

## TONY ELLIOTT INTRODUCTORY PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT – DEC. 13, 2021

**UVA PRESIDENT JIM RYAN:** Thanks to all of you for being here and thanks for giving me an opportunity to say a few words. I'd like to start with an offer of thanks to Bronco Mendenhall for his leadership, his service and his friendship. He is a very good coach and a very good man and has left the football program in strong shape and as important has left an indelible impression on the players at UVA who were lucky enough to be coached by him, and I wish him the very best.

I also want to thank our incomparable athletics director Carla Williams, not only for her leadership generally but for her incredibly hard, quick and successful work to recruit Tony Elliott to be our next head football coach.

It's not always the case that I believe headlines, but in this case I saw a headline that said Tony is the perfect fit for UVA, and I believe that to be true.

I have been a huge fan of Virginia athletics since 1989, over 30 years ago when I first came here as a law student, and that continued while I was a law professor, and the Ryan fan base expanded to include my wife Katie and our four kids, all of whom now bleed orange and blue.

What I loved most about UVA athletics and appreciate even more now that I'm president is the strong desire to win but to win in the right way, and that means acting with integrity always. It means taking seriously that student-athletes are both; they're students and they're athletes. We have a responsibility to help them succeed on the field or the court and in the classroom. It takes seriously the idea that we have an incredible opportunity to help our student-athletes develop into the very best students and athletes that they can be, but also the very best important. That is to say, we have an opportunity to use the vehicle of athletics to prepare our student-athletes to be outstanding citizens and leaders.

The reason I believe Tony is a perfect fit for UVA is because of his values, because of his track record, and because of his life experience. His life story is one of resilience and of overcoming obstacles. It's a life guided by faith and by a sense of purpose. It's a life story of success, and it's a life story that is a powerful testament to the ability of education to transform lives. More than this, I believe deeply that Tony is a coach for the right reasons. I had an opportunity and the great good fortune to spend time with Tony and his terrific family before he had made his decision to accept our offer, and I asked him what motivated him to be a head coach. He said he saw it as an opportunity to develop young men and to prepare them to be leaders for the rest of their lives.

Coach Elliott, welcome to UVA. We are incredibly fortunate to have you. Thank you. (Applause).

**ATHLETIC DIRECTOR CARLA WILLIAMS:** Thank you, President Ryan. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here with us today. First, I would like to acknowledge our players that are here today. Thank you for being here. As we discussed last night, we love you guys, and you are our motivation for making sure that you have an amazing opportunity here at UVA, so thank you guys for being here.

I would also like to thank President Ryan for his tremendous support of our coaches, our staff and especially our student-athletes. There aren't many university presidents that will cannonball into a swimming pool to support a National Championship. Thank you for all you do for us.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Board of Visitors and especially to Rector Whitt Clement and Vice Rector Robert Hardie. Thank you for your support, your encouragement and your wise counsel.

Thank you to Bronco Mendenhall for six years of dedicated service to the University of Virginia. He is one of the best human beings that I know, and I hope he will return to college football at some point. Our industry needs him.

I also want to acknowledge his staff and their families that have poured into UVA over the last six years. Coach Mendenhall and his staff have advanced the football program and laid a strong foundation for Coach (Tony) Elliott to build upon. Thank you, Bronco, and thank you to his staff.

I would also like to thank donors and supporters who are here with us today. Many of you are here, many of you are watching online. Thank you for believing in UVA athletics. Thank you for believing in UVA football. We will need your continued support.

The landscape of college athletics has changed significantly in the last six months, and now more than ever private funding is critical to success in athletics. It is as critical as recruiting and coaching. So thank you for your generosity. Thank you for your support.

I also see a lot of our former student-athletes here, former football players, football alums, and I just want to say on behalf of Coach Elliott, thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your support.

I would like to acknowledge Coach Elliott's family, his wife, Dr. Tamika Elliott, and their sons AJ and Ace, my new buddies. We are thrilled to have you join our UVA family.

Now to coach Tony Elliott. Humble, hardworking, intellectually curious, a passionate educator, a gifted teacher and coach, a person of integrity and high character, innovative, analytical, genuine, competitive, loves the young men in his program, committed to developing champion men, role model, ambassador, champion, winner. These are just a few of the reasons Coach Tony Elliott is perfect for the University of Virginia.

