

Inside Virginia Athletics with Carla Williams
Podcast – Episode 2
Thursday, July 23, 2025

John Freeman: Welcome back to another edition of Inside Virginia Athletics with Carla Williams. Football season is quickly approaching which means we're going all in on the football program today. I'm your host John Freeman and of course we have the headliner of the show here as well. That is Dr. Carla Williams.

How are we doing today Carla?

Carla Williams: Doing excellent. I have Tyler (Jones) here with us today.

JF: Let's introduce Tyler because he is a man who joins a long line of TJs here at the university of Virginia. We have the OG Thomas Jefferson. We've got the football player Thomas Jones, and now we have Tyler Jones, the deputy athletics director for external operations. And I wouldn't say more importantly, but another job of his is the football general manager, which is a major task in today's college football landscape.

So the newest TJ, how are we doing today? Thanks for joining us.

Tyler Jones: Glad to be here. My dad's name is Thomas Jones.

JF: There you go. You were born for this job. You two have had a relationship for a while. I know a little bit about how it started, but Carla inform our audience of when you first met this man to your left and how you got him here.

CW: Yeah. Yeah, I'd say what 10 or 12 years ago we were at an event, an NCAA event, and there were probably maybe 10 to 15 administrators there. And Tyler was the youngest one of the group, and I was just blown away, just so impressed with him. At the time, I was at Georgia and was so impressed with him and wrote his name and got his number and I immediately thought this this guy is going

places and I want to keep up with him. And so that's how it started and then when I had the opportunity to convince him to come here we worked really hard to do that and he's been phenomenal.

JF: And Tyler, I remember the day when you were touring around and Carla was touring you around like okay this is a big deal. She doesn't always do this when she's interviewing a candidate. How are you enjoying Charlottesville and UVA here?

TJ: Loving it. And you know Carla is a fantastic recruiter, right? Like see it's incredible but my family and I are enjoying our time here and it's been an unbelievable experience.

JF: We're two minutes in, we've already said the word recruiting which is what we're gonna be talking about today. When did you become the official GM of our football program?

TJ: It's a nuanced deal. Carla really challenged us, not just me, in what, the fall, early fall of 2024, to kind of think about what would a front office look like. And I went to work. I mean, I called anyone that will pick up the phone, former GMs and current GMs and retired front office professionals just to pick their brains.

What would it look like, currently what's happening in your space, but what could it look like on a collegiate space? So the info gathering, the long phone calls on football road trips, that was a really good time for me to call these folks on Friday nights when they have football games on Sunday and just grateful for them spending time with me to just understand the landscape and find ways to pick their brains and implement a plan here at UVA.

JF: There's movies about professional football GMs. We don't know so much about what a college football GM does. So what is your day-to-day like in that role?

TJ: It really depends on the day. And I'm fortunate enough to have some colleagues across other institutions and I pick their brains. It really is time of year, right? So in season, you're really evaluating the current roster and trying to forecast what that looks like in the future.

And then, different from my colleagues on the NFL side, we have a number of acquisition windows, right? So you have several portal windows, you have high school recruiting. So it really depends on the time of year and the volume of conversations with agents and student athletes and their parents. But it's really more about relationship building and on the phones. I mean, I get a ton of steps in, walking around grounds, on the phones, and it's a 12-hour deal because you're talking with folks on the West Coast because you're talking with folks on the West Coast and on the East Coast. So a ton of time on the phone, just explaining to folks what UVA is about, our roster situation, and then detailing out what the financial package could look like.

But it truly is a day-to-day type of job.

JF: And we'll talk about that day-to-day. Carla, when did you identify the need for a GM position? Was that a collaborative effort with Coach (Tony) Elliott too? Take us through that whole process?

CW: Yeah, I think that we started working on this really years ago. And once Tyler got here and became the sport administrator for football, started to recognize the fact that we were going to this place that was more professional.

And we didn't want to be the first school to jump out there and just start hiring people. You know, so we took our time to really review and scan the entire landscape and recognize the fact that a lot of the skill sets that are needed, we've got people here that have those skill sets.

