

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Brent Pry

Silas Dzansi

Dax Hollifield

Kaleb Smith

Press Conference



This thing was the right time and the right place for me, for my family. It was important that what the administration division for where this program needed to go aligned with what I thought. I've always been close to this program. I left. I was here in '95, '96, and '97, and I've stayed obviously keeping a watchful eye on it. It was important to me the vision and the direction that the administration, that Whit and those guys believed needed happen was aligned with what I thought.

The welcome has been awesome. We're certainly moving in the right direction.

THE MODERATOR: You did mention that you were in Blacksburg from '95 to '97. Must have seemed like a lifetime ago. What have you learned about football in all of those years?

BRENT PRY: I've had the great fortune of working with some unbelievable coaches. I left Virginia Tech and went to Western Carolina for a run and then went to Louisiana Lafayette with Rickey Bustle, who was a long-time coordinator in Blacksburg. Had the good fortune to work for Tommy West at the University of Memphis. Jeff Monken at Georgia Southern, and then James Franklin.

I've been around great folks. A bunch of first-year head coaches. Learned a lot. Son of a college football coach, 45 years. So it's kind of just in your blood. Certain things come easy. I do believe this is my calling, and I'm in the right place.

Q. Coming from Penn State, like you just spoke about, recently with all the realignment and different changes and movement we're seeing in collegiate athletics, how do you look at that as a head coach knowing that there is some uncertainty as to the shifting and what's going to happen and geographical barriers really don't matter anymore?

BRENT PRY: For us I've always been taught you worry about what you can control. That's where your focus is.

What we can do is what's best for Virginia Tech. I love our

Q. Coach, when you look at a league that has the depth of quarterback talent that the ACC has, what challenge does that present to your defense?

BRENT PRY: It's a great question. I think this is a heck of a quarterback league. The film I've watched and the literature I've read, I don't know that there's more depth at that position in any other league in the country. So we've got our work cut out for us.

Our scheme is designed to put pressure on the quarterback. We're going to be aggressive. We're going to change looks and make it hard for the decisionmaker, make it tough on the play caller and the decisionmaker. We're kind of built that way, but this is a heck of a league for quarterbacks.

Q. You've been an assistant for a while, and you said it had to be the right fit to make you change that and become a head coach. What is it about Virginia Tech that just made this the right place for you to make that move?

BRENT PRY: It's a great question. What is it about Virginia Tech? It's a special place. It's not for everybody, but it was definitely for me. It was for these guys. It's a genuine place. Didn't have to pretend to be somebody wasn't.

We're going to do a great job of recruiting young men and families that identify with Virginia Tech and what's unique to us. We've got a great degree. We've got a great relationship with our community. We've got unbelievable game day environment. We're a blue collar outfit. What you see is what you get. We're relationship-based.



brand. I don't know where else in the country, what other conference offers everything that the ACC does: Great academics, great climate, great cities, great rivalries, great talent. To me it's a rare combination that I don't think you get in any other leagues.

I've been in the SEC, and I've been in the Big Ten. I love what we have to offer. I've got tremendous faith in our Commissioner and our ADs and our presidents. They're very engaged in this. I expect big things. I feel very confident.

Q. A new development today just a couple of hours ago as the D-I Council is recommending that all restrictions get taken off the transfer portal. The players can transfer as many times as they want to or need to, as long as they meet academic requirements. Does that make your job harder, maintaining your roster and numbers, knowing who is coming and going?

BRENT PRY: Right after NIL, the transfer portal has been next on my list, but we just need some end caps, right? We need some defining -- some calendar dates that make sense so that it gives us a chance to keep the roster in good condition.

I'm all for these guys having opportunities to help themselves, to be in a better situation that fits them, but at the same time to protect our program and our players we need that roster to be healthy and to do that we need some endpoints.

Q. Coach, what has impressed you about the guys who decided to stick around under your new leadership?

BRENT PRY: I'm sorry. One more time.

Q. What has impressed you about the guys that have decided to return under your new leadership from the past regime?

BRENT PRY: I think these guys are a great example. I couldn't be more proud of them. That's why they're here today with us. Great leaders. A ton of maturity. Have really worked through a lot of adversity. It's not easy to go through a coaching change. Especially one that happens during the season.

My hats off to these guys, and they've embraced myself, our new staff. They've been very positive, very supportive, and that's what it takes. We're in this thing together. We're supporting one another with the task at hand.

We've got really good young men in our program, and I'm excited about the experience and maturity that we have.