This is a pivotal moment for our football program, and we are honored to have Coach Elliott as our coach, as our leader. Please join me in welcoming Coach Tony Elliott. (Applause).

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll have Coach Elliott make some opening remarks now.

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Good afternoon. We're actually off to a pretty good start. I was walking in with Brennan (Armstrong) and I was telling him that we're already breaking records. I believe this is the first outdoor press conference, right?

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** Yes, it is.

**TONY ELLIOTT:** We're off to a good start.

It's with great humility that I sit before you today. I must begin by thanking the good Lord above for directing my path and ordering my steps along this awesome journey of life. To the Board of Visitors, President (Jim) Ryan, the entire administration, I'm extremely grateful for the trust and belief that you all have in me to lead the football program at the University of Virginia.

To Carla (Williams), words can't express how excited I am to partner with you as we take Virginia football into the future. Also I've got to thank you for seeing something in me that compelled you to take a chance. To the faculty, staff, student body and alumni of this world-class university, I'm extremely grateful to become a part of the UVA family.

After 16 years at Clemson, 11 years as a member of the football staff, I've got to take a few moments to thank some individuals. To the Board of Trustees, President (James) Clements, I thank you for believing in me. To former athletic director Dan Radakovich and current athletic director Graham Neff, I truly appreciate the trust that both of you had in me to let me be your leader at Clemson.

To Dabo Swinney, I cannot express how grateful I am that you took a shot on me both as a player and as a coach. To all the current and former staff and players at Clemson, I appear larger than I really am today because I've had the privilege of standing on the shoulders of you giants, and I thank you.

To all my former colleagues and friends at Michelin, I thank you for inspiring and encouraging an engineer to take a leap of faith when it didn't make sense to make a career change.

To all the former coaches and players at South Carolina State and Furman University, I'm eternally grateful for you guys helping me develop as a young coach.

To all my family from the West Coast to the East Coast, I thank all of you for believing in that lost child, believing that he could become the man that would make you all proud. To my aunt, Ms. Blondell Kidd, you were and still are an angel that the Lord sent to change my life, and I'm forever grateful.

To anyone who has crossed paths with me and left an impact, I thank you, as well. To my wife, the real head coach -- I know the order in my house.

Tamika, I thank you for seeing things in me that I never would have never seen, inspiring me to walk in the gifts that have been given from above. I thank you.

To my boys, AJ and Ace - sit up, Ace - here's what I say to you. Stand firm on the foundation of faith. Strive for excellence in all that you do. At all times keep a positive attitude. Boys, if you do that, you'll impact the world. I love you.

To Coach Mendenhall and his staff, I commend you all, and I truly appreciate all of your effort to build a successful program here. I am so excited to watch the team compete in the Fenway Bowl.

To the current team, the message is very simple, as I told you last night. Finish and do so with purpose, passion and love for each other and love for Coach Mendenhall and the staff.

I have patiently waited for this opportunity, and I'm ready. Over the past 11 years, I've seen the establishment of a championship culture, what it looks like, and I'm prepared for this moment. I chose UVA because I wanted to lead a program that was partnered with a university that had world-class academics. I wanted to be able to recruit the best and the brightest student-athletes.

I wanted to compete in the best conference in college athletics. I wanted to be a part of an alignment with Ms. Carla (Williams) and President Ryan that shared a vision that was similar to mine, which is centered around the holistic development of the student-athlete. And lastly, I wanted to be part of a university and athletic department that would not compromise its values to win.

There is no better place for me than UVA. And there is no better time than now.

My vision for the UVA football program is to become the model in college football, the model program in college football. My goal is to contribute to changing the narrative in college football and demonstrate that you can win at the highest level and you can do so while achieving excellence in education, leadership and service.

To bring the vision to life, it's going to take a tremendous amount of work and a ton of commitment. I certainly know that I cannot do it by myself. It's going to take a unified effort from the team, from the coaches, the support staff, the administration, the faculty, the student body, the alumni, the donors, the supporters and the fans in order to build something special.

We will also have some room along the way for others to join in if they want to.

