

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Coach Brent Pry

Nick Gallo

Ali Jennings

Josh Fuga

Press Conference



newcomers?

BRENT PRY: This is the most important thing to me before the portal, before name, image, and likeness. Our culture was going to be the foundation of who we became as a football team.

So protecting that, that's about relationships and trust and hard conversations. That's how we're building this thing, and that's just another area that we have to be great in.

We've got to be open and honest. We have to work through it. Bringing older guys in, transfers in, like Ali, the first thing that happens is they have to be right for us regardless of the talent.

Secondly, we have to know everything about them that we can. We have to do our homework. You spend two, three, four years recruiting a high school player. You're going to spend two, three weeks sometimes recruiting a transfer player.

So the more we can know about a guy, like Ali, his background, we knew a ton about him, a ton of people that know him. Guys on our team that knew Ali. There was less risk. We knew a lot that made us feel good that he would be in that locker room and be what we need him to be and would be like-minded, as well as the talent we needed to impact our roster.

It's not easy. It takes a lot of diligence, a lot of research, a lot of homework making sure we bring in the right guys.

Q. Obviously for a head coach in this collegiate climate you have NIL, you have the transfer portal, all these things going on that cause you to re-recruit your players while you're bringing them in and then year one, year two, year three, and so on and so forth. Being new to Virginia Tech in the sense of this past season, as well as everything else going on in college athletics, how do you balance all of that?

BRENT PRY: Honestly it's still about doing what's right for our kids, our staff, and our program, our university.

THE MODERATOR: From Virginia Tech we'll have our head coach Brent Pry with us at the podium, and then our student-athletes will follow.

Coach, no opening statement. We will get your opening question.

Q. Defensively you obviously returned strong players in the secondary. How do you feel about the growth on that side of the ball and what that unit can do for you?

BRENT PRY: I want to get to your question obviously, particularly about defensive personnel. Very comfortable there. I first want to mention we had a tough loss in our Hokie family the last couple of days. We lost our assistant tennis coach. A young man, 36 years old. Wife, 5-year-old. As everyone knows, we're a close group in Blacksburg. So I want to send prayers and condolences to the Sayer family and Coach Thompson and our tennis program before we move forward.

Defensively we lost a couple of leaders obviously with Chamarri and Dax, but I really like the speed and athleticism that returns on that side of the ball. We got a fast group. Coach Marve has them racing to the football.

We've really honed in on our fundamentals and techniques. We've got a good plan to create more explosives through personnel, through scheme, maximizing what we do well.

Q. So Virginia Tech heads into the season with 35 new scholarship players. Almost 41% of the roster. How have you structured this offseason to emphasize trust and chemistry amongst a team that has a ton of



It's about what we believe in. I wasn't going to take the opportunity at Virginia Tech without the platform to do it the way we know it needs to be done at Tech.

A shared vision from our president, Dr. Sands, to Whit Babcock. The support has been phenomenal to do this thing the right way, the way it needs to be done at Virginia Tech, what's right for us.

So there's a lot of things that can send you on a detour, but we're going to do things the right way. We're not cutting corners. That gives us the pathway.

We try and eliminate the gray. There's too much nonsense going on in college football in our game. We want to be forthright with our players. We want to be forthright with our staff. We've got a platform to do that at Virginia Tech. So I'm thankful and appreciative of the atmosphere that exists where we can do this thing the right way because it is challenging right now.

But we've got good people. It goes back to bringing in the right staff and the right players that want to be at Virginia Tech for the right reasons. That has to come first. We want to be competitive in NIL. We want to eliminate guys going to the transfer portal, but in the end it's about first and foremost, do you want to be at Tech? It has to be the environment that they're looking for.

We don't song and dance guys to come to Tech. We do the very best job we can to have them understand what this experience would look like. If it's for them, that's awesome. That's great. If it's not, I would rather know you now than in a year when they want to hit the portal.

