

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Friday July 14, 2017

## Justin Fuente

## Andrew Motuapuaka

## Cam Phillips

Virginia Tech

JUSTIN FUENTE: Thank you. It is an honor to be back here this year to share the stage with fantastic coaches and student-athletes that represent their institution so well. I'd like to just briefly thank our president, Dr. Timothy Sands, our athletic director Whit Babcock for their trust in me to head up the Virginia Tech football program. I know it means a lot to so very many people, and their trust in me is not lost. I certainly appreciate that.

I also want to thank Coach Frank Beamer for his role in this transition that we've gone through. I really hope and believe that it's a chance to be a model for transitions in the future. He's just been incredibly supportive of me and our staff and our kids, and I just can't say enough good things about Coach.

It's an exciting time at Virginia Tech. We've got many things going on from the administrative side, our facility renovations with our new team rooms and some projects Whit and his staff have going on, to our drive for 25, which is to all the Hokies out there is the single best way to help Virginia Tech and the athletic department and the place that you truly do love, to what our kids are doing in the classroom and in the community. I'm awfully proud of our young men, a couple of which you'll get to hear from here shortly.

We said goodbye to our seniors, a fantastic senior class, that helped us through this transition, and as we turn to 2017, we get to welcome our entire staff back, led by Bud Foster, the best defensive coordinator in all of America, Brad Cornelsen, our offensive coordinator, who I truly believe is a rising star in this business, and the rest of our assistant coaches. I think that's a product of Whit and his dedication to building a first-class program and our guys' belief in Virginia Tech and desire to stay home.

We've got 14 seniors this year, two very deserving young men are here, Andrew Motuapuaka, our starting linebacker, and Cam Phillips. We have several other seniors that deserved to be here, but I really felt like



these two guys from both sides of the ball have really earned their stripes, and I think will do a great job. Despite how Cam is dressed, they'll do a great job representing our University.

But with that being said, I'm looking forward to answering y'all's questions, and I know you're looking forward to hearing from our kids.

**Q. Andrew, you being a beach guy, I know UVA is a rival and Quin Blanding is also a beach guy. How cool is it to see that you guys that you played against have grown up and are now seniors and leaders of your defenses? How cool is that to see?**

ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA: Like you said, being from the beach I think is real cool. We played each other in high school, used to go at it, and it's just cool to be the leaders of our team and be at this Media Day today. It's a blessing.

**Q. Andrew, just speak on the firepower that's returning with you at linebacker, and secondly, the chip on your shoulder from getting to the ACC Championship but not winning it last year.**

ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA: So as far as linebacker corps, we're working hard to be the best. We're not satisfied with the accomplishments we've accomplished, and we have a great coach that pushes us hard every single day.

As far as making it back to the ACC Championship, we definitely have a chip on our shoulder, being that we didn't win last year, and definitely the goal to make it back to the ACC Championship.

**Q. Andrew, talk more about the chip on the shoulder regarding the Atlantic Division. A lot of the teams in here yesterday were saying it's all about Clemson and Florida State it seems like, and they get all the attention. You guys in the Coastal Division feel that way, both as a division and maybe even as a school, Virginia Tech, maybe people forgot that you guys won 10 games last year?**

ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA: I mean, I think speaking from Virginia Tech, I think we don't really -- personally I don't really feed into all that stuff. I'm just here to play ball. That's what really matters at the end of the day.

Just like the -- not being mentioned and stuff like that, little things like that really just kind of fuels us to go get our respect.

**Q. Looking numerically, you return so many players on defense, almost the entire secondary, a couple linebackers. But I do notice three guys whose names I heard called almost as much as yours last year in Woody Baron, Kenny Ekanem, and Nigel, losing those three guys who were all up front, how does that change the dynamic of your defense?**

ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA: Those guys were very experienced. They had a lot of experience under their belt. So I think that's probably the biggest thing with the guys that are filling in their spots now.

But I don't think they'll miss a beat, really. I think our young guys are hungry and really ready to make their impact on this program. You know, they know that the baton has been passed to them, and I think they're ready to step up to the challenge.