So who is Tony Elliott? I'm a man who was once a lost child that overcame tragedy and difficult circumstances to learn that greatness and excellence is for everybody because greatness and excellence is a decision.

I'm extremely passionate about developing young men through the transferrable life skills that football provides. I'm passionate about winning and winning the right way. Never did I imagine that I would sit here before you today, but the journey was worth it, and I appreciate every day that was invested along the way.

The journey ahead is going to be filled with some mountaintop moments and also some moments down in the valley, and I look forward to both, because I know that both are important for growth.

I know the business of college football will judge me based on the results on the scoreboard, and I am passionate about producing positive results, but more importantly I know that I'll ultimately be judged by the positive impact that I make on the lives of the players and the staff that I am so humbled to lead.

Virginia football has a lot of work to do to become the program that is authentic, connected, transparent and about service. We also have a lot of work to do as a team, to be a team that is fast, intelligent and tough.

To all the former players, I look forward to embracing your legacies and your traditions as we build a program that acts and we field the team that is fit. It's time to go to work. Go Hoos.

**Q. I know you had some familiarity with UVA from being in the ACC, but as you went through this process what did you learn about the school and the program something you wanted to pursue?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So the school obviously has a tremendous academic reputation, but I learned just visiting around and seeing the campus the history and the pride and just the tradition that exists on the academic side, and then visiting over here with Carla (Williams) and the athletic department, just their passion and love for this university and for this football program. That's important to me.

So what I really wanted to feel, which I thought existed, was just that authentic passion and love for the university and for the athletic department.

**Q. You mentioned patiently waiting for this opportunity. I'm curious what it was about this cycle, this job that made this timing right, and if you could speak a little to how the fact that you weren't headed for the ACC title game for the College Football Playoff, did that make it easier to be involved in a job this time around?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Good questions. So for me, I sat down probably three years ago and kind of outlined really what I was looking for, and I made mention of those things, the high standards academically, the ability to recruit high-character young men, the conference, the ability to play in a championship-level conference, alignment, and then just a shared vision.

For me, I'd been looking for those things, and part of the process -- it happened so fast, and very rarely do you have an opportunity to get to know the people that you're getting ready to hitch your saddle to.

This year, this cycle allowed me to explore more options because we weren't in a situation -- we had a chance, so if we would have figured out a way, I might not be here because I would have stayed loyal to my values of my team of not interviewing while we're on a championship run.

But seven years ago is when I became the offensive coordinator at Clemson, and seven is a number of completion, so for me it was confirmation that it was time for me to transition to the next step. I had been asking for confirmation for years, and then spending time with Carla and having an opportunity to have real conversations, tough conversations, conversations that you normally don't get to have in this process is what solidified it for me.

**Q. I'm wondering because there's so much speculation, could you shed some light on how you're going to build your staff and maybe what's going on behind the scenes in that regard?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Thank you, great question. So this is a very unique transition. Had a chance to address the current staff, and I appreciate their time and opportunity to speak with them. I also get an opportunity to watch the team prepare for the bowl, so it's very unique, and it gives me time to make sure that I get a really good lay of the land and an understanding of where the program is under Coach Mendenhall and the direction that we need to go.

I'm going to be very patient and make sure first and foremost that I get the right people. That's going to be the approach. It's not about the Xs and the Os to start, it's about the people, because at the end of the day this program is going to be about developing young men, and in order to develop young men you've got to have good people in place to pour into their lives and plant the proper seeds.

So I'm going to take my time, and as I told the staff, they'll have an opportunity to be evaluated as we go forward. I'm going to get feedback from the players, and I've already talked to some, and they've given me their impressions of the coaches on the staff. I'm going to continue to meet with Coach Bronco and just get a full understanding of the structure and the challenges and some of the things that he's faced as I build the staff.

But it's going to start with quality people that align with my vision. I've been in conversation with a couple, but I haven't made those decisions yet because I want to be fair to the staff and I want to take my time and do it right.

**Q. You will be a first-time head coach at a Power Five institution; you had a front-row seat as Dabo Swinney took on that same challenge at Clemson. What can you learn from watching him and the things he did that were right and maybe even some missteps that he had along the way?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** First and foremost is surround yourself with good people. Piggy-backing on the last question, making sure I surround myself with good people that are going to give me wise counsel, understanding that I may have the responsibility of sitting in the head seat but I don't have all the answers. But I'm going to make mistakes, and I know that. That's why I said there's going to be mountaintops and valley lows. We need both.

