

Virginia Tech Football
Interim Head Coach J.C. Price
Press Conference
Nov. 18, 2021

Opening Statement

"It's bittersweet in this type of circumstance. On one hand, you have such respect for Coach Fuente and the job he was doing. I've been overwhelmingly humbled by [Virginia Tech Athletic Director] Whit Babcock's belief in me and him appointing me the interim head coach. I just want to do my best for these kids. These kids deserve to go out a winner, the seniors deserve to win. There's a lot to play for. The kids gave really rebounded based on the situation. I think dealing with the last two years, I don't think there's a team that's had to deal with more hardship and overcome more adversity. Obviously, there's a ton about overcoming adversity through the years and through different seasons and these kids are exactly that. They're resilient, they're tough and we're going to do our best to finish this thing out for us. There's still goals that we could reach."

On the statuses of WR Tre Turner and C Brock Hoffman

"Brock was at practice today, we'll see how he progresses. Tre is going to make the drive, 23 hours. With what he's got going, he can't fly. It says a lot about him as an individual wanting to do that for his teammates, but also our training staff with two young men that volunteered, jumped at the chance to help us out. We didn't have to convince anyone to drive Tre down. These two guys, they stepped up, they're going to take the time. They're going to drive halfway down, get a hotel and finish up the next day. Tre will be there and he'll be ready to go."

On being the head coach at Virginia Tech

"I keep pinching myself."

On taking the team to the memorial at Virginia Tech

"I'll be honest with you, I wanted to keep that between me and the team. We did do that. It was not something that I would want to even talk about. In fact, I asked them to not Tweet about it so I don't know how you found out about it. It was something I felt we needed to do to maintain our why and understand how important this place is and what it means to me and what it means to our team to finish this thing up and go win. Get back to bowls, get back to delivering Virginia Tech to its rightful place in college football - a perennial bowl contender and a team that plays for championships. There's still things out there that we can do and that was just a reminder of what it means to be a Hokie. I'll leave it at that because it was really something that was just meant to stay between us and the team."

On whether he's had any conversations with Coach Frank Beamer or Coach Bud Foster since he's taken on the interim head coach job

"I've had a lot of conversations with a lot of people. Those two obviously reached out. One of the first offices I went and sat in was Bud's. I've had great advice from guys I've played with, guys I've coached with at past schools, Coach Beamer, Coach Foster, they've all given you great ideas at the same time so you have to try to get through whatever is trying to suggest to you and you have to pick out what you think is best. I have to do what I think is best for this team. I think I am. We're going to change some things as far as how we travel, how we go to the hotel, but at the same time, coaches and players are creatures of habit. The nuts and bolts had to remain the same as far as class schedules, time we practice, how we practice. We're all creatures of habit and that part isn't broken because we're close. That's the heartbreaking part of it. I'm just going to be honest, people tell you congratulations and it feels like I ripped my heart out. I didn't want it under these circumstances. Once again, it's humbling to be the guy that Whit has decided to lead us these last two weeks and I'm just going to be me and do everything I can for these kids."

On how the players have reacted to the news on Tuesday

"There's no playbook for what we're going through. The timing of it was the timing of it. No one picks a perfect time to give someone bad news. There's no good time to give bad news so I understand the situation and how it came

about. To do it on a Tuesday was tough. Once we broke the team meeting, I think the position coaches did a great job of rallying the young men, of being psychologists probably more than anything. There was probably not much football talk that morning prior to practice. To the kids' credit, it was an incredible practice. It was obviously somber, don't get me wrong, but considering the circumstances and what they went through, those kids practiced their butts off. They did everything we asked them to do, it was impressive how those kids responded. I think when you have a team that one has gone through so many heartbreakingly close losses like we have on top of how their COVID season went. I know I was not here for that, but I understand and I know what happened one, because this is my school and two, you hear the players and coaches describe what happened during the COVID season. I think that allowed them to be able to rebound from this in the way that I never thought they would be able to do so quickly."

On whether he ever envisioned himself as a head coach

"Of course, I think anybody that gets into this business wants to be in charge. If they tell you they don't, I would call them a liar. I think there's a process every coach goes through to learn how to coach. You're a GA, you become a position coach, you become a coordinator and then you think one day I'm going to be a head coach. There's only so many jobs out there and for me to be sitting here as an interim head coach, I don't think I ever in my wildest dreams thought that would happen. To have head coach after my name at Virginia Tech, I don't think there's a greater honor."

