

**Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Game 1 West Virginia – Media Conference
August 28, 2017**

Opening statement

“Obviously today is the first day of school, so I want to welcome everybody back to Virginia Tech. The kids (players) are off today and we will get into our normal routine tomorrow. We kind of had a good dress rehearsal this weekend, things went well and guys handled it well. We are starting to get our legs back and you can tell there is a little more spring in our step. I know you guys have seen the depth chart. The thing I will tell you is the guys you see that are second, have a chance to play probably quite a bit. Things can always change. We wrapped up a very productive camp and we are anxious to get ready to play West Virginia and our travels to DC.”

On what the week looks like with playing on Sunday instead of Saturday:

“Usually, when we play the first game or coming off a bye week and we have a little bit longer preparation, we will have our big practice on a Sunday and then have Monday off then our Tuesday will be like our Wednesday and we’ll have an extra non-padded practice when we have a long week of preparation leading up to the game. So, we have taken that schedule and have bumped it to tomorrow. So, we’ll have a non-padded practice later in the week, so our Tuesday and Wednesday practices will be the same as a normal prep week, we’ll just have an extra day in there with no pads.”

On what he has saw in Kyle Chung and Braxton Pfaff to name them starters and if the injury to Tyrell Smith was a factor:

“Well, first of all it hampered him [Smith] a little bit during camp, but he did a great job of battling through it, he’s good to go. I’m certainly not down on Tyrell [Smith], I would anticipate he’ll have a huge role in what we are doing. Kind of a product of that is we moved Kyle [Chung] out there and he’s always been an athletic guy for us and really took to it pretty well. That’s the way we are rolling right now, but I’ve been pleased with his work there. At tackle, Braxton [Pfaff] has been really consistent. He’s played quite a bit just over his time, never as full-time starter, but has gotten significant game reps through his career – and he’s been the most consistent guy there at right guard.”

On what will be going through his head moments before the first game:

“Probably all of those things, I mean you’ve got a little bit of everything going on. We do some live special teams work, which helps temper your fears when you covering the very first kick of the year or when you’re trying to return the first kick of the year. But there’s no substitute for game experience. It takes a little while for guys to get into game shape. I don’t know if it is because of the anxiety that goes with playing early in the year or what it is. It just seems like after the third week guys are more settled into it and can play some more snaps in a row or could do maybe a little more on special team. We try to take that into consideration early in the year, which leads to some more young guys getting out there. But when you kick it off to start

the season on a fantastic stage against a great opponent, you can't help but feel all of those emotions as the ball kicks off."

On how far cornerback Bryce Watts has progressed to being the fourth corner:

"I've been really pleased with Bryce [Watts] and his ability to maintain throughout camp. You know, sometimes you see those young guys hit a wall and their development stalls or maybe they take a step backwards because it's just more than maybe they are ready to handle. Bryce has not been that way. He's just continued to get better every single day. We all know he can really run and he was a productive player on both sides of the ball in high school. The thing that sticks out is his ability to continue to do it every single day. Those top three guys are the top three guys at corner, but we are feeling more comfortable with Bryce every practice."

On having 11 redshirt and true freshmen on the two-deep and if there is any uneasiness with that going into the opener:

"Well, certainly I think you always feel a little bit better when you got guys that have been out there before. But they all said they wanted to play when we were recruiting them, so here's their opportunity. That's what I tell them too, 'I sat in your living room and you told me you wanted to play.' So, it's not good enough at Virginia Tech just to play, but play well. Sure, there's some young guys that will be going out there for the first time, but hopefully we've done a great job training them and they will be ready to contribute in an efficient manner."

On with AJ Bush being the backup quarterback, if they will redshirt Hendon Hooker:

"Well, I just think we'll see as the season goes on. At that position, it is obviously very different than any other position on the field. In my mind, we've always handled it with a plan starting out and then we talk about very scenarios on what could happen and what we are going to do during those scenarios. And then those may change from week to week based on Hendon's [Hooker] continued development, based on AJ's [Bush] development and all those sorts of things. So, we'll just have to see and take it one step at a time."

On if D.J. Reid will have an opportunity to come back with being away for personal reasons:

"No and just to clarify D.J.'s [Reid] situation, he's just dealing with some things that he needs to go handle. He is certainly on scholarship and all of those sorts of things. There's just some things he needs to go handle there, football needs to be way down the list for priorities for him right now."

On how James Clark worked his way into being the starting kick returner:

"Well, he's really fast. He is a senior, he's an older guy. Kind of like Mook [Reynolds], he's an older guy and a trustworthy guy. We feel good about both of those guys. James [Clark] has been consistent throughout practice, that's what we talk about all the time at all of our positions. Every day at practice is an audition to earn your teammates and coaches' trust. And every day at practice you either add to that trust or you take away from that trust. Our time with James, he's added to that trust."

