

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Game 7 – North Carolina Media Conference
Oct 16, 2017

Opening Statement

“Got everybody back yesterday, enjoyed the bye week. Got some things done some guys rested. Had a good workout yesterday preparing for North Carolina, treated it like a Tuesday. The kids are back off today as we’re fine tuning the game plan and doing all of those sorts of things. We’ll be back ready to go for the rest of the week to play North Carolina here. I know their record is not what they want it to be. They’ve certainly faced their share of adversity and I know they’ll be anxious and ready to play this weekend so we’ve got to do the same.”

On going to the pumpkin patch with the family:

“It was good, it was fun. The girls had a good time we had a good time. Came home for naps watched a little football and reveled in the joy of letting someone sweat out third and five, whether to punt or go for it and all of that type of good stuff.”

On using the bye week to self scout:

“Sure, I think we set out objectives to accomplish during the week. One of them is to take a good look at ourselves in all three phases of the game, what we’re doing well what we’re not doing well. If there is anything we can do to help those things, tendencies so on and so forth, we take some good time there. Along with focusing on some key teaching or scheme points to make through the week and also a little bit of preparing for the next opponent.”

On whether he worries about the coverage teams remaining engaged due to the success so far of K Joey Slye and P Oscar Bradburn:

“Well, I think more so on kickoff than punt. It’s a constant message to our guys on our kickoff coverage team is that we can’t take it for granted, we can’t relax. We may play in some windy conditions as you get later in the year, but you just can’t take it for granted. Our guys have done a good job of that, I think they’re eager to cover kicks. The way I’ve seen them cover the couple that have returned I think they’re anxious to get those opportunities. I think (coaches) James Shibest and Brian Mitchell do a great job of keeping those guys on edge and continuing to focus on our fundamentals in terms of covering those kicks.

“I don’t hear us bring that up as much on punt just because it doesn’t take much for one gunner to get held up or a punt to be not as high and all of a sudden you have a return opportunity but we have done a good job and we will have to do those things. In my mind just looking at our team at the midway point, for us to give ourselves the chance to win we’re going to have to do all of those little things. As we continue through the season in terms of winning the first position battle. We won a game or two in our first six games not only because of the field position battle, but it played a huge role in us being able to win; particularly the first game. Us continuing to emphasize and accomplish those things whether it’s downing punts in the Red Zone or eliminating return yards is going to be huge for us moving forward.”

On whether it was fortunate for the bye week to come when it did with some players having sustained injuries:

“Well the thing I would tell you is yeah it did come at a good time. We’re still working through a decent number of guys that are, I guess day-to-day is the best way to say it. Particularly at our offensive skill positions. I’m not really sure who’s going to play on Saturday, quite honestly. None of them are major things, we usually tell you guys when we have big huge season ending or things like that. None of them are like that but we’re just dealing with a bunch of those right now and that’s part of football and part of the season and what we’ve got to get moving forward. I’m certainly not complaining about it, I’m just telling you that there’s a handful of guys that are like that. They’re going to practice some and rest some and practice some and see if we can manage it the best we can.”

On whether would be Cam Phillips be a part of that group:

“Yes”

On Phil Patterson potentially returning to practice after the bye week:

“He is and I’ll put him in that group of guys. In my opinion it’s important for Phil (Patterson), it’s important to Phil (Patterson) for him to make it back. He wants to go play and play at a high level and wants to do it as quickly as possible. We’ve been pleased with him and his progress or his urgency to get back it’ll just be a matter of, some of it or most of it is out of your control how his body feels moving forward.”

On whether UNC having played two quarterbacks makes it more difficult to prepare:

“Well I think they have similar skill sets is what would say just looking at them. I know they made the change last week and it’ll be interesting to see what they do moving forward. I feel like in general terms they’re running the same offense with both guys Both of them are athletic guys, they’re not afraid to run the football. I think just big picture wise they’re pretty similar in their skill sets.”

On whether last year’s game film against UNC in Hurricane Matthew is pretty limited in value due to the weather conditions:

“That was a pretty extreme game, I mean I don’t know. Certainly, to my knowledge we’re not preparing for conditions like that. So I don’t how much good that video does for either side. It was just such a unique situation and we’ve talked about it before, that was in the past and it was unique situation so not much.”