On his memories of playing Miami as a player at Virginia Tech

"Obviously, the one that comes to mind is the first time we beat them in 1995, my senior year. I think I had a good game that day, I'm not sure (4.0 sacks, 10 tackles). Just what it took to overcome how far ahead they were talent wise, they were better than us in the early 90's. By the mid 90's, we overtook them and from then on until the middle 2000's, we dominated. So that was great to see and great to be a part of. I've been a part of a lot of great things at this university. Talking about, again, overcoming adversity, in 1995 we lose to a good BC team, we lose to Cincinnati out here in the mud, we were a team that was preseason ranked and sitting here 0-2. To find a way to go beat a team that you've never beaten. I think that speaks volumes of that team in 1995.

"There are all kinds of teams that are like that in the history of Virginia Tech. The 2010 team started out 0-2. I'm just impressing upon these guys that our story is not written, our book's not finished. What's it going to say? At the end of the day, if we can find a way to win one maybe two games, then maybe this team will be remembered as the most resilient, mentally tough team that Virginia Tech's ever had to overcome what they have gone through the past two years. No other team has had to overcome what they've gone through. If we can get that done, I'll tip my hat to the kids because it's about them."

On if he remembers what he said to the 1995 team after the Cincinnati loss

"I'm sure it was emotional. I don't really recall much of what was said and it was probably profanity laced, probably not for print. Seniors have to lead and that's what we did on that team. We had really good players, really good leaders and the senior class that year, we like to think, was a big part of what Virginia Tech became. We're not that far away from being that. In my heart of hearts, we could easily be 7-2 or 8-1 but we're not. We're going to finish writing this book in the next two weeks. I just get to sit in the head chair, that's all."

On preparing for Miami

"Not much has changed as far as the nuts and bolts. I think one of the reasons Whit chose me other than my overwhelming love for this place was it allowed the coordinators to continue to be coordinators. Coach [James] Shibest is still concentrating on special teams. [Brad Cornelsen] and [Justin Hamilton] can do their thing and I can take some of the day-to-day operations off of those guys so they can focus on putting together the best game plan to head down to Miami and give our guys the chance to compete."

On whether there's anything about being a head coach that he didn't expect

"Just the fact that you never turn your brain off. I constantly think 'Am I doing the right things? Am I saying the right things? Did I change the right thing?' You can't have everything the same. You can't change everything, but everything can't be the same. It's a fine line I've been walking and I just hope and I pray that I'm doing right by these

kids so they have a chance to be successful these last two weeks. That's all about the kids, it's not about anything else. It's not about one coach, it's not about any of that. It's about the players in that locker room and doing what I think is best for them. That's tough to say, you go from being a position coach and now you have a say in a lot of things I didn't have a say in before. So we are going to change some things."

On what went wrong for the team this season

"There's a lot of parity in college football. There are probably four teams in the country, four or five, maybe six, that are probably a little better than everybody else. Then you have a big large group of everybody else that on any given Saturday can win or lose a game. It's so fragile, so close, it's such a thin line between winning and losing when you're in the middle group. Then there's probably about 10 teams that just aren't very good. We're in that middle section. We have just not found ways to win games that we should have. You self reflect, what could I have done better as a DE coach, what could I have done better as a position coach? How could I have helped Coach Fuente and the team more. That's what I always think about. It's just such a fine line on Saturday between winning and losing. The tide can turn so quickly. We just have to find a way to finish off these games and make Hokie Nation proud of us."

On how the day-to-day has changed for him with his additional responsibilities

"I have relied heavily on [Defensive Line Coach] Bill Teerlinck and Corey Rush, our GA, as far as me not being able to watch as much film as I could watch as a position coach. But I was still coaching the guys in the meeting. The great thing about having two defensive line coaches is that the game is so different from when I played. When I played, everybody was doing the same things. Now, the inside tackles and the ends, what they see and how they play are totally different. I know it's different positions, but it's really two different positions. There's interesting, small details about playing defensive end that you don't have to worry about if you're playing defensive tackle.

"That's the great thing about having two defensive line coaches. Bill has done a great job of helping me with the film aspects and [Justin Hamilton] and I meet extra so that I make sure I know what's going on. But I was still running the defensive end meetings. Bill and I still wanted to meet separate to make sure that those kids get the extra time they need so instead of Bill coaching 12 guys with three deep, he's still coaching half of that. So I was still handling the position meetings and at practice I bounce around. Then I'm more trying to make sure practice runs smoothly and more heavy on the head coach's role."