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Defensive Coordinator Bud Foster Q&A Highlights
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Opening Statement

“Really excited to get started, it’s been a long camp but I’m looking forward to kicking this thing off. Excited about the opportunity to play West Virginia, it’s been a while. This is my 20th time being involved in this game. A lot of great memories some big football games, some important football games. These programs parallel each other in a lot of ways as far as the blue collar mentality, the toughness of the kids. Got a lot of respect for this program who we’re about to play but I’m excited that this rivalry is kicking back off again. I know we are planning on playing again down the road. We’re excited to get started and see where we are in this version of 2017 Virginia Tech football.”

On memories that stand out against West Virginia:

“Well there’s a lot of good memories and a lot of tough losses as I said, we’ve had some great wins on this series, we’ve had some real disappointments, as well. Obviously some of the fond memories are the first time we beat them on a goal line stand with Major Harris I can’t remember how long ago it was (1989). It was a big win for our program as we were in the early Beamer era. Then obviously we had a big win up there in Morgantown that kind of catapulted us to the national championship. But there’s a lot of other games, we had some tough losses here at home, we’ve had some dynamic wins up there. But I know this, you go back in history there’s been a couple games here and there that were lopsided but you go back to those scores, there’s a lot of low scoring type football games. That is a rivalry. I think the last 33 times we’ve played they’ve won 17 and we’ve won 16 and that is a rivalry when you’ve got both teams competing and having a chance to win. That’s what these games have been.”

On getting the team to understand since they haven’t played West Virginia before:

“Well you got to give them a little bit of a history lesson and let them know that there’s a line drawn in the sand so to speak or in the dirt you know when it comes to playing these guys. As far as particularly from the fan base, I think they’re probably because of the histories of the program, they might have a little bit more knowledge and awareness of the players. I know where I live, I’m surrounded by Mountaineers and there will be blue and gold flying around for a year or more you know. Depending on the outcome of that game, I’ll fly my (VT) flag pretty proudly, but there is an excitement about this game and basically myself Charley (Wiles) is involved in a few of them and Ryan Shuman spoke from a playing standpoint. Yeah, this has been, I want the kids to understand this has been a true rivalry. There is an expectation of how to play the game when these two play as far as a tough hardnosed, physical football game and I don’t expect it to be any different this year.”

On pointing to the 1989 game as when the rivalry began:

“Well I don’t know if I can point to that because I think prior to that, Virginia Tech and West Virginia had played for a long time prior to that. I think the rivalry was already established but I think West Virginia was at a point in their program where they were I think at a level above where we were as aspired to be. I’m just talking everything from their stadium to their facilities to where they were in the rankings and those type of things. If we wanted to get to that point we needed to beat somebody like that so yeah that was a big game and us taking that next step or towards that next step to where we wanted to go as a program.”

On West Virginia running backs and the possibility of defending six different ones:

“Well, we haven’t seen all of them. We’ve only seen a couple. So they’ve got guys that redshirted, were brought in, that type of thing. The thing that we’ve got to see, I think they’re down a bit as far as receivers go and I think maybe that’s where you’re going to see a lot more running backs. So what role will those running backs be? Will they be what we call 20 personnel where there’s two backs and no tight end but with that, will they be into four wide receivers and bring them in motion and run those types of things? Those are all things that our offense does, those are all things that we’ve prepared for and seen, it’s just we’ve got to see what and plan for what their plan of attack is going to be and how they use those guys. Generally speaking when you’ve got that many backs, you can’t play them all at one time, so I’m sure they’re going to get touches and probably go with the guy that’s hot if one gets that way. My thought is if they’re going to use a lot of backs it’s going to be because they’re short receivers. They are not a multiple back team. They’re a one back offense and they will get it occasionally get into some multiple backs but you know if they do, we’ve got a plan for that.”

On West Virginia running back Justin Crawford:

“I just think they do a great job in their game planning, seeing what the defense will give them and taking advantage of it. Obviously he has a dynamic skill set. You’re not at this level as an athlete if you’re not gifted in some form or fashion. I also think that part of what makes West Virginia good is Dana (Holgersen) and (offensive coordinator) Jake Spavital they’re going to, like our offense and today’s offense, spread you out. They’re going to take what you give them and try to, you know create big plays. We’ve always been that way, limit their explosive plays from that standpoint.”