And so, and Tyler's a prime example because a big part of it is relationship building. Like you have to be able to recruit. That translates into a lot of things, fundraising, for instance, and Tyler helps us with fundraising too. Just being able to identify who is excellent at building relationships with not just coaches, but with student athletes, with their parents, with prospective student athletes, with agents and representatives, not just agents but entire agencies. And so it is a unique skill set and Tyler has the skill set to do that and he actually is helping with the entire front office, which includes football, men's and women's basketball, and baseball. So Tyler is the GM for football, for women's basketball, and for baseball.

Which, that's his nighttime job. He has a daytime job of being our deputy AD for external affairs, but you know, the ability to be a part of a team, the ability to forecast and strategize, and you've got to work your tail off. You have to grind. You have to work.

And then you have to be able to build and maintain relationships with a lot of different people.

JF: During portal season, how many calls are you getting a day? Texts?

TJ: I don't wanna count. It's, and Carla's spot on. It truly is about people and about relationships. And, you know, the work is the work, right? And, you know, for me, it doesn't take talent. It's really putting the work in and spending time with people. But yeah, we're talking several dozen calls just in the morning and at night, Zoom calls, text messages, those types of things. And it truly is about relationship building, first and foremost, because you're kind of dating, right?

You don't know these folks, and you don't know the prospective student athlete as well as on the high school side, because you're spending

time with them. Your coaches are in their homes. The coach is going to their high schools.

You have a longer runway to build that relationship. But in the portal, I call it portal combat. I'm sure I heard it from someone else, but it is fierce, it is chaotic, but we try to focus on building the relationship. And it's not a transactional thing, it's truly a relationship. And spending time with the agent and the family to understand what are their desires and needs. And does our opportunity help them in that regard? And what you want to avoid is the transactional nature of it where it's not. They don't know anything about UVA or the coaching staff or the scheme.

So for me, it's articulating that with their representation about what the opportunity could look like and trying to make sure that it fits their needs and desires.

JF: And, Carla, you get involved in recruiting every once in a while too, is that right? Are you, when a player comes you might visit with them as well?

TJ: Oh yeah. She's our secret weapon, so we use that. We don't want to overuse it, but if there is an elite prospect, high school or college, and I try to investigate to see, you know, how could Carla come in as a recruiter to kind of give a different lens about the opportunity. So I'm mindful of how often I go to our secret weapon. But we do, we do probably a little bit more than we probably should, but she's so great at it. So I'm trying to be mindful of how do we deploy her in the right situations.

CW: I love it.

TJ: She does.

CW: I love recruiting. But I know her time is an issue. But once you have an opportunity to meet these the young people whether it's football or basketball or really any sport and help be a part of it because it's such so much to

sell right it's such a great institution and a great opportunity and I love meeting people also. So they don't use me too much. They're very mindful of my time, but I enjoy it.

JF: Well, whatever you guys are doing on the recruiting trail, it's working because we had a top 20 portal class ranked by National Publications. Let's talk about how you built that class. Big gift comes in right at the end of football season last year.

A headline gift, the word for it was transformational. So we got a top 20 class coming in. How much of that class would be possible without that gift? How important was it in building this new crop of players that we expect a lot from?

TJ: It was critical. It was an absolute game changer for us. And how I would articulate it is that our entire recruiting board changed, literally that quick, right? And the type of prospects that we were gonna pursue.

So it was an incredible jolt of energy and excitement for the program. And it certainly did pay dividends for us in acquiring elite student athletes.

JF: And the word NIL is shifting. You know, last year it might have a different meaning than it does in the new Rev Share era. But, Carla, where are we when it comes to funds for players with our football program compared to where we were last year, two years ago, three years ago?

CW: Yeah. A 180 and Tyler can speak to this. This year in December was the first time that our football program fully participated in NIL. and that speaks volumes because it's been happening for three years.

So this past December was our first opportunity to be in with two feet. And then actually this April was our first opportunity with basketball to be in with two feet. And so it's huge because

it's the lifeblood of a program and if you're trying to have championship programs, you've got to acquire talent. You have to acquire talent and you have to retain that talent. And so the gift that we got, and we've gotten several, we've gotten several gifts that have made a huge impact on our ability to acquire and retain talent, makes a huge difference. And several of those gifts come from new donors.

TJ: Yep, that's right.

CW: So I think that's a really neat aspect. We've got a blend of our existing donors that really care about the program that have given. And then we've got new donors where we've expanded the donor pool because they appreciate, and I've said this before, the way that we do athletics and the values that we try to uphold and all of those things. And so they want to be a part of that success.

