. We didn’t really discuss what we figured a full season should be, we just kind of sat down and talked about it and saw what our thoughts were, but we didn’t really discuss what we figured a full season should be.”

***On what it will be like to play without fans and the impact that may have on teams who play on emotion:***

“Well we have been hitting it hard because we know we may not be able to have fans and we have to bring our own juice. Coach Fuente has been big on preparing us, getting us ready, getting the offense ready when we are going against the defense in practice and making sure we are creating our own juice just in case we are faced with that in the season. I think we’ll be prepared for it, if that does happen.”

***On running out to Enter Sandman with no fans:***

“It will definitely be different, but those are the times that we are living in right now and we have to adjust on the fly.”

***On what he has seen from TE Nick Gallo and what type of teammate he is:***

“As far as teammate goes, he’s a great teammate, one of the best teammates that I have been around. He’s always encouraging the guys even when he’s not in (the game) and that is something that you don’t always see, especially from a guy that has only been here for a year. As far as him on the field, he’s good. He’s a good route runner, good in the pass game and he’s coming along in the run game as well. He kind of reminds me of how I was coming along. If we would’ve had a spring, it would’ve helped him even more but he’s made a lot of progress so far in the fall so I am excited to see what kind of season he has this year.”

***On if he wonders why the ACC is still planning to play football while many leagues are not:***

“It will definitely be different, but if we are playing, we need to be ready, we need to be prepared because that will just create a bigger stage for us. We have to be prepared for whatever happens.”

***On wondering if a school official at practice is there to let the team know that the season has been postponed or cancelled:***

“Like I said earlier, right now it’s out of our hands, something that we can’t control. As far as we know, we are playing and we are preparing for NC State on September 12. That’s all we can control right now and until they tell us different, that’s all that our focus is on.”

***On the team’s first scrimmage and things that he took away from it:***

“It was out first one and obviously like I said earlier we didn’t have a spring so we have to fine tune some things and get out chemistry right but we definitely have a lot of playmakers and guys that will help. The offensive line, we have a lot of depth there as well so definitely excited for the future and just building off that scrimmage and getting better off of it.”

***On QB Hendon Hooker’s development since the last time they played together in the spring of 2020:***

“I would say the way that he is leading right now is the thing that is standing out to me the most. He’s really trying to help, not just the quarterbacks, he’s really trying to make sure that

everything else is right. He's the quarterback so he knows the whole offense so he is making sure that everyone is doing their job on point and is doing the right thing.:"

***On the players only team meeting and how important it was for the team leaders to set an example:***

"It was definitely important, especially from the fact that it was just from the players. The fact that it was just the players that held the meeting and conducted the meeting, they took it really seriously and they knew that these older guys wanted to play. We know they want to play too, obviously it's under different circumstances, but just the fact that it was just a player's meeting, they are going to really take it seriously and are going to do the necessary things off campus and off the football field so that they get a chance to play as well."

***On his reaction to seeing Virginia on the Hokies' schedule on week two of the season:***

"Right now, we have to worry about NC State. When it gets there, we'll talk about it then I guess, but right now, it doesn't matter if we don't take care of NC State."

***On his impressions of RB Raheem Blackshear Jr.:***

"He's an electric player for sure. If he ends up being eligible, he'll help this offense immediately so he is definitely one I am excited to see. If we can have him, that will be great for our offense."