On whether the opponent and their offensive scheme adds to defense’s anticipation for the season:

“I mean, we are very excited about opening up. That’s the unique thing about college football, we do scrimmage but we scrimmage each other. There’s no preseason game, we don’t get to scrimmage an opponent like high school so to speak. You know high school programs do, so there’s a lot of question marks and I’m anxious to get started. Our scheme defensively and our personnel, we have some experience back but we have some guys that are stepping up into roles that maybe last year they were backups and were a big part in what we did last year. Maybe not as big a part as what they will have this year. That’s always going to be interesting to see how they handle that, and particularly early in this game there’s going to be a lot of excitement, we need to take a deep breath and just get down to playing the game and sometimes that excitement, that anticipation can wear you out a little bit early but we’ve got to

be able to respond to that. But I'm excited to get started, I'm excited to play a big time opponent in West Virginia. It's going to be a great measuring stick for us to see where we are, you know particularly in the first game of the season. Where we are and then what we need to do to get better."

On emotions right before kickoff of the first game of the year:

"Thankfully I still have emotions after this many years of being in it and that's why I'm still in it. Yeah, I mean the hair stands up on the back of my neck and there's that excitement. There's also, you don't know for sure what you're going to see that first snap. There's a lot of things going on, but from an emotional standpoint, yeah I mean you're just in it for the kids. We live vicariously as coaches through these guys and I'm really excited for them I'd like to think that they're a part of an extension of us too, so I'm hoping we will play with controlled recklessness with a lot of emotional enthusiasm and an unmatched effort and attitude and that's kind of my thoughts prior to that game. Kind of, in 15 seconds that's what we'll do"

On scouting West Virginia quarterback Will Grier:

"Yeah, we went back and looked at some Florida game film of the fall, a little bit of the spring game that we could see. You know he's a talented guy, you're not a quarterback at this level, you talk the University of Florida and then now here at West Virginia, if you're not a quality athlete, a quality competitor. He's got a live arm, he's consistent, you know he's had enough practice time I think to knock the rust off but there's a difference between practicing and you know all of a sudden playing in front of 90,000. What I've seen, he's a quality football player and a tremendous competitor and a guy that's got a lot of skills and just a quality, quality football player."

On Brandon Facyson being listed behind Adonis Alexander on the depth chart at cornerback:

"I mean, Adonis is number one right now, he's number one on both sides. He's had a great camp, great summer. You know Brandon has practiced and we fully expect him to be ready to go, but I just think that's where Adonis is, it's not so much where Brandon is as it is where Adonis is and what he's done. I still feel like we've got three really good quality corners and we have three of them in my eyes."

On having some many younger players on the depth chart:

"I wouldn't say there's nerves, I just think that that's always a concern, let me just say or a question mark about how these guys are going to play the first time, but that's why you practice. It's time for the test so to speak. You have to now step up and be ready to go, and that's part of the process. It's part of the process in all sports. You're going to have some young players but I think that's the one thing we do have, we've got a good mix of experience, you have some of those young players played a small role last year in our success. A lot of guys when I look back at like a Trevon Hill or a Tim Settle, those guys might have played 20-25 plays a game, now all of a sudden are going to be playing 45-55 plays a game. Their role is going to become much more significant and them being able to handle that role besides the young guys who are in a backup situation, those are the questions we've got to answer for this first

ballgame, how those guys will handle number of plays and they'll handle their new role so to speak within our defense."

On the honorary captains – Frank Beamer & Don Nehlen:

"With this game and having like I said the utmost respect for this program. A lot of it goes back to our days of playing against Coach Nehlen and his staff. They are, in my opinion, couldn't be better gentlemen to be the captains as far as obviously Coach Beamer and what he's done for us and this program and what he's meant to Virginia Tech and same for Coach Nehlen. What he meant to West Virginia, to the program, what he meant to the state, of West Virginia and how he conducted himself and their program so professional and just like I said, couldn't be two better gentlemen and coaches, but more important better gentlemen to be captains for this game."

On Virginia Tech playing at FedEx Field and past struggles of the Hokies playing there:

"No, no, obviously all three were great football games. When you go back and look at the games, it comes back down to us executing when it's all said and done. I know the Southern Cal game, could've gone either way, they went on to win a national championship. A dynamic football team, maybe one of the best we ever played but we had a chance to win that football game. Same with Boise, they were a top five ranked team. We had a lot of question marks that year and ended up losing to JMU the next week but reeled off 10 straight wins. We spotted those guys, we didn't execute some things early. Not just on defense, it was on the offensive side, turned it over and we had a blocked kick. The Cincinnati game, that was a tough loss because we gave up a play at the very end but it was a play the week before the exact play, that we got a pick from. You know, we just didn't execute it. You know that has nothing to do with the stadium, it has something to do with how we perform and how we play. Those first two games were first two games of the year if I'm not mistaken, so those were some really tight ballgames against some really great opponents and if we execute just a little bit better, we got a chance to win both of those games. But in both of those years, I will say that, we won the ACC, so it's a great measuring stick for us and we had a chance to win both of those games against quality people."