JF: And talent acquisition takes investment. So where are we amongst our peers when it comes to investment for talent acquisition in the football program specifically?

CW: It's hard to tell. I mean, it really is hard to tell because we're all so competitive. It's not published. Like no one's publishing what they're spending and we aren't publishing what we're spending.

So we talk to a lot of people to try to gauge and I would say that it's really good. You know, I would say that we're very competitive in football and basketball and baseball also. I'd say that we're very, very competitive and you can see that in the recruiting classes. So, that's really the way that you could tell if you're going to be competitive with your roster. Construction is, well, where the rankings have you, you know? who are you acquiring? Who are you retaining?

TJ: That's right. You know, so I think we're in a really, really good place. It's been a long time coming, but looking forward to next year.

TJ: I couldn't agree more. I think, you know, it's the the battles that we've won on the recruiting trail. It's a good indication on where our investment level is. And again, I have a small group of colleagues that are at peer institutions, very similar to UVA. And we talk, and we don't share trade secrets. We can't. But it's like, wow, man. I can't believe you guys got that player. So that's a good indication that we're in a good spot and a much better position than we've been for the last several years.

JF: Do you ever see stuff on the internet and you're like, there's no way.

TJ: Oh, yeah, it's most of the information that is published online, and I will say most, 90% of it is inaccurate. And we laugh about it because we're literally, like we have these conversations with that particular prospect in their representation and I call the agent, it's like, what are you doing?

Like I know it's them, right? So, cause it helps them, right? So it's a little bit of an acquisition. There's a narrative, there's some branding and marketing behind it. And it's not published to Carla's point, so there's no real fact check, fact checking. So it's, why not? Why not inflate the numbers and that helps that agency acquire new clients. So I get it, I understand it. But I laugh and chuckle when you get texts and tweets and I'll send it to Carla, we'll laugh. It's like, that is so terrible. That's not accurate at all.

But again, we're learning, right? So this is our first time being in the space. So we're starting to understand the dynamic. And when I visit with donors and supporters, I tell them that our experience in the portal in December was much different than the spring because we learned so much about the environment, right. So we're a bit more strategic in the spring and acquiring players and understanding the relationship with the agencies that put us in a very much different position which also helped our basketball programs of what we learned with football so that the trickle-down effect of what

we learned with the beta test with football to some degree, we learned some things, we've tweaked our strategy where our basketball and baseball programs were able to benefit from that.

JF: So what would more investment do for the program? And to put it in perspective, this year, this upcoming football season, the way you acquired talent is going to be different now than next year. With the Rev Share era, there's a cap on how much can be distributed to players compared to what it was up until July. So what would more investment do for the program in this new house settlement era, and what's our next need when it comes to recruiting talent?

TJ: I can take that one. I think it's going to change and evolve like yearly, annually, honestly. It's going to continue to change. We're going to have to innovate and adapt to that. So that part is really our new normal in terms of that. I think what we're looking for in many other programs is sustained success, right? Not just one roster or one season. it's several seasons, several rosters.

So you're looking for how do you build an infrastructure, a front office that can sustain the success that you're having in one season. And there are plenty of examples of teams that have won double figure games one year and then win a couple of the next year. That's happening across the country. So it's not stable.

So how do you create a framework in an unstable environment where you can recognize sustained success is really the challenge? And in terms of what we need, it truly is more engagement and true NIL. That will be a difference maker for UVA and for other institutions is yes, there's a revenue cap on shared revenue. That's great. That's awesome.

But how do you engage your fan base, your donor base, local, regional, and national businesses to see value in our student-athletes

through True NIL? That is a big needle mover for us in terms of investment. And then you win with people, right? So how are you building your front office, keeping staff, investing in the right staff in terms of a player evaluation are probably the two investment areas that I'm excited to put a plan together with Carla's guidance on.

JF: And so let's talk player evaluation because it's different here than a lot of other places because you're not only evaluating the player, you're evaluating the student, you're evaluating what they fit in this culture here at Virginia, which is a unique place.

What are those conversations like with you, both of you together in setting that standard? I imagine it's a collaborative effort, not just with you two, but with the university as a whole, with Coach Elliott, and everybody that's got a piece of the pie.

JF: We are who we are. We're the University of Virginia. We're not going to change that. It's great. It's an awesome asset in this space.