So we're going to get the right guys. If we do our homework and we recruit the heck out of a young man and his family, whether he is a transfer, at high school, and they choose to go somewhere else, I'm okay with that.

When a young man, particularly from the state of Virginia chooses another school and we didn't invest the time necessary and maybe they don't fully understand the experience or they're choosing not to come to Tech for a reason that's maybe not true or valid, I have a problem with that.

So that's why it's important to us. Ninth grade, eighth grade, let's build relationships. Let's make sure this family knows what we're all about. In the end we'll take the chips where they lay.

Q. You talk a lot about relationships and having the right staff and all that. Coach Price has been one of the hottest assistants in college football for a few

years now, and he is still with this team. Can you tell me what it means to have a coach like him that is Virginia Tech through and through and that has meant so much to the program, and how you retain a guy like that that people are always probably clawing at or calling his agent trying to put in a word with?

BRENT PRY: Yeah, Coach Price is a great asset to our staff and to our program. Coach Price, and his wife. She's in the Hall of Fame at Virginia Tech. JC was An All-American when he was coaching at Virginia Tech the first time. You talk about a guy, if you cut his veins open, you got maroon and orange coming out of that dude.

For years JC and I were buddies after leaving Virginia Tech just watching him come up through the coaching ranks and all his time at Marshall.

I talked to James Franklin many time about JC and trying to get him involved at Penn State. We're very fortunate to have JC. He's a Hokie through and through. He does a great job with our defensive line as Josh Fuga will attest to. He is an asset in every way in what we're doing.

Like myself and some others on our staff, he has been part of championships at Virginia Tech. He knows what it looks like.

Q. I wanted to ask in terms of the offense, last year obviously a lack of playmakers. You've addressed some of that in the transfer portal. What is the vision for the offense, and how confident are you that that unit will be more productive?

BRENT PRY: I think first and foremost, just another year for Tyler Bowen as a playcaller. I know what it's like when it's year one, and there's growing pains.

I think it was probably a little more challenging because he wasn't in that room down the stretch. He spent a little more time with Coach Glenn and the quarterbacks, but moving in there full-time has been a real asset. He has been the right thing for us. The right thing for Grant, for Kyron, for the young quarterbacks.

At the same time we had to go out and get some explosive playmakers, and we did that. Three guys in that wide receiver room, with Ali being one of them, a tailback. We just did some things that were necessary to allow us to have a better opportunity to create big plays.

So schematically we're really working hard at our tempo, at our formations. How can we be simple for our guys in what we do but challenging to defenses? To me that's always a sign of good coaching, either side of the ball.



But we've got some good things we worked on all offseason. Again, you talk about explosive plays, but to me it really starts with our run game. We couldn't run the ball last year, and that hurts the ability to throw the ball, hurts the ability to protect. A lot of things. It hurts your defense.

So it starts there, and we've had some improvement there as well.

Q. You've coached pretty much every positional group on the defensive side.

BRENT PRY: You did your research, thank you.

Q. From Tillman and Micah Parsons how difficult is it whether things aren't going right defensively for you?

BRENT PRY: I have to trust the coaches. Coach Marve played for us at Vanderbilt, was a captain. Got incredibly high football IQ. He is cut from the same mold. He has been brought up in this system. There's a lot of faith there.

A couple of guys on that staff, Pierson Prioleau played in the system at Tech. Shawn Quinn, this is our third stop together defensively. He knows what I want, what that needs to look like. Derek Jones and I coached together at Memphis and have been friends a long time. Then we talked about Coach Price.

There's a lot of men in that room, a lot of experience on the defensive side of the ball that we're all like-minded. That was really important to me in the hiring process that they saw things the way I did and what good defense needs to be look like.

That's why it was important for me to be in that room. I knew it would be challenging. But to get my thumbprint, to make sure everybody is on the same page and how we're going to do this on that side of the ball.