**Q. I just want to say on behalf of all the media, you've won the best-dressed award, so congratulations. Semi-serious question here. You've got a little bit of a flashy outfit. Is that your way of saying you're ready to shine this year? On the serious side, you also got to play alongside Isaiah Ford last year. What did you learn playing with him as now you step up this year as the man?**

CAM PHILLIPS: Playing alongside Isaiah Ford was a great experience. I gained a brother in that. Me and him came in together as freshmen. We played alongside each other, and I think he's going to do great things for the Dolphins. But he taught me -- first off, he definitely pushed me, pushed me to be better, you know, all the things that he did, made the contested catches, was in the spotlight kind of. But I think how he worked away from the cameras, away from everyone, what the people didn't see was more important. Me and him worked out together, just so we could one day gain the recognition and just the respect of our peers and our coaches and fellow players, and that's something that I'll always remember.

**Q. Just what you can say about -- though some of the players aren't with the team from last year and last year's run to the ACC Championship, just what you can say about the personnel that you have and why Virginia Tech is still dangerous this year.**

CAM PHILLIPS: Regardless of what we lost, I still think we have a large nucleus of talent, especially on defense, and on the offensive side we have experience, as well along with great coaching, which is very important. I think the senior leadership and the experience that we have in myself and Travon McMillian and Wyatt Teller, I think that can help us

greatly to bring along some of these young guys. We need those young guys to step up and mature because we are going to need those guys to make some plays for us in the 3rd and 2, 3rd and 5, 4th and 3 situations. And I think this camp and this summer is going to be important for those guys, you know, to gain some maturity and show us their growth. I think they've done a great job thus far. I've tried to lead them as best I can, and I'm going to continue to do that hopefully to bring success to our team.

**Q. We don't see a lot of outfits like that up in Syracuse, so can you tell us a little bit about it? What exactly is that jacket, and the glasses too?**

CAM PHILLIPS: Okay, the jacket is actually a velvet double-breasted jacket. The color is bronze, actually. It looks brown to me, so I say it's brown, but the correct term is bronze, and the glasses actually flip up. But from a different world, Dwyane Wade, I think he made those glasses pretty popular. I just like to have fun with stuff like this. I think it's a way to show my personality, show fans, other players how kind of a laid-back and fun, cool guy I am. I'm having a great time at this event.

**Q. You guys get a big opportunity to face off against the defending national champions, Clemson at home this year. How much does that game mean to you guys, especially after the ACC Championship game last year?**

CAM PHILLIPS: It means a lot to us. I know it definitely means a lot to me just because of how we lost in the ACC Championship. I think it's an opportunity for revenge, so I speak for, I think, the whole staff and the team when I say we'll be ready for them. We're not going to take them lightly at all. Like you said, they are the defending National Champions. But I think it will be a great opportunity to show our growth in the season. I believe it's, what, the fifth game of the season, so it'll be a nice test for us to see where we are.

But I'm definitely looking forward to that after -- key word being after -- our first game, our second game, our third game and our fourth game. I'm not overlooking any of those opponents as we have to get through them first. But when the time comes, I'm pretty sure the atmosphere will be amazing. The fans will be ready. The players will be ready. I'm pretty sure everyone will be watching us.

**Q. You brought up Bud Foster and called him the best coordinator in America. Just what you can say about learning daily from him and just what he's meant to your career and what he means to you on and off the field.**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, the first thing that comes to my

mind is he's a true professional. Comes to work every single day with a quest of teaching and mentoring young men, and ultimately putting the best defensive product out there on the field. It's great to have that resource. It's great to have someone on staff that understands things that have happened at Virginia Tech in the past. And I just really enjoyed it. You know, there's a lot of people I'm sure that have talked about this transition and how is it going to work and all that sort of stuff, and it doesn't work unless people are professional. It doesn't work unless they conduct themselves in a professional manner. A large reason for how smooth this has been has been Bud and his professionalism and his excitement and love for Virginia Tech, and I've just really enjoyed the past year and a half.

**Q. Jerod Evans meant so much to your team, running the football, passing it, and you've got a lot of kind of new young guys competing, I guess, for his job. How much do things change, or do you expect to get the same amount of production out of the next guy up?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, we'll see. We've obviously got an open competition there at quarterback, three very capable candidates. I really believe that offense has got to fit the quarterback and whatever his skill set was, and I think Brad Cornelsen did a fantastic job last year of twisting and turning the offense to fit Jerod's skill set, and in turn it was very, very productive.

I've said this before, I'm sure the local Virginia media will probably roll their eyes when I say this, but I believe it: The biggest thing for us is the supporting cast, in terms of the other wide receivers and getting some more production out of our running back position as we move forward so that whoever does play quarterback has a chance to be productive.