So we don't talk about how do we change who we are. We're out looking for people that fit, right? That fit UVA, that are interested in what we're about. And having phenomenal coaches that embrace that makes my job much easier, right?

It eliminates the excuses. But yeah, we're unique and different than some of our peers, even in our league, but we're not here different than some of our peers, even in our league.

But we're not here to change who UVA is. I really use it as a difference maker in some of the recruiting conversations that I have with prospective transfer student athletes. There are some challenges, inherent challenges, that we have to manage in terms of the transferable credits and those types of things. But quite frankly, that's happening across the country. That's not a UVA problem. I mean, there's

athletes that have transferred four times in their one career without a degree, which is challenging to land anywhere.

But that's something that the university have been great in evolving, in listening to some of our challenges and understanding that we didn't want this environment. We are reacting to the changing landscape and I've really appreciated the university's empathy and knowing that and their commitment to working with us.

CW: Can I just add to that because it's a deeper question that we've talked through years ago before Tyler got here, but it's relevant today. And it'll be relevant every day. And it's a question about strategy and culture. Like it's a central question about what do we want? What do we want for Virginia football?

So if we want a football program that occasionally has a special year, then we can kinda float along and keep doing it the way we were doing it. But if we want a football program that on occasion has a bad year, then you really have to start from the subsurface and build up that infrastructure, change the culture, and you have to stack years on top of each other to build something that is sustainable at a special level. Otherwise we're gonna have these peaks and valleys. Every 10 years, you're gonna have a great season, you know, 91, 98, 2019, you know, and that's not what we're aiming for.

We're aiming for sustained success and that means not occasional good seasons, but you're happen to have an occasional bad season because we're looking for sustained success and that requires an overhaul culturally, mentally, facility-wise, infrastructure-wise, operational support-wise, university support, academic support, all of those things, it takes all of that to completely change the narrative and build a program that is sustainable. And that is exactly, that's what has to happen. That's what we're working really hard to build right now. And it's just gonna take ongoing effort.

TJ: I think it's great. And that was awesome. And Carla has seen it at different institutions. So if you really dug in to the subsurface, they're all successful ones, sustained success, they all look very similar when you really dive into it.

So I couldn't agree more. The goal is to have sustained success. And that does require stability, continuity, alignment, and all of those buzzwords. It really does matter when you're building the proper infrastructure and foundation to support a program that's competing for championships annually. And

JF: Carla, one of the things you mentioned was overhaul in all aspects, one of them being academically. What changes have been made with academics, admissions, in this new era where you're bringing in players who have been at a school or two, or three in some cases, or they've already graduated and it's gotta happen so fast?

CW: Yeah, I just started off and I just say that it's been great to have these conversations. It goes back to building relationships. So we built great relationships on grounds so that we could explain what is happening. This has never happened before. The deadlines that we had before don't apply to college athletics. So we've gotten great support just in the flexibility in some of the deadlines even.

That may seem like a small thing, but previously that locked us out of exposure to certain prospects that were transferring. So just giving us flexibility that fits the national landscape has made a huge difference. The academic values have not changed. We still attract the same student athletes that value a UVA degree.

TJ: That's right.

CW: That still value a UVA education. We still attract those same student athletes. The partnership with the university, what that has done is it has adjusted to this landscape to say, we want to help you guys compete. How can

we do that? And so that's been, to me, that's been the biggest change is that the little things that were maybe inflexible before now we've got some leeway because the entire landscape changed.

TJ: That's awesome and I think too is it's going back to the relationship trust. Trusting that you know our head coaches folks like myself and Dr. Williams are going out and securing student athletes that belong here, that are going to flourish here and have success. And I want to shout out our academic staff.

And our football program has had several semesters over a 3.0 GPA. So the athletes that we're bringing in, they understand UVA and they're good students. And we're a results business and they're performing in the classroom.

So having that support first and foremost and trust through the relationship and then delivering with student athletes having success has really helped us to Carla's point stack these things on top of each other in this ever-changing landscape of college athletics.

JF: And Carla was talking about flexibility. You've got a real-world example of that with our team, right? Like, what was the example you used with some players you brought in?