But I still get a little shaky when I walk by that staff room. It's hard for me, I'm not going to lie. I mean, I might grab Fuga once in a while and get him straightened out, make sure he gets in the right gap and steps with the right foot, but I'm excited about being just a head coach. I really am.

I need to do a better job there, and I'm looking forward to being there for our offense, our special teams, and our defense.

Q. I have some family down in Virginia. What's the landscape of the Commonwealth of Virginia with all the good football teams like JMU and VMI? How is it with

you trying to compete with those good programs?

BRENT PRY: We're the flagship school in the state. There's no question about that.

You're talking about a program with eight straight years at ten-plus wins and played for a national championship. So I'm not completely sure about your question.

But there's some good college programs in our state. There's good high school football in our state. That's one of the reasons we are really making a giant effort to recruit the state of Virginia. There's too many good players that have been going other places.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch places with Nick. We'll spend about five minutes with Mr. Gallo at the podium.

Questions for Nick.

Q. You heard Coach talking about hopes for improvement offensively. What is your outlook for what that unit can look like?

NICK GALLO: I think we were definitely pretty disappointed with how we played last year, and I think kind of the first thing that we addressed was all the mistakes we were kind of making, putting ourselves in bad situations.

So one of the fundamentals we talk about is details. Offensively we've been really dialed in on the details all offseason. Like Coach Pry mentioned, we have a lot of great transfers in the portal. Playmakers there.

They're really talented, but more important than that they're all great culture guys. They hopped right in and were asking every weekend to throw routes, catch routes, all these things, so they fit right in.

Then I think experienced guys coming back, settling into the second year of Coach Bowen's offense, I think it's all going to pay off.

Q. Nick, we talked about the transfer portal. We've talked about Ali and all the weapons that are being brought in, but in terms of returners, you're the leading receiver of all the pass catchers on the team from last year. Has that kind of forced you into a leadership role and knowing what the culture at Virginia Tech is at a higher level perhaps than some of the transfers and whatnot? Have you kind of had to be forced into or have you stepped into a leadership role because of that pretty much?

NICK GALLO: Yeah. I wouldn't use the word "forced," but I would definitely say I stepped into it.

Just being at Tech for -- this will be my fifth season coming up, being able to bring those guys along and then being in the second year of Coach Bowen's offense.

There are a couple of us, Kaden Moore, Parker Clements, all these guys that can kind of really tell guys what we're looking for and the expectation we expect.

Q. You spoke about it going into year number five. You've seen so many different things over these last few years with Virginia Tech Hokies. What has Coach done culture-wise that you feel is going to take what we saw last season in the win-loss column and start to translate some of those things?

NICK GALLO: Yeah, Coach talks about our fundamentals all the time. I think this offseason especially with us not being satisfied with the season we had last year, really honing in on the competition aspect this offseason, winter, summer, spring. Every single rep is being charted, win or loss.

I think flipping that mindset to competing and going out and winning is really going to benefit us.

Q. Two-part question here: First part, you arrived at Tech in 2019, but you've been around the program for almost a decade dating back to when your brother Eric started his career in 2014. As you reflect on your experience thus far and look forward to your senior year, what has made Virginia Tech so special to you and your family, and what are you looking forward to most this year? The second part is, do you and Coach have the same tailor?

BRENT PRY: He copied me.

NICK GALLO: I don't know about that, but yeah, like you said, I've been coming to Blacksburg, Virginia for about ten years now. My whole family really enjoys it.

It's become a really special place for us. It's just an amazing program, community, university. All those things just tie in so well with each other. Everybody is pulling for each other.

What I'm most looking forward to would probably just be just knowing it's my last one, trying to go out there, do the best we can, lead this team and end on a good experience.

THE MODERATOR: Follow that up with the podium question here. We've referenced how it is that you

experience Virginia Tech the first time, what your lineage was at the age of 14. So if there's a bookend on the other end, how do you want to leave it? What's the experience going to be like?