THE MODERATOR: From the podium, I realize I'm asking a bit of an open-ended question, but you were part of an electric game-day atmosphere at your last stop. In considering your first head coaching gig, was that home-game game-day atmosphere a variable for you in deciding how it is you were going to progress in your career?

BRENT PRY: The atmosphere is important, but to me it just -- it's part of what makes up what's so special about Virginia Tech. It's got a passionate fan base. A ton of loyalty. There's a real connection between our fans, our community, and our football program, our university.

I wanted a school like that. That was important to me. We're going to be transparent. I'm going to be transparent because we want those fans to feel part of this thing. We want our alumni, our lettermen to be part of this thing.

To do that, I think you have to be transparent.

Q. Virginia Tech had one of the best defenses last year, and seven guys from that defense are back. Knowing what you know about defense, how excited are you about this prospect?

BRENT PRY: We've got a good group. Obviously, as a coach you always -- you love the strengths, but it's our job to identify weaknesses and improve on those. We've done a good job of that this winter and spring. The guys are working their tails off to eliminate weaknesses or improve them.

It's our job as coaches for these guys to reach all of their potential and then some. Every one. 120 guys on the roster. All of them reach their potential, we're going to have a pretty good football team.

That's where our efforts are. I like the guys that are returning on defense. I do think we have a fair amount of experience, but what's more important to me on both sides of the ball, our best players are our leaders and our best workers. When you have that that's usually a pretty good formula.

Looks like the Hokies just got another commitment. Thank you for the heads-up in the back.

THE MODERATOR: I thought they were raising their hand for a question.

BRENT PRY: We just got better, guys. Appreciate the

thumbs-up back there.

Q. Coach, over the years many schools and you know probably well Penn State have come down into Virginia and gotten a lot of great recruits. How important is it for you to basically close the border and how hard of a task is that going to be for you?

BRENT PRY: I obviously know firsthand. It wasn't just Penn State. I was in that car and on those planes. Two of those kids from Virginia came over and saw us here at the hotel last night and this morning. Impact players at Penn State, and Virginia Tech wasn't in the conversation.

We've got to fix that. You get what you emphasize. We're going to recruit the heck out of the state of Virginia. That's very important to me. I saw what it did for Coach Beamer and his staff and his program.

I've always thought that about this place. It's the flagship school in the state of Virginia, but we've got to put the work in. We've got to invest in these coaches. We've got to invest in these schools and these communities, and we're doing that. We started that from day one.

That's going to happen. Right now recruiting for us, it starts in the state of Virginia. There is nobody else that should know more about kids in this state than Virginia Tech. No other program. Not North Carolina. Not Penn State. Not South Carolina. Nobody else is going to know more about these prospects in the state of Virginia than us.

We're not going to win all those battles, but we're going to win some of them. We're just behind the 8-ball right now.

Q. We got a little bit of a taste of the quarterback decision that you're facing with both Grant and Jason in the spring game. Can you talk a little bit about their progress and what sort of decision -- what maybe their strengths and weaknesses are as you are here this last month?

BRENT PRY: I'm excited about the quarterback position. Jason and Grant are both experienced play callers, signal callers. These guys, different kind of path, but what Jason did at the FCS level and then what he did at South Carolina, winning big games in big venues, that's what we would ask him to do here.

Grant Wells was arguably if not the best, one of the best quarterbacks in his conference two years in a row. Both of these guys bring a ton of experience, a lot of maturity. They're leaders. They're workers. They have different skill sets. I'm really excited about both of them. Whichever guy ends up No. 1, we're going to have a hell of a good No. 2

to go along with it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We can switch places now with Silas. Silas, our offensive lineman.

We have about five minutes with Silas. I'll ask your first question from here at the podium. Your opponents registered 30 sacks against the Hokies last year. How do you lower that number this year?

SILAS DZANSI: I mean, probably just working to avoid that this year is watch film and just practice.

Q. Looking at the fact that there's numerous transfers coming into this team and a couple of quarterbacks transferring, and just what can you say about blocking for them, and what it's been like as you head towards the 2022 season of learning their tendencies and whatnot?

SILAS DZANSI: It's definitely been great blocking for both Grant and Jason. I don't really pay attention to what they tend to do. I just kind of block, and they make me right, to be honest. That's about it.

THE MODERATOR: From the podium here again. Last year you started four games at right tackle, two at left guard, one at left tackle. Now, for the average fan that may not be a hard switch to make from week to week. Describe the preparation it takes to balance from one position to the next.