TJ: Yeah, so we had, you know, two transfers that competed in the national championship in January, right? So a student athlete from Notre Dame and a student athlete from Ohio State. And the flexibility, no, one, they're phenomenal students, so that helps, right? They're phenomenal students, but for the university to admit them that late in the process, for me, was like a really good example of a level of trust. That they trust that those student athletes will be able to be successful here, you know, despite the timing, which again, is the college athletics piece, it doesn't really apply to the academic calendar, right? So their flexibility was a really good example, and I share that story

quite a bit of their trust in us and our process, and the approach and their willingness to work with us as a partner was a really cool example of that.

Because that would have been an opportunity that those student athletes wanted to come to UVA. And Ohio State and Notre Dame are really good academic institutions, so UVA fits. That's a desire for them and for the university to admit them was an awesome story for them.

JF: And fair to say that three years ago when the portal was all getting figured out, that wouldn't have been a possibility?

TJ: Probably not, probably not.

CW: A lot of this is new, like this is new for all of us. And the thing that's been heartening for me and gives me a lot of hope for where we're headed is that it truly is a partnership. Because we've talked about this before, we work really hard to be great representatives of the university. And we've talked about how important athletics is to the overall marketing for the university. And so when we flourish, you know, that helps the university. And so the partnership is true and it's been a huge help in us building these rosters that we've seen this year.

I'm confident that'll continue.

JF: So you both talked about culture and fit at Virginia, and that means there's transfer athletes that you're evaluating that don't fit. Maybe they're asking for something that we can't offer them or simply it's just not a good match. What are some times where you've had to put your foot down and say, I don't think this is the prospect for a reason beyond just the fact that you're looking at on field production.

TJ: It goes back to the partnership piece and certainly the commitment from our head coaches. Like they prevent a lot of these prospects, right? We know who we are. We

have a feel for you know, you know student-athlete being admitted so very rarely are we bringing a prospect for consideration that's like an absolute no, right?

Cause we already have these mechanisms in place with academics and our recruiting staff and those folks. And we kind of got it to a science and how we evaluate those, but some of it is just fit, right? So when I visit with a recruit or an agent, it's my responsibility is no surprises, right?

Like we want to make sure what's important to you, what's important for us. The worst thing that we can do is get hitched, get married, and it's not a good fit, right? So it's refreshing when both can walk away from the table and knowing that it's probably not a good fit, right? So it's refreshing when both can walk away from the table and know that it's probably not a good fit and it could be a myriad of reasons. It could be, you know, academic fit. It could be scheme fit, right? You might be a very talented player but it doesn't fit the scheme. You may love Virginia and love the coaching staff and love everything that we have, but will you be happy here in that role, right?

You want to avoid unhappy student-athletes because the responsibility is already very difficult, right? Being a student-athlete, you know, doing that at a high level, you know, performing on the field at a high level and doing it unhappy is not a great situation for anyone.

So I'm trying to make sure that the expectations are aligned and the athletes could flourish here and be happy. And we've had to say no several times just to avoid a headache or an issue down the road. And that can be hard, right? It can be very, very hard for a coach.

And they're watching the film and like, she could really help us. You know from a women's basketball player, she can really help us on the basketball court or on the football field and know that it probably isn't the right fit for us

and probably for that that prospect that is a tough decision, but ultimately it's the right one

JF: I don't think it's fair that there's no combine during portal season. So NFL GMs, they get interviews, they get combine, they get measurements, they get evaluations. You get Zoom calls. So what are we doing here at UVA from a data and analytics standpoint to make sure that we're investing wisely in the proper players?

TJ: It's funny, that's a great question. And going back to NFL and pro GMs have so many touchpoints and they have an abundance of data. So when I talk with NFL GM, they just laugh at me. Like, your job is impossible. Like, what are you guys doing over there?

You have all these acquisition windows and you have to negotiate with the players several times. And he's like, you don't draft players, you have to recruit them. And it's like, you're speaking two different languages. So I appreciate that, hearing that from an NFL GM, just really, you know, sympathizing with our current situation. But yes, you're right. There's a lack of data points, right?

So we really leaned on, you know, how can we curate these data points, right? So there's a ton of resources out there around, like PFF (Pro Football Focus) is a good example of a data outfit that you can take data and evaluate players. But, and one of our core principles is making data informed decisions, right, which is hard in an environment that's super intense and emotional, right, that's the sport, right.

So, are these coaches build and bond with these student-athletes and they're not a part of the financial decision and ultimately we have to define a value, right, for that particular student athlete. So we use a ton of different sources and we're fortunate enough with Carla's support to have data analysts and data scientists that are helping us make these informed decisions that ultimately helps me and

some of my colleagues identify the level of investment, but it is an absent information and data that we're sourcing on our own.

