

**September 26, 2020**

**Virginia vs. Duke**

**Scott Stadium (Charlottesville, Va.)**

### **Bronco Mendenhall Press Conference**

#### **Opening Statement:**

“It was a pretty surreal experience. There were so many times during the game I couldn’t believe we were playing and that it counted, and that it was for real. Unlike anything I’ve experienced before, I wanted so desperately for our players to have success on the field and have a tangible result to show for it because of just how diligent they have been in all the protocols. As you’ve seen, there’s different levels of discipline in relation to protocols. That’s just to this point and it could change for us tomorrow, but to this point, they’ve really done a nice job.

“I’m so happy for Brennan (Armstrong) in his first start and an ACC game to get a win. It was fun to watch our team play football. Lots to learn and plenty of things to improve. But, they were resilient and they played through their mistakes and different miscues, and ultimately pulled away toward the end. I’m encouraged. Certainly, lots of work, but I’m encouraged.”

#### **On the offense going into the fourth quarter, the group’s response and combination of Brennan (Armstrong) and Lavel (Davis):**

“It takes time. Even though we’ve been practicing against each other, this was Brennan’s first start and Lavel’s first college football game. The good news is the future looks bright. The other good news is it just takes time. We’re still finding our formula. I was encouraged by the run game between Wayne (Taulapapa) and Shane Simpson. I really liked how that looked. Really our pass game wasn’t as consistent. We’re still determining the formula for this team and this quarterback and this system and the resources we currently have.”

#### **On the performance of Lavel Davis Jr.:**

“One of our best kept secrets. It’s hard to hide 6-7 for about 12 weeks in practice. The same plays he made tonight he’s been making against us almost every day. He wasn’t highly recruited. Was kind of viewed as a project, but we’ve loved him from the beginning and see a really bright future for him as he learns and grows and develops.”

#### **On Virginia’s resiliency through COVID:**

“We have a saying in our program how you do in one thing is how you do everything. That’s what I believe and that’s what I promoted. It was rewarding to see that. I’ll certainly use that as leverage in terms of lessons learned. I promised them it would deliver and I’m so glad it worked because my credibility was at stake.”

#### **On the defense forcing seven turnovers:**

“It was tough. That game was in the balance for a long, long time. Those turnovers really were the difference and those are forced and plays made, not just miscues by an opponent’s offense. I was encouraged and happy. That was the difference in the game in my opinion.

#### **On Wayne Taulapapa in the run game:**

“Wayne ran really hard, really physical and really consistent. I think part of the reason he did that was he had Shane Simpson coming and sharing some of the load. You had both of them rolling at a high level. Wayne did an exceptional job. He was aided by our grad transfer Shane Simpson, who did a really nice job and I think that made Wayne even better.”

**On the performance of the offensive line:**

“It’s the deepest and most experienced offensive line we’ve had here at Virginia. Duke is very active and mobile up front, and very aggressive. It’s difficult to run the ball on them. I think our offensive line did a really nice job in their preparation for the game, but they are also seasoned and experienced, so that was something we haven’t had in our era here at UVA to this level. It’s a nice starting point to see where they’re took off from.”

**QB Brennan Armstrong****On first start and his thoughts on performance:**

“Performance wise, there’s a lot to learn. I needed to be more consistent, but I think that's going to come as time goes. Overall, I'm just happy to get out there with the guys – we finally get to play. I'm just happy to get a win under my belt and we're just going to continue to grow. After these long weeks of practice, finally getting to a game, I just think we're happy to play.”

**On team’s resiliency through COVID and delays and that translating to field:**

“Yeah, I mean that's just how we're just how are taught. You come here to Virginia, you get taught to be resilient and it just manifests in our daily lives, like with not having any COVID positive test manifest on the field. I'm just proud of the guys, it's just who we are. I think that's who they want us to be and that's how you’ve got to be in the real world. So just seeing that out here on the field you know it just shows a lot of the shows a lot of leadership, I think, on and off the field.

**On chemistry with WR Lavel Davis Jr.:**

“Lavel, he came in as freshman and we hit the ground running when we got back here in July. You know, that was our first get together with just throwing and I think it's going to increase – we've gradually gotten better. First game, you know, this is his first game this is my first game in my first start. It's going to gradually get better, I think, just the confidence that he's having, his confidence is going to increase. Yeah, he's 6-7, a huge target and, you know, I'm really, really proud of him already and I think he's going to be a great player.”

**On associate AD for sports medicine, Kelli Pugh, her work and her breaking the rock:**

“She has done so much for our team, so much behind the scenes. There [are] so many people who've done so much behind the scenes and her breaking the rock tonight, she couldn't be more deserving. It just honestly – I don't know many words besides it just put a smile on my face to see her break the rock. And, you know, we got here with no COVID positives, we've done a great job, they've done a great job, Kelli's done a great job – so many people that deserve a lot of credit and I'm glad to see her break the rock tonight.”

**On running game:**

“Yeah, they just go to their office a lot and, you know, Wayne [Taulapapa] and Shane [Simpson] they carried the load. I mean we were popping off like five yards a carry and when you can do that as an offense, there's a lot of other stuff that we can do on top of that. I just give credit to the o-line, Wayne and Shane. It’s an experienced o-line, Wayne's experienced, Shane's experience just came from a different team, and now he's in the mix. I mean they ran the ball well and I'm super proud of them.”

**LB Zane Zandier****How the resiliency the team has showed for the pandemic and by having a late season opener translates to the field:**

“Even when we’re down I think the third quarter, going into fourth quarter, it seemed like everybody was cool, calm, collected and kind of feeling we were going to win. We just needed to make those plays to pull away and

ended up doing it. So, yeah, just being resilient is a huge part of this program and I think we've just trained that since I've been here for four years.”

**On overcoming struggles in the beginning and building momentum:**

“Oh yeah, absolutely. First off, I mean we kept saying it's first game jitters, first game mistakes, it's going to happen, and everybody just stayed the course. [We] kept doing our thing on defense and getting the ball back to the offense as much as possible. Get Brennan (Armstrong) the opportunities to you know settle in. Down the stretch I think he looked really good. Lavel Davis was exciting to watch. Tony (Poljan) had a really big third down catch. And I think we ran the ball well with Shane (Simpson) and Wayne (Taulapapa) the way they were running. They were running hard. And Wayne finishing with a break in, I think he was eight yards from the end zone when he was wrapped up and still got in. It was really exciting just to watch those guys finally get it all together. Yeah, it's exciting definitely. Now we've got a big test next week. It's exciting.”

**Impressions on playing with limited fans in the stands tonight:**

“Honestly, it wasn't too bad. It was definitely a little different. It's quieter. You can hear every call being made. I think that worked out pretty good for us, but I could see my family and to me that's really all that matters so I wasn't too affected by it.”

**Anticipation on finally getting to play:**

“I think just like the past week, we're just trying to keep practicing hard just because you get into a kind of rhythm and it's hard. It's easy to go through the motions and it's hard to go hard every day in practice but that was kind of just our focus. I think we had a good week of practice and just having the opportunity to play game, it just was awesome. Just meant the world to all of us, because of everything that we've gone through and yeah it was just so much fun to be back out there.”