SILAS DZANSI: It definitely was not easy, but just working -- whoever I was next to that week, just working closely with them watching film together, great communication during practice and during the game. It just became kind of easy. Just got used to it, to be honest.

Q. Can you just share what some of the new energy has been around the program since the coaching change for players but also kind of what you are hearing from fans, community? What's the general vibe around the program?

SILAS DZANSI: The vibe has always been what it's always been. As far as players, you know, we've always been a brotherhood, and that's never going to stop. Especially in the O-line room. We're all together in everything that we do.

As far as the team and liking the new coaching staff, everybody loves Coach Pry and his staff. Everybody likes Coach DeeJ in the weight room. I feel like everybody has meshed together extremely well, and we're going to keep working through this fall camp and get ready for the

season.

Q. Jesse Hanson described Coach Rudolph as a genius. How would you describe him, and what's that been like for you having him help you develop?

SILAS DZANSI: Having Coach Rudolph in our room has definitely -- I don't want to be rude, but it's definitely been an upgrade I feel like. He has definitely been teaching us a lot more than what we learned in the past, and on top of that, he is just building on top of what we already know. Especially for myself. I'm already pretty much a seasoned offensive lineman, and I know how to do my technique, I know how to do them right, I know how to block, but he has been teaching me stuff that I didn't know before as far as how to, I guess, do it the right way, I guess.

No, he has definitely been a big help. Definitely a big upgrade. As far as myself, I've seen upgrades in myself, but as far as guys like Jesse Hanson, who have kind of been in the back, I've seen great improvement from him. Crazy improvement from Kaden Moore, Parker Clements, and our young guys that just came in as well.

THE MODERATOR: Silas, how do you know, as an offensive lineman, a lot of the action happens either behind you or to the side of you. How do you know when the play is over that you have done your job or you were successful in helping the play?

SILAS DZANSI: Personally if I'm blocking a guy and he doesn't touch the quarterback or the ball carrier, I know I did my job, and then as far as knowing when to stop, I go to I guess the fourth whistle that I hear, I guess.

Q. You have three members of the offensive line returning, but you've added a lot of new players at every position. At the offensive line as well. How long does it take an offensive line to mesh when you have new guys involved, even though they're skilled, even though they all share the same work ethic? To mesh together, how long does that take to develop?

SILAS DZANSI: I can't speak for all offensive lines, but I know for ours it doesn't take long at all. Like I said before, we're all a brotherhood, so it's just like playing with family. We're going to fight. We're going to get on each other's head a lot, but at the end of the day, we're going to come together because we all have the same goal.

As far as meshing, the more reps you can get, the better you are going to be in practice, outside of practice when it's just us we practice a lot, we watch film. It don't take too long at all.

THE MODERATOR: Your last question here from the podium: We just want you to come clean and admit it, the only reason you're back for a sixth year is just so you can run out to "Enter Sandman" again, right?

SILAS DZANSI: Of course.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Silas. You can switch up with Dax, and we'll bring Dax up for a couple of minutes. Thank you.

Our senior linebacker, Dax Hollifield.

Q. Covered you from years from Shelby High School, the Shelby Pile when you take the field. To go off of "Enter Sandman," how does that compare with the high school days and the old Shelby Dog Pile?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: Shelby, North Carolina and Blackburg, Virginia they're very similar. They have passionate fan bases and they all love football. That's why I love Blacksburg so much. It resonates as home for me personally. I love playing in front of passionate fans, passionate people. It makes the whole thing that much more enjoyable.

Q. Dax, on your social media account you have the last collegiate max of 380, and you have the video of that. Just speak on the weight room, achieving that, and just the energy that's there in the weight room for the Hokies.

DAX HOLLIFIELD: It's been great. The team, I love -- honestly, my favorite part of football is I love the weight room. It's great throwing up weights and having these attainable goals every day and going out there and getting better.

I love the team being brought into the weight room. You can definitely tell people getting things out of it. People getting stronger. Just looking more defined, looking more like football players each and every day, and it's great to see those guys.

The funny thing about that is it's 380, and then I got on Twitter, and there was a guy from NC State, a freshman linebacker, who just pulled 405 the same morning. Man, you guys are showing me up like that. It was crazy. It's pretty good.