But just surrounding yourself with good people, taking the time to really, really lay the foundation from a cultural standpoint and don't waver on your beliefs even if you don't necessarily see the results that you may want. Pay attention to the details as you build the culture. Keep the main thing the main thing, stay focused, so as you build your culture and you have some success, don't get away from your core values. Stay focused with that.

When you make a mistake, have accountability and ownership of it and push through and understand that mistakes are part of the process, but it's the collection of how you respond to those mistakes, and then when you have successes, celebrate your successes and then keep that windshield mentality moving forward.

**Q. This is kind of an odd question, but you talked about the academic standards and the athletic. A lot of people kind of think you can be one but not both; you can't be champion level at both. How difficult a challenge is that and what's the best way to attack it?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Well, I'm glad you brought that question up, because for me that's what I was looking for, because I think in order to be the best football player, you've got to be the best student, and you can't have one without the other. They complement each other, and all of those skills are transferable.

It's kind of crazy that people can think that, but in order for you to have success on the field, you've got to do everything right. It's how you do anything, it's how you do everything. So I'm looking forward to the challenge.

Again, I understand that there's going to be a Virginia fit. There's going to be a profile of what we're looking for, and we're going to have to go work to recruit the best and the brightest, but our attraction and our draw and ourselves is we're going to build champion men all the way around. We're going to use football, we're going to use social development, we're going to use academic development, and then we're going to build on a foundation of faith so that they can grow spiritually, as well.

**Q. I understand you met with the team last night; how did you feel that went?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I thought it was positive. I thought it was very positive, and they were very engaged. Just wanted to make sure they knew who I was and what I was about and the direction that we're heading, and then I gave them a challenge and a charge that turned it back over to Coach (Bronco) Mendenhall as his football team through the bowl, but I thought it was positive meet.

**Q. How do you want to look on offense, how do you want to look on defense in terms of styles and systems? What is your plan of attack there?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I want to score and I want to stop people. (Laughter.)

No, great question. So my background is a two-back, no-huddle spread. That's my background. But if you've watched over the years, been very multiple, and I think you have to adapt your system to the personnel that you have.

Every year each team has its own identity, so we'll base out of that and go from there. I'm anxious to watch, and I told the guys last night, the offense that they run here, man, it's always been intriguing to me, so it's going to be fun to be able to watch these guys practice and prepare.

Defensively I want to be known as a controlled, aggressive defense, meaning that we're aggressive, but we're under control, we're surround, we get 11 hats to the football, very good at disguising our coverages. We can be multiple, find ways to disrupt the decision maker and then stop the run.

**Q. How would you define your recruiting philosophy, especially with the college football landscape changing so much over the course of the last few months and even moving forward?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Right. I think recruiting starts in your own locker room. That's where we're going to start. We're going to build a culture that recruits itself. So we're going to have an inside-out mentality, meaning that we're recruiting the person first and the player second. So we're going to have to do a great job of evaluation and identifying those guys that fit the profile on both ends, from an academic standpoint and an athletic standpoint.

We're going to work. We're going to make the state a priority. We understand that the Commonwealth has a ton of talent. Now, not every individual will be the profile that we're looking for, but we're going to have relationships in the state, and I'm about relationships and recruiting. I know times have changed coming from a situation where we were all over the place, but I still believe that you can have relationships, and at the end of the day that's what recruiting is to me.

So we've got to do a great job as a staff of recruiting our locker room first and making sure that once those guys get here they still feel like they're being recruited so that they can go out when we do bring recruits on campus, and a big thing for me is just to get them on the grounds and let them see it.

**Q. A lot has been made about the facilities here, what needs to be done, the budget that supports football. I'm curious what you see as what you're inheriting and what the discussions with Carla were about that. And then Carla, if you wouldn't mind addressing the same topic, what do you think still needs to be done and do you feel like you guys are making progress in that direction?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** First and foremost, we're not going to make any excuses. We're going to be appreciative of what we've got because in order for you to appreciate and be good stewards of the big things, you've got to be good stewards of the little things. So the focus for us is going to be about building the team.