NICK GALLO: My ultimate goal is just to leave the program in a better spot than I found it, whether that be leading the guys on my team, having impact on the community, the university, all those things are pretty meaningful to me.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. You can switch places with Ali, and we'll get your wide receiver is up for a little bit.

Questions for Ali.

Q. Ali, we talked about the impact that you're expected to have here and the weapon that you are. We've all heard the phrase, if you can't beat them, join them, but in the game that you played with ODU against Virginia Tech last year, you went off for five receptions, 122 yards. What was it about Virginia Tech that made you say after that, hey, this is something I want to be a part of, and I want to be on this side of this game and doing things in the maroon and orange?

ALI JENNINGS: First off, I want to say I'm sorry to my coach and my teammates now about that last year (laughter), but it was really my visit. It was the first visit I took when I entered the portal and just getting around a few of the players, getting around the support staff and the coaches, and the environment, it was just addictive.

When you walk in the facility and everybody is greeting you and you see how high energy everyone is and how much everyone enjoys being around each other, it just hooked me. That was one of the big things I wanted to go to when I chose my new school.

When I was there, I was, like, I don't want to leave this place, and it was close to home for my family to come see my games. So that was definitely big for me.

Q. Coach spoke on the relationships of this team, and he spoke about he wants you to want to be here. What can you say about the overall continuity of this team and you coming in with this?

ALI JENNINGS: It's funny. I was just talking to Coach Pry about this last night over dinner. As most of you know, I've been a few places, but this environment here, it's the most tight-knit, family-oriented place I've been. You see guys coming in every day, staying long hours even after the mandatory meetings and workouts are done, doing whatever they can to help better each other, better

themselves, and the team.

It's just something that you see a part of the culture that's, like, man, I see the trend that we're going in. I'm liking it, and I want to be a part of it.

Everybody loves being around each other. Everybody is having fun together. Everybody is working hard together. Everybody is bringing each other along, so I can't wait to see how everything works out for us this season.

Q. Kind of going off of that, just what you see brewing for this offense this season at Virginia Tech?

ALI JENNINGS: I see it being a fun year watching us this year. I like everything that Coach Bowen is about. He is aggressive. He is very smart. Like just talking to him about different concepts and how he wants us to play and things that he sees for us. It's going to be exciting to be in it, and hopefully we make it exciting for everyone to watch because we have a lot of good players, returning players and new guys.

The receiver room is insane. This is the deepest receiver room I've ever been in. It's going to be fun, and it's going to be -- I feel like it's going to be pretty hard to stop us.

Q. You started off last season on an absolute tear. It wasn't just Virginia Tech, so I know he apologized to you all, but you came through the first five games with nearly 700 yards and six touchdowns. Later on in the season we know you were hobbled a little bit and the injury bug kind of bit you at the end there, but how are you feeling now in terms of how to continue that going through all of next season what does that look like? The second part to that is there a significance to the number zero for you?

ALI JENNINGS: For the first question I am feeling amazing. I am 100% healthy. I'm as strong as I've ever been. I'm the fastest I've ever been. Just the hard work put in this offseason for coming in, rehabilitating, and then getting implemented into the workouts and just going hard every day.

I have my teammates pushing me. I have my coaches pushing me and the training room. I thank you to all my trainers that helped me to rehabilitate and get back to where I was before I got injured.

Now it's time for me to take it to another level and help bring my team along and the receiver room especially. I'm excited about it because this is going to be a good year for us.

What was your second question, again?

Q. The significance of number zero.

ALI JENNINGS: I'm kind of making it a significant thing for me. I got it two and a half years ago. My first year at Old Dominion. I've always wore No. 13. I always wore double digits, and leaving West Virginia and going to ODU was supposed to be like a restart for me, like a full reset without anything on my mind. Just going in and resetting and just starting my career over. Every time you count, you start at zero. I'm just taking that along with me.

THE MODERATOR: Last question from the podium. You grew up a Hokie fan. Have you taken yourself to the first game yet and what it's going to be like coming out underneath "Enter Sandman?"