On why he chose to switch up some details of the travel schedule

"Talking to guys that I know in this business who have sat in this chair with the label that I have, of course I reached out to ask what did you do. What were the things you wish you could've done different, what were the things that you liked. If the whole season, we were doing A, I just said we need to do B. If the whole season, we were doing B, I would've said we need to be doing A. It's not even about what it is, it's about it being different. Just changing something to try to infuse some energy and enthusiasm with the kids in an obviously tough time they're going through."

"The schedule is going to be the schedule. It's just little things, it's not even a detail that's worth mentioning, how we eat. It's really nonsensical to be honest with you but you have to change something but you can't change the wrong thing or go overboard. But I'm hoping just by tweaking something a little bit, that we can have a little bit more fellowship and be a little bit closer as a team the next two weeks going down the stretch."

On whether he would've believed he would be the head coach at Virginia Tech 10 years ago

"You could have asked me that last Thursday and I would've said there's no chance in hell that would ever happen. Not this soon but obviously I've always had the goal to be the head coach at Virginia Tech. If you don't have goals and aspirations like that to coach at your school, then you're full of it. But no, I would've never thought that in my wildest dreams. Everybody has a path in their coaching profession and it takes twists and turns. You make this decision and it's the right decision, you make the next and you never know if it's the right or wrong decision until after the fact. The thing I tried to do going into my coaching career, personally, was I didn't want to move around. When I

was at JMU for seven years, I didn't pursue a lot of jobs. I'm probably the worst self-promoter in the history of self-promotion. I was at Marshall for nine years and we were happy. If they hadn't made a change there, I still might be there, I don't know. But that's the great thing about football. Football mirrors so much in life, you don't know what's going to come at you next. I tried to tell the kids the same thing I tell my two daughters, you control your attitude and effort every day. That's on you, nobody has the power to tell me how I should act or I should feel. That's all inner-driven and that's all I'm trying to tell the kids."

On what his role and responsibilities will be on Saturday

"Hopefully I just get to stay out of the way and watch the game. I'm sure that's not going to happen. I'm just there to support [Brad Cornelsen] and [Justin Hamilton] and [James] Shibest, whatever they need from me. I will obviously be making the decisions that every head coach makes. I will be wearing the head coach hat, I will not be the defensive line coach or the defensive ends coach. I will have very little to do with that. I will be wearing the head coach hat as far as trying to deal with time management, game management, trying to help [Cornelsen] make decisions on whether we should go for it and those things. So, Saturday I will totally be wearing the head coach hat."

On the Zoom call with the verbal commits Virginia Tech has already secured

"I was part of that. The thing about it is it's my school, I love this place. We don't know what's going to happen. I could be the interim head coach for two weeks and then not be here next year. If I'm not, I still want those kids to come here, I still want my school to retain a Top 20 recruiting class. That's my goal. If I'm here, great. Whatever capacity I can be here, I want to be here. I want those recruits here. We worked our butts off, our staff did, to get a Top 20 recruiting class. There's a lot of good players in there and a lot of good kids. A lot of good people, a lot of good families in those kids that made verbal commitments to us. I was on the Zoom. I thought it went great. Every kid that was committed got on the Zoom and we answered their questions as best we could and tried to relieve some of their concerns. We were just open and honest."

On how he'd define his coaching style

"I don't know, I guess we're going to find out. I think the way you coach at defensive line, which is where I've coached my whole life I've never coached another position, I think the type of guy you have to be is you have to be a little excitable. You have to be on edge, you have to be enthusiastic, you have to be able to walk that thin line of going crazy. Where as a head coach, I guess we'll find out Saturday. I've never been a head coach at any level. I'm hoping and praying that, like Coach Beamer, that when I panic, that's when the kids should worry. I'm going to do my best to keep my cool because that's what a leader is supposed to do. I don't think a leader is supposed to get too high or too emotional, that's just my opinion. I love that way Coach Beamer was as a head coach. He used to say don't you panic unless you see me panic and he never panicked. That's what I'm going to try to do. I'm not guaranteeing that all of a sudden we get some call that don't go our way that I won't revert back to being a DL coach and lose my ever loving mind. But I'm going to try my best not to."