JF: Let me talk about investment. Carla, is the data analytics, the recruiting services, is that kind of the next frontier of need in college football? Because you have a limited amount of money that you can spend on players, and you gotta get it right.

CW: Yeah, I would say that that was a priority for us. So the data analytics and we actually use a firm, that was a priority because number one, this is a huge investment overall by the institution. So you want to make sure you're maximizing and being great stewards of that.

And then the goal is to acquire the talent that allows you to win. And so, you know, relying on the data was a priority for us from the beginning. So we have been doing that all year.

TJ: Yep, that's right.

CW: And it's been a huge assist. Tyler and his staff, they manage all of that and work with the firm and work with the analysts to do that, but that was a priority. I mean, there's no way around it for us, and we wanted to make sure that we were great stewards, that we assigned the proper value, that the negotiations were based on data.

And so I think we've executed that plan to perfection because we weren't afraid to triangulate. So we the traditional way of recruiting, which is, you know, staff, watching film and identifying the talent that you want. And then you've got to use the data to determine, okay, and prioritize. And then you've got to convince them to come here. Right? They've got to get them on grounds. And then you have to convince them to choose Virginia. So having all three of those things has been a huge help.

TJ: The best feeling is again with GMs on the pro side is finding the diamond in the rough. Right? Like that's that is a refreshing thing of like that particular prospect fits UVA on all different levels. Scheme, size, speed, intellect, those types of things. How do you find the diamonds in the rough that they put them in the right system and the right, you know, environment they can flourish. That's really the secret sauce. How can you do that a high level and that the data helps.

And then also the data sometimes affirms a decision that you've made. You know, layering another data point to affirm. Also, sometimes it's a tough conversation with the coach and saying, you may love that particular prospect, but this data point doesn't. Let's have a conversation about that. And that goes back to the relationship that you have with the coaches, the level of trust, right? And having some tough conversations when you're trying to make sure you have alignment in the resources and the data has been an awesome piece for us to be able to make sure we're making the right decision.

JF: So all of this happens, you identify the prospect, they choose Virginia, are they signing a contract? Yes, they are. What does that look like?

TJ: It comes in different shapes and sizes. It really depends on a number of different factors, right? Undergraduates, graduate, you know, are they, do they have multiple years of eligibility, but those athletes are signing an actual contract. And that is pretty commonplace now in our environment across several sports.

JF: And what makes it binding? Is it school binding and player binding?

TJ: Both, yeah.

CW: Yeah. It has to be, right? I mean, there's, we already have these other hurdles in college

sports where they can transfer. The freedom of movement complicates everything.

And so these contracts, these agreements are, you just have to have them. And that is going to continue to evolve over time because there's no standard contract. And so we all work with our general counsel's offices across the country to help build these contracts. And we have to have them. That's a part of it. They are not employees, but we do have these agreements with them that are binding.

JF: A question for you before I wrap up with a final question. Are we recruiting players that have no ability to graduate from Virginia while their eligibility for football is still intact?

TJ: Great question, and I love it. graduate from Virginia while their eligibility for football is still intact? Or?

- 1

38:26

Great question, and I love it. We have a plan for every prospect that we visit with from an academic perspective, for a path to graduate or a path for them to earn a certificate. So that's a part of the recruiting process.

That, again, substantiates the importance of the educational piece. So again, substantiates the importance of the educational piece. So every prospect that we visit with, there is a path either to graduation or a path for them to earn a certificate from the University of Virginia.

JF: There wouldn't be a situation where we just get a guy for one year knowing that he wouldn't be able to graduate.

TJ: We haven't had those conversations where that isn't an ultimate goal for a particular student-athlete. Now, they have to perform, right? That has to be important to them, but that's a part of our recruiting process is mapping out their academic track, either to earn a degree, could be an undergraduate degree or a graduate degree or a certificate.

JF: So these are true student-athletes.

TJ: They are, they are. And again, it goes back to that's who we are, right? So we're not going to compromise or change who we are and Coach Elliott is great. It's a scholar-athlete, right? That's the standard. That's the expectation and you know his expectation and desire is that every student-athlete that's a part of his program is leaving the institution with a degree or a certificate. I mean that is an indication of completion, right? You've completed something.

