

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Weekly Media Conference
Oct. 30, 2017

Opening statement:

“Thanks to everyone that came out Saturday. I hope everybody has dried out and enjoyed themselves. It was a pretty cool atmosphere. The weather I know was a little bit rough. I thought both the fans and the team grew stronger as the weather grew worse. We have a tremendous challenge this week, obviously going on the road to Miami. Before we get into all that I just want to say, I don’t know if y’all saw but Coach McDermott of the Buffalo Bills gave Logan Thomas a game ball after the game the other day and I just want to make sure that Logan and his family know that everyone here and the Hokie family has him and his family in our thoughts and prayers as they go through a really tough time. That was a pretty neat move and neat reaction, maybe more importantly by his teammates. All that being said, we know we have a tremendous challenge as a football team this week to go on the road and play a very athletic, well-coached and undefeated Miami team at their place. We had a good workout yesterday, the kids are obviously off today and I’m hopeful we’ll have a great week of preparation.”

Do you guys have a dehydration protocol or is there something you do to try and combat that?

“That’s the best way to combat it. Obviously we can’t simulate that here now, this time of year. I think we do a really good job between our strength and conditioning staff, our medical staff driving that point home of hydrating. Preventative maintenance I guess you could say that will obviously be a focal point.”

Is there something from your past that leads you to teach ball security as such a focal point?

“Well I think the biggest thing is statistically speaking its still one of the biggest determining factors of winning and losing games. Last year for us was kind of an anomaly in terms of taking care of the ball and still winning games, or not taking care of the ball. If you look at the games we won versus the games we lost, there’s a huge discrepancy. We have always taught the techniques, done the drill work, I just think maybe during team emphasis we’ve done a better job of emphasizing it and they’re beginning to understand it. Maybe there is a realization of how important it is, maybe there’s some pride in taking care of the ball that maybe was a little bit lacking. I’m not positive, you’d have to have the players answer that one. The biggest thing is, to me it’s one of the most important statistics and obviously this week we’re playing a team that, if I’m not mistaken leads the ACC in turnover margin and has done fantastic job of taking the ball away and taking care of the football.”

Miami has a turnover chain; do they seem to get really ‘up’ whenever they get a turnover?

“On the coach’s films they don’t have the turnover chain, its only on the TV copies and I haven t seen very many TV copies. I’ve heard some people talk about it and that sort of stuff but by all

accounts, this would be a third person account, but by all accounts they do get excited about it and you know something they take pride in. They understand the importance of taking care of the ball and taking the ball away and probably one of the biggest reasons they are in the situation that they're in right now."

Miami recruits well and has a ton of talent, are they similar to facing Clemson?

"Well I think so. When you look at the North Carolina game last week with Miami and its back and forth and then all of a sudden if I'm not mistaken, I think it was the first play of the half, they ran a post for a huge 75-yard touchdown just like that. They can flip the field or make a big play. They look like what Miami should look like. They're big and athletic and well-coached and certainly have guys that can make big plays on you if you're not careful."

How is Yosuah Nijman?

"Yeah I would say it's kind of like Steven (Peoples). It's just going to be a day-to-day thing. We're hopeful that he will be able to go, kind of like Steve. Probably workout some and rest some and workout some and rest some and see how it goes."

How did Parker Osterloh do when he filled in for Nijman in the second quarter?

"I thought he did a good job, I really did. I was proud of him. It's nice to have him back. We haven't talked much about him, just all of the things that he's been through to try and get back this season, it's been a long journey for him and it was nice obviously that he's back and secondly we called upon him and he was ready to go play. I'm awfully happy, he's obviously a guy we trust."

What was the thought process on not kicking long field goals?

"I don't know that I'd read too much into my thoughts on our kicker in terms of our decisions. We're in that kind of area where we haven't been incredibly efficient kicking field goals, those longer areas and we have a fourth and manageable situation, I just felt like our defense was – we've got a lot of confidence in our defense, sometimes you can be a little more aggressive in those situations when you're playing well on defense or you feel good about your defense. I'd say it was combination of several of those things that we felt better going for it."

Did you get the look you wanted, it looked like the throw was there?

"I wish I could tell you which play you were talking about. I know there was one that got batted down, I don't know if that's the one you were talking about that was going to be a big play if it hadn't been batted down. The defensive lineman made a good play. I think we had a decent look there, I think Josh (Jackson) was being kind of careful with the football, which I'm ok with, just the ball in a little bit different spot and we would've had a shot."

Since Miami has lost Mark Walton how have they replaced him and are they operating at the same efficiency?

"Well anytime you lose a player of the caliber it makes it difficult. I think they've done a fantastic job of picking up the slack. All that being said, he was I would say the best player that they had. He was really electric and they went out of their way to find different ways to get him

the football. Definitely getting him involved in the passing game and the running game. I've seen them kind of collectively pick up the slack. They've got some young wide receivers plugged in there. The slot receiver is a heck of a receiver and obviously through the running game they put another guy back there towards the end of the game. I see them as a group doing a pretty good job of filling in for him."

Is the running game starting to look the way you want it to or is it still a work in progress?

"Yeah, I'd say like the whole football team is. We're always nitpicking and trying to find different ways to try different ways for us to give ourselves a chance at success. I'd like to make the safety in the hole miss a few more times if we could. We've been able to get the ball to the unmarked hat at times, and at times on Saturday. Eventually you're going to have times where we're going to run into somebody that we can't block and we we're able to get the ball to that person on a little bit more consistent basis last week. I'd like to see us make some bigger plays out of those. But, yeah I like where we're headed. Certainly the weather was a factor in terms of managing the game but I'd put the running game in there like everything else, continuing to try and improve and get a little better."

How do you think Wyatt Teller has played this year?

"I would put that whole group, along with everybody else on alert after the North Carolina game. We made no bones about it we we're not pleased, Wyatt included. I'm not singling Wyatt out but just in general as a group, it was unsatisfactory two weeks ago and last week was much better. Wyatt would be included with that, I think he had his best game last week, he answered the challenge which is certainly what you want. Hopefully as a group and Wyatt individually, they will continue to accept the challenge."

What was so good about Wyatt's performance?

"He just played harder, played tougher and in my estimation we just did not do that in any position."

How did you feel about Osterloh jumping in for Nijman?

"I think he did a good job. Obviously we trust him. He's the first guy we grab to go throw in there. It's good to have him back, he's been through a lot in terms of just trying to get healthy and get back out on the field. Credit to him, he was prepared in terms of when he was healthy enough to start practicing again, he didn't have huge strides to make in terms of his conditioning level and those sorts of things. I thought he played well."

Is Osterloh your unofficial sixth lineman? Could he play at guard?

"He certainly could play guard, absolutely."

Are you concerned about your defensive line and the backups in particular?

"Well, I would say probably the same as I've said all year. Those first two guys are really really good players and we're continuing to try and grow up some guys that haven't played at that same level. (Jarrod) Hewitt has made the most strides and is closest to those other guys but that's where we're at."