

Virginia Tech Football
Head Coach Justin Fuente Q&A Highlights
Postgame Media Conference – vs. Virginia
November 23, 2018

Opening statement:

“I’m not sure what to say about the game. We played on both sides of the ball. Two teams that obviously wanted to find a way to win the game. I’m awfully proud of our kids, not just to be prepared to play this game but to battle through the ups and downs, make plays through all three phases of the game, defense, offense, and special teams. To give ourselves the chance to win it was the type of effort it was going to take. There’s so many kids names that pop into my mind when I think about this game, all they’ve been through and all they’ve battled through you know it makes me feel proud of them and most importantly happy for them. I see these kids on a daily basis, I know what this game means and as a coach you desperately want them to have success. It was nice, it was nice to get to see them celebrate.”

On whether he thought the players showed the indicative spirit and fight of this team:

“Yeah I’d say that, it’s indicative on what we see on a daily basis from our guys. We know what’s there, we see them come to practice daily and how they work in weight room. We all understand that in this arena your subject to criticism and all that sort of stuff. You just want your kids so desperately when you are putting all that work in to have some success. It was hard for them to get to celebrate tonight, they had to go through a lot, but I was proud that they did it.”

On QB Ryan Willis’ competitiveness, what was going through his mind while Willis avoided the sack in overtime:

“Probably the same as everyone else, ‘throw the ball away.’ But he just gets out there and plays as hard as he can. You don’t normally hear that about a quarterback, but he just plays all out and as hard as he can every single snap. He certainly made some plays, like everyone he made a couple mistakes. I was happy that we got an incomplection there because if we didn’t it would have been disastrous.”

On Dalton’s catch and the 50/50 ball in the end zone that resulted in VT touchdown:

“We were not in desperation mode on Keene’s catch but it was getting there quickly. Ryan just bought some time, I don’t know what he saw. I just know he threw the ball up there and Dalton making that catch is indicative of the type of person Dalton is. I don’t think there is anyone who was surprised that he came down with it. The fumble was so bang-bang. I don’t know what happened to be honest with you. We had a nice crease in there and Steven was moving fast through the hole and I don’t know what happened. I heard someone on the headset say fumble and all I could see were legs and bodies. I felt like I saw a couple people dive on the ground and then I saw a couple more people dive on the ground. So I guess the ball must have not been recovered. That is probably not a great description of what happened, but I just couldn’t see what happened.”

On Willis' tackle at the end of the half on the INT:

"In that situation you know the clock is going to be stopped at the end of the play, you can catch it step out of bounds or throw an incompletion. We would end up having to kick a long field goal. They were playing cover two and the corner sat on it and the ball should of probably gone to the other receiver. But when he catches it and he is headed the other way, Ryan is the only shot to get the guy down. When I saw he was going to get there I was worried about him cutting back having been a quarterback in that situation before many years ago, it's a hard tackle to make. It was a huge play obviously and the fact that he got him on the ground and we were able to go to half without those seven points was huge."

On Hazelton not playing WR:

"Damon hadn't practiced much this week, he played a little bit. But he just didn't practice very much, we had him for emergency use only. If I'm not mistaken he played a few snaps at receiver. It was a limited role just because he didn't practice much."

On WR Tre' Turner's performance:

"He is a competitor he obviously has talent, we know he can run but he is a highly intelligent competitor. He was a one-man band there for a little bit, blocking the punt, making a big catch, the long run, if he continues to work he's going to have a really nice career here. It is really nice to see guys like that who are willing to play such a big role in special teams. It sets a great example to our other players. He is a true freshman now and the example he sets, a great example of a team player, a team-first guy, we need more of that same attitude."

On K Brian Johnson's mentality:

"Going in, if the ball was on the 22 or further, we were going to go with Jordan because he has a big leg. I really wish we could get Brian a shorter field goal. It hasn't happened, we haven't made one in a while, but they haven't been gimmes. The thing that I felt good about was Brain, he's been so good in practice. I think when he made the first one, he felt better and then obviously the one in overtime."

On sharing the win with Ricky Walker:

"I don't know if I am a good enough orator to put that into words. I just told those guys that I love them and I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it. I told them I'm sorry, I wish I could give them a better more flowery speech but I love them to death. Ricky has been fantastic for this program. He is an adult, a grown man. To see him get to celebrate and hold the cup and take a picture on the 50 yard line. For a trophy game picture with Rick, it was pretty special."

On Steven Peoples's run in the last minute:

"So in-between, it's not like we have been mixing them up. It was a situation where we were so in-between there in terms of trying to run the clock out but feeling good that if we could pop a run out of there we were going to go. But there was not much time and we were caught in no man's land."

On the final play:

“I have no idea, I just know their QB had the ball and then it was on the ground and it was a scrum. The rest was history.”

On DE Emmanuel Belmar recovering the ball in the final play:

“It’s fitting that Belmar recovered it, he has been beat up and he shows up to practice every day. He got carted off once. He’s about playing on one leg out there, but he is tough and what this team is about. For him to recover it, I think that is pretty poetic.”