On burning Drake Deluliis’s redshirt:

“Well to the best of our ability we really felt like, first of all we we’re in the situation in the game two weeks ago where we didn’t have a lot of a choice but we had been preparing him for that. He has been working on the outside, long term I think he’s going to be a tight end but he has a unique skill set. I would prefer but sometimes it’s beyond our control. I would prefer, obviously the later you get in the season to not burn those guys but our plan for him when we did decide to play him was that he would continue to play a role. It wasn’t just throwing him there to block a couple guys. We feel good about him and his development.”

On what are the strengths of UNC and how does make sure the team doesn’t overlook them:

“Well you don’t have to look at the film very long to realize that they have good players they’re very well coached. Now they’ve had some hard luck but when you look at their defensive line and their skill players on offense you know if you’re not in the right gap or you’re not coming of the ball the right way they can make you look pretty bad pretty quickly, I don’t think that’ll be an issue. We have a tremendous amount of respect for Coach (Larry) Fedora and the program they have at North Carolina

and the history and the talent that they have on that roster, so they certainly have our guys full attention.”

On whether this game factors more heavily into the recruitment of players from North Carolina:

“Well I’m sure it does but to me I don’t, if I was advising an 18 year old on where to go to school I don’t know that I would stake a large portion of that on one football game. I think there are a lot of other factors that are a lot more important to their happiness and their day-to-day life that doesn’t have to do with what happened on one particular Saturday for four hours. I’m sure in their minds there is an element of that but ultimately you’re making a decision about where you’re going to go to school and who you’re going to play for and the program you’re going to represent. To me one game shouldn’t define that one way or the other.”

On whether RB Travon McMillian will continue to get a majority of the carries or will it still be running back by committee:

“Well, we’ll see. Part of that was because Steven (Peoples) wasn’t able to play a couple weeks ago. Part of it was because Travon (McMillian) was playing well and taking care of the football. I certainly anticipate that he’ll be the guy that runs out there this week and if continues to play well then he’ll continue to stay in there. That doesn’t mean if he makes one mistake he’s never going to play again, that’s not what I’m saying. Some of it is where we’re at in the season and who is available and some of it is, I think playing well is really important to Travon (McMillian) and we appreciate his work ethic and how he’s tried to approach things.”

On whether Sean Savoy is back with the team and how is he holding up:

“Yes he’s back. I would say as well as could be expected, is how I would characterize that. I don’t want to put words in Sean’s (Savoy) mouth but I do think it’s somewhat therapeutic to get back around his friends and his teammates. Those of us that have been through things like that or can only imagine what it’s like to go through things like that. It’s going to take time and Sean knows that we’re here for him and whatever he needs and that we genuinely love and care about him and want to help be the best at everything he does but also know that he’s going through a lot of emotions that come with something like that.”

On what it will take to be successful during the second half of the season:

“Sure it’s a tremendous challenge moving forward looking at our league, particularly our side (Coastal Division). First of all I would say our schedule was somewhat symmetrical in terms on non-conference games and then two conference games, both from the other division and then now our straight run of inter division play and I think anything can happen. To me it’s going to be about our ability to grind it out every single week. I don’t think there’s going to be anybody that is that much better than anybody else. As we go through time that may prove to be different, there may be a team or two that is quite a bit better than everyone else I don’t know yet. Every single week is going to be hard, it’s going to be really difficult. We’ve got to have enough grit and determination to do the little things week in and week out to give ourselves a chance to win so I’m anxious for it. I don’t know how it’s all going to go. I know we’ve got to do in terms of all the little things like the turnover battle and winning field position to give this group that we have this year the best chance to win.”

On what he stresses to the team to keep the turnovers down:

“I think the first thing is we have adjusted a slight tweak in technique that I think has been good. We’ve made it a huge point of emphasis, not just in our drill work but in our team settings. I think the guys have embraced that part of it. Maybe we’ve done a little better job as coaches drilling it into them not

just during drill work but during big team settings and then we've been able to create a little bit of depth. I think guys know that it's tied to playing time. I think guys know that for us to have a chance to win this has to happen and if you want to stay on the field you certainly need to take care of ball and I think Josh (Jackson) deserves some credit for it. Josh (Jackson) has been pretty judicious in his decision making and done a pretty good job of taking care of the ball."