Q. Dax, as the leader of this defense, which was one of the best defenses in the league last year, what was your reaction when you found out your new coach was going to be a defensive guy, and not just a defensive guy, but a guy who had helped Frank Beamer in '95

and '96, Bud Foster, some of the greatest seasons in the history of Hokie football?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: It was really exciting. Coach Pry recruited me a little at Penn State, so I knew of him before. It was exciting to get a guy that knew the standard that was in Blacksburg back.

He came from GAing for Bud Foster, so he knew what it took to have success in Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. It was really exciting to get that back. Everything he stands for I have learned from him over the past seven months stands true to that. He is an excellent man. He treats people right. It's going to be an exciting season with him.

THE MODERATOR: Question from the podium here not football-related: You've got quite the skill in the kitchen?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: I try.

THE MODERATOR: What's your go-to dish? What do you like to make the most?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: I cook a mean chicken parm. I do that.

THE MODERATOR: What makes it so good?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: I told somebody earlier. Honestly, to make anything good, you just add a bunch of butter. (Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: As a follow-up question, is it harder to bake a multi-layer cake or read a triple-option flex?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: Repeat the second one?

THE MODERATOR: Is it harder to make a multi-layer cake or read a triple-option flex?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: Oh, definitely the cake, honestly. If you don't cook it long enough or it won't be cooked through the middle, and then it will just fall apart. Triple option, there are only so many things you can do. When it comes to a cake, there's a bunch of outcomes that can go wrong with it. Definitely. If you don't whip the batter enough, if you don't -- I don't know if the oven ain't cooked at the right temperature, there's a lot of things that can go wrong.

THE MODERATOR: You used the term "unfinished business" in announcing your return. It's a phrase we see a whole bunch. What is unfinished to you in Blacksburg?

DAX HOLLIFIELD: I came here to win, and I feel like I haven't done that yet here. I want to set this place, this new regime, this program in the right direction with my last

year and set my legacy off right.

I want to go out on a good note and have a great season this year.

THE MODERATOR: Dax, thank you. We can switch it up with Kaleb. Kaleb, our redshirt junior, wide receiver. A few minutes with him.

Describe that moment in 2019 when you received the news that you received a scholarship after having walked on at Virginia Tech?

KALEB SMITH: That moment will always be special in my heart because as a kid coming out of high school, I had scholarship offers. Virginia Tech is where I wanted to play and be a part of. When I found out that I was put on scholarship, I cried. First thing I wanted to do was go call my parents and tell them that we made it. We did what we always talked about.

Q. We're used to seeing Hokie receivers with big numbers in the passing game. That didn't happen last year. You guys are just about dead last in passing. It's a new year, new scheme, new players. Are they going to get you the ball this year?

KALEB SMITH: That's always the goal, right? It's definitely a new scheme, and it's a new attitude, new mindset to the offense. Something I'm very excited for.

THE MODERATOR: I want to follow up that scholarship question. It's not that you didn't work hard before the scholarship, but do you find it inside you that there's a different obligation to a work ethic now that you are scholarshiped?

KALEB SMITH: The work ethic has been installed in me as a kid. Going out and getting something yourself and not having it being handed to you, it makes everything a little bit sweeter sometimes.

Q. As you guys have been up here speaking today, you've been laughing, joking around with each other. Obviously, Coach has a personality we've been able to see. What's it like to be a part of this team, and is there that playful banter going on all the time between you guys?

KALEB SMITH: Just since January I've been having the most fun while still working my tail off that I've had in my time here at Virginia Tech. I think that just shows a testament to the guys that we have in our locker room. All these old guys have really stuck through it when times weren't very pretty. That fact that we can still come

together and share a laugh and just share that brotherhood that Virginia Tech is all about.

Q. Kaleb, what do you think has attributed to kind of that culture shift and why you guys are having so much more fun?

KALEB SMITH: A lot of it has to do with Coach Pry. He comes in and preaches hard work and competing and competition brings a little bit of trash-talk here and there. Just the energy at practice is unmatched. You have the guys that we love to compete and we love football, we love this game, and it's a game at the end of the day, and you're supposed to have fun playing it.

THE MODERATOR: Last year you had the chance to wear Coach Beamer's No. 25 week three of the season. What did that mean to you?

KALEB SMITH: That means everything. Coming from being a Virginia kid, like I said, I grew up, and that 25 meant something special. I was honored to wear that. It's something I had always dreamed about doing here. I'm glad to be able to represent his number well.

THE MODERATOR: We thank you, Virginia Tech. Good luck this season. Coach, welcome back to the league.

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