ALI JENNINGS: Yes, I did grow up a Hokie fan. My entire family, we used to come to the games. We have friends and family members that play for the Hokies.

And I can't wait for the first game to run out of the tunnel with my teammates and coaches and actually get that feeling of a night game. Our first game is a night game. I'm excited about that.

And just running out of that tunnel hearing "Enter the Sandman" and seeing all of our fans there in a packed-out stadium ready to go after putting in a year's long worth of hard work and going to show off what we've done and how we've bettered this team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. You can switch places with the old man.

Josh, you're up. Five years now Josh has been with the program. We have about five minutes for him as he brings the lunch pail up. Questions for Josh.

Q. What can you tell me about your outlook for the defense, where the unit is strong and maybe where there are some questions that still need to be addressed?

JOSH FUGA: Just like Coach Pry said, very fast, very powerful, very elusive. We are obviously disappointed on our performance as a team last year, so one of the ways of really getting back to how Virginia Tech was, was to be fast, elusive, and powerful. That's something that we are ready for and for everybody to expect from us.

Q. We had a couple of questions about NIL, but I want to talk about you making a difference in the community. You had an opportunity this offseason to

impact the southwest Virginia through The Hokie Way with the Life Ring -- excuse me, The Hokie Way and Life Ring to support pediatric cancer and the Boys and Girls Club in the Eastmont Community Foundation. How has that impacted you, and what really led you to pursue something like that?

JOSH FUGA: Oh, man. Just to hear about it and the thought of it blew my mind. My aunt's mom, I call her Grandma Yvonne, she passed away from lung cancer. So just to hear what the Life Ring Foundation was doing and the NIL that's involved with it, I had no -- it was a no-brainer to hop on.

In order to honor my grandmother and to help those children that are in need, I couldn't say no to it. I immediately jumped on board, and I was full throttle. Let's do this, man. Whatever they need, if I have to show up, I'll show up. Whatever, they need something written, I'll write something. Whatever they need, I want those kids and those families to know that I'm standing there with them and they're not alone.

Q. Obviously we know the history of the lunch pail, but you're holding it right now. Just bring me into your connection to it and how you're bringing it into the season?

JOSH FUGA: Yeah. Brought it up here because, you know, it's back. We're back. Virginia Tech is back.

But I'm blessed and fortunate enough to be the bearer of the lunch pail. As I was saying all day, when is Coach Pry and the staff, Coach Marve, they instilled the mindset of the standard is excellence. This lunch pail is the standard of the institution. It's the standard of the program.

It's excellence. So what's in this lunch pail is excellence. Like I said before, I'm more than blessed to be the bearer of it. When everybody sees it, they have nothing but respect for it because they know what it is, they know what went through the history of Virginia Tech, and it's excellence for the standard.

The standard is excellence, and that's what this whole defense and this whole team is trying to uphold, which is excellence all around the ball through all three phases of football.

Q. You are a player that has -- we've talked about Coach Price and all that he is. We see Coach Pry's personality popping through here. What's it like to have coaches who not only have played your position, but that have coached your position, and have the personalities that they do because, you know, we

know that defensive line coaches aren't necessarily known for that. What does that feel like for you?

JOSH FUGA: It feels amazing. Just how Ali alluded to it, when you walk in the building, man, it's nothing but good vibes. I'm a family-oriented guy, and Coach Pry and the whole staff have done a phenomenal job since they got here of making that the vibe. That this is a family place.

You can have hard conversations, and there's nothing -- there's no emotions to it. It's a hard conversation. You have to be able to have a hard conversation, but then also, you can also sit back and talk whatever about anything. You can laugh, joke with anybody in that building, and it means a lot. You don't want to be uptight every day like, oh, man, I got to do this, I got to do that.

No, you want to be loose, have fun a little bit, and then when it's time to go, it's time to go.

THE MODERATOR: Josh, thank you. Virginia Tech, good luck this season.

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