And that's important to coach, important to me, and important to Dr. Williams that these young people are earning a degree or a certificate from the University of Virginia.

JF: So the last question kind of stems from that, because I hear it from fans a lot. They say, players these days are just mercenaries. You know, they're brought in, they're paid, they do their job, and then they get out. What would you say to a fan who's disillusioned with the college game because they don't feel like these one and done players or two and done players are representing the school that they graduated from or the school that they love?

TJ: It's a nuanced question. And I try to come from a place of empathy first and foremost. It's different and I get it, right? If you're an alum of the institution, there's kind of these inherent experiences that a student should have attending the University of Virginia, right?

The first year, the fourth year, you graduate. So I understand the nostalgia and like the shared experience as a student. So the first piece is empathy. I get it, right? But however, this is a completely different environment, right? So I have to first show empathy and understanding but then explain to them how the landscape has changed first and foremost.

And they're not mercenaries. They're not. Like, they're They're not. When they sign that letter

of intent to come here and they're a student, they want to be here.

And they want to experience UVA, either for a year or two years. They want to fully ingratiate themselves in the culture. And I think the coaching staff do a really good job of kind of an onboarding, like understanding where you are in the Commonwealth of Virginia, what that means, touring grounds, bringing in former players to share with them what it means to be a Cavalier. So we have an on-boarding process, but to reference them as mercenaries is probably unfair because these student athletes are excited.

So I'll give you a quick example. It's funny. We have student athletes on our roster for football that are married. That are married. They're married, right? Some of them have children. Some of them have been at several different schools. And it's cool when they come in and they're like, wow, this is Virginia. They look like freshmen, first years. Because they're genuinely excited to be here and experience something different.

And it's not just a football commitment. It's an emotional commitment for these young people. They are moving and uprooting themselves, coming to the University of Virginia, around new people, new staff, new teammates, and they are generally excited about it. It's a really cool experience.

So to call them a mercenary is probably unfair. They are committed, they wanna be here, they're a Cavalier and it's been really cool to see them kind of grow in that space.

CW: Can I add, because we've talked about this with several of our coaches, because change, you could take two roads with change. You could experience the change and not adjust, or you could accept the change and look for the opportunity to really flourish.

And I think if you think about regular students across the country, there are hundreds of one-year graduate programs, hundreds of two-year graduate programs. That doesn't make those graduates any less of an alum to those schools, including UVA.

We have a lot of graduate student athletes, which to me is one of those unintended consequences, those things that you don't know you're gonna have happen until it happens, but people that really value education, they've earned their undergraduate degree and have eligibility and chosen to come to a place like UVA to get a UVA graduate degree. I mean that to me we applaud that.

You know we think that's while you're being a division one power for athlete. You know so the student-athletes whether they have one year of eligibility or two years of eligibility or five years of eligibility, they have all chosen Virginia for the same reasons we love Virginia. So they are our student athletes and this is their school and that's how they see it.

TJ: Well said. I mean, that's incredible. And we've had student athletes that have transferred from schools like Northwestern and Harvard. And I'm like, wow, I can play a sport that I love and earn multiple degrees from very prestigious institutions. It's a blessing.

So again, I go back to my original comment about UVA as a special place. and it is a destination, people just have different routes of getting here, right? And the traditional route was as a first year, but now the landscape has changed. The destination is still the same and a phenomenal institution, but their route was just a little bit different. And if you look at it through that lens and welcome those transfers and to our family and knowing that this is home, just their path was different I think people would start to understand a little bit differently than a mercenary. They just had a longer route to get to Charlottesville.

JF: Well, it's been a fascinating look inside the program and Tyler we kept you for about an hour. I'm afraid what your phone has done in that hour, you haven't looked at it.

TJ: What's this phone ringing?

JF: He's probably got about 20 notifications. You're in charge of all the recruiting in the portal along with obviously the football staff and Carla you did a great job recruiting Tyler to be here. So TJ you're off the hot seat.

TJ: Appreciate it. Thanks so much. Thank you for all your help and your work too.

JF: Thanks. Yeah, appreciate it. And Carla, we'll do it again on our next episode.

CW: Absolutely, thanks.

JF: All right, that's Tyler Jones, Carla Williams, I'm John Friedman. Another episode down of Inside Virginia Athletics with Carla Williams.