**Q. You talked about more production out of your running backs. Jerod, of course, was your leading rusher by quite a bit. What is it going to take to get Virginia Tech back to the days of pounding the ball and using the other elements of your offense, as well?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, the first thing I would say is that I don't really care who runs the ball. I don't care if it's the running backs or the wide receivers or the quarterback, but we do have to be able to run the ball. There's no substitute for that. So we were able to rush the football, just came in a different manner. We had a 240-pound quarterback that was really effective and had some toughness and did a good job with it.

For us, it's making sure we do find a way to run the ball and then find a way to make big plays out of the passing game. I think you'll see us continue to find a

guy that we feel good about running the football. I think continuing to find some guys on the perimeter that we like handing or pitching or flipping the ball to to continue to manufacture ways to run it.

**Q. You guys invite Old Dominion into Blacksburg this season for the first time. You spent a lot of time at Hampton Roads over the past year or two. Can you talk about Old Dominion and what they offer? They won their first bowl game this last season, but have you seen the landscape of their team this coming season?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Absolutely. I can't say enough about their program and the job that they've done there. They have our full attention. I know we've got games before that, but they've got our full respect, and we'll have to have a great week in preparation. But I certainly have taken notice in the quality of football that Old Dominion has put out. I watched their bowl game and really believe that they've got something going there.

**Q. Talk to me for a minute if you could about goals and how you measure success. Obviously Tech had a fantastic year with the wins, the bowl game win, but look at the long-term picture, what are your goals as far as long-term? Do you consider last year a success in your eyes, and what do you have to do to meet your goals this year and moving forward?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I probably think of things differently. I mean, our long-term mission is return Virginia Tech back to the top of the ACC. I mean, that's our goal. But to me, it's about the process and it's about are we going about the process that's been proven over time that leads to our improvement. As far as what we're trying to obtain, we're trying to obtain perfection in our preparation, which will give us the opportunity to win the ballgame. It doesn't guarantee that we will win. It doesn't guarantee that we'll win one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, games. It doesn't guarantee anything. It just guarantees the opportunities if we're willing to put forth this dedication, this discipline level on a daily basis. That's how we tend to measure these things; are we giving ourselves this chance for success on a weekly basis.

You know, the ultimate number of wins and all that sort of stuff, I understand it's important and it is a measuring tool, but it's not the only one. My first year at Memphis, we had to use a different measuring tool to determine if we were improving. Each year is different. Each team is different. As we move forward, for us, it's all about focusing on the process and making sure we're giving ourselves a chance.

**Q. Last season it seemed like the highs were really high and the lows were really low. You go from dominating North Carolina and then the Syracuse game and then beating Miami. Obviously the Belk bowl, the Notre Dame game. What do you think contributed to that inconsistency, and is that anything that you're trying to emphasize over the course of the spring and going into this season?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Well, I think, first of all, our margin for error wasn't that great. It didn't matter who we were playing. We weren't overly talented or so talented that we could not play well and have a chance to win, regardless of the opponent. It just didn't matter.

But second of all, I thought we were incredibly resilient. We were remarkably tough-minded and had the ability to bounce back when in bad situations.

Going back and looking through it and thinking about our team, we just -- there's some teams out there that are so talented they can not play their best and still win, and sometimes win comfortably. For us, that wasn't the case. We had a very thin margin for error, and if we were just off a little bit, it showed dramatically, and when we were right on, it gave us a chance. But the thing I thought -- the most endearing quality of our guys I thought was -- the thing that we could learn was they were battlers. They were never down, never out. The ACC Championship game, everybody talks about the comeback victories. We were down 17 twice to Notre Dame; we were down 24 at half to Arkansas. But Clemson was poised to blow our doors off, too, about halfway through, whatever that was, the first quarter or whatever, and our guys buckled down and battled and scrapped, and ultimately we had a chance at the end.

**Q. Tell us about your impressions of what is now your home field advantage at Lane Stadium. What type of impressions did that game day environment make on you?**

JUSTIN FUENTE: Just a fantastic example of college football. Our fans don't just fill the seats. I've been places and been either on the road or as a home team where fans come to be entertained. Our fans come to participate -- to participate, to actively help us try and win a football game, and it's just a fantastic example of school pride, of camaraderie, of tradition, something I'm awfully proud to be a part of. You can almost see it even better on the road when you watch our fans travel to road venues and the numbers they turn out and how vocal they are. It's really something special to be a part of.