On timing of how he found out that he would be the interim head coach

"There were a couple conversations and I had a good chat with Whit early Tuesday morning. I basically found out the same time everyone else did. The thing about it is this thing is not about me. It's about the team continuing to improve and it's about the kids. I've always been the worst self-promoter and believe me the last thing I want to do is ever talk about J.C. Price. I want to talk about these great student-athletes we have and about trying to get them a win."

On how the assistants who are have worked with Coach Fuente previously have handled this week

"Obviously, we're all hurt, let me say that first and foremost. And the second thing I told the players, I told the coaches, whatever way you're feeling, whatever sort of way you feel is okay and it's right. Whatever emotion you're having is the correct emotion because it's yours. Those guys have been nothing but solid men. There hasn't been a day where we've questioned anybody's want to or want to continue on. Everybody has been totally professional and gone about their business and gone about their work. We've all been through this. Every coach gets hired, every coach is going to get fired. That's just the way it is and you know that going into it. The staff whether it's been the

guys who are ex-Hokies or the guys who had a long relationship with Coach Fuente, we've all put our sleeves up and just gone to work and we're going to try to put these kids in the best position we can."

On whether he views the next two weeks as an audition for the head coaching job

"Not at all, not at all. I want to go 1-0 this week and that's not coach speak. It's not about me. I'm not auditioning to be the next head coach. I don't expect to be the head coach at Virginia Tech. I've been promised nothing. Whit has not said you do this, you do that, no. I'm trying to get us organized, keep us on the right path and get us in the right position to win. That's all I'm concerned about. I haven't thought one thing about becoming the next head coach at Virginia Tech. In fact, I will share with you that I've told the team that I don't expect to be the head coach after this. I expect to be the head coach for the next two weeks and then hopefully I'll be getting us ready to go to a bowl game."

On whether he's concerned about WR Tre Turner playing in the game despite not being allowed to fly

"To be honest with you, you'd have to ask [Mike] Goforth or Brett [Greisemer] about it. I'm not really sure or even understand what's going on. I know there's some air trapped in the upper chest and throat. I can't speak intelligently about that. I know that he is cleared to play but flying would exacerbate the situation and his health so that's why we're choosing to drive him."

On where his discipline comes from to not think about where he will be two weeks from now

"It's been instilled in me since I was here in 1992. When I first got here, it's been pretty chronicled that I was a little bit of a knucklehead. I was probably a huge knucklehead about the first year and a half to two years I was here. I grew up. I left Virginia Tech as a young adult now I'm coming back as a grown man and I'm just doing what grown men are supposed to do.

"Grown men are supposed to help young men become better people and that's all I'm doing. Literally, all I'm trying to do is see one day at a time because any further than that then I'm going to be overwhelmed. To me, if I'm overwhelmed, then I'm going to make a poor choice or a poor decision. I'm not going to do that, even to the fact that I changed something in the travel schedule an hour ago that I should have changed a day ago that I was unsure about. I said you know what, we're going to do it. I want to make sure that every decision that I make is thought out intelligently and thought out to not rush anything or put these kids in a situation where they can be successful. It's all about the players, not even close about me.

"Whatever happens with my coaching career next year, that's what's supposed to happen. If I'm supposed to be here, I'll be here. If I'm not, then I will be where I'm supposed to be. I have a great, supportive wife. Two beautiful, intelligent daughters. They're older now so they understand this business. I just went through it last year. [Justin Hamilton] made a comment and it was so true, six months ago I told him I'd crawl on my hands and knees to be the DL coach at Virginia Tech. Now, all of a sudden, I'm sitting in this chair and I told him I'd still crawl on my hands and knees to work here. I just want to be here. Whatever capacity it is, great. I don't care what it is. But if I'm not, I'll take that and attack that with great attitude and effort, like I do everything in my life. I told the players I don't have bad days. I have good days and I have great days. That's the only way I can look at it. When you're in this profession, you'll drive yourself crazy if you try to forecast what you're going to be down the road. Like I said, you could've asked me Monday night about sitting in this chair and I would've told you you're crazy."

On what his wife said when he got an opportunity to talk to her on Tuesday

"When I finally got a chance to tell her, obviously she was ecstatic, excited for the opportunity. Once again that was also tempered by the fact that I could be out of work in two weeks. Her only suggestion and advice was to go out and be yourself and that'll be fine, believe in my decisions, don't second guess myself and do what I think is right, which was echoed by a lot of people."