Now, in conversation with Carla, I know there's a commitment to a new facility, but I want to be able to have the culture established before we walk into the new facility because bricks and mortar is nice and the young people want to see bricks and mortar, but we all know that's not what makes a home, it's people inside, so we've got to establish that first and build, and as we build, then we'll continue to branch out, but we're going to take it one step at a time, starting with the foundation, which is the culture, and then the facilities will come and we can take off from there.

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** I'll just add that my staff tells me that I'm brutally honest, and I was with Tony (Elliott) about the facilities, because I think it's really important to be honest, especially in the beginning. So I was very honest, showed him pictures of our facilities, and then he had a tour of our facilities, and he still chose to come. That was really positive and confirmation for me, as well, that it's more than just the facilities.

We know they're important. We are going to have the facility here soon. But there's a lot that goes into building a championship program, a championship culture, and I'm looking forward to getting started on that.

**Q. How essential was it for you to be able to bring your wife and Ace and AJ to come down? I know it was a quick trip, but to get their input and what was that process like when you were weighing all the factors and just your general thoughts of Charlottesville in one quick trip?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Great question. I'm going to get some brownie points. Happy wife, happy life. But for us, it's about family, and for me, growing up in the circumstances that I did, football was where I found a lot of my solace in terms of a family.

Now that I'm a father and a husband, that's the most important thing to me. Yes, I sit here as a head coach, but I'm dad, and that's my biggest job is to be dad and to be husband. If they didn't give me the thumbs up, it's not happening. Just general

impressions, obviously coming from Clemson, very similar feel. You can just feel the passion for the place, and I think that was important to me.

But we've got three Chick-Fil-as, I believe, in Charlottesville, right? There's three of them and a Target. Target was important. Target was almost a deal-breaker. Ain't that right, Ace?

**Q. The early signing period is 40 hours away or so. Have you had a chance to evaluate the committed players, and how challenging will it be to keep this group together given the timing of your hire?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Correct. Yes, I did have a chance to evaluate and had a chance to speak with those individuals last night, and I thought we had a good -- just a good meeting, and able to kind of outline who I am and what my plan and vision is going forward.

The challenging part was the dead period started, and I wasn't able to see those guys face to face, so my message was, hey, just got to trust that I'm going to do everything I can to build a staff that you can be proud of for those guys, and we've just got to continue to work through communication up through signing day to try and hold those guys together.

**Q. Carla, you mentioned earlier that you hoped Bronco (Mendenhall) at some point returns to college football. What have the last 11 days been like for you, how hectic? How surprised were you by his decision, and how soon after the Virginia Tech game did he express his reservations about his future?**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** So I've said it before. I think he's wonderful, and I think he's great for college football. I think he's great for college athletics. I do hope he gets back into it at some point.

We talked on Sunday after the Virginia Tech game, and he was thinking about it. We had a great conversation and talked again the next day, and thought we were moving in the same direction, and then I think it was on Wednesday or Thursday when he shared that he wanted to step away, which was shocking to me and our student-athletes and our staff and our coaches. I think everyone was shocked by it.

But knowing him as a person, and Holly (Mendenhall), as well, I think it was the right thing to do for them. He made the decision for himself, for his family, and so we were very fortunate because he had laid such a great foundation here and established a strong culture, and I think part of that made it attractive to Tony.

I told him that he's going to be even more impressed with the job that Coach Mendenhall had done once he had gotten here, and it was certainly a great appreciation for the work that Bronco and his staff have put into the program for six years.

**Q. How are you going to handle observing for the next 30 days? Are you going to be like one of those blow-up Santa Clauses on the side looking over everything or are you going to be incognito or just film?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So first of all, Coach (Bronco) Mendenhall has been very gracious to welcome me in and open himself up to as much access as I want, and I have to say this: I know I'm not the smartest man in my house with Dr. (Tamika) Elliott, but I pride myself on being smart, but I had a chance to sit down with Bronco yesterday, and oh, my gosh, unbelievable. Unbelievable. He encouraged me, I've got to go dust off some books and get to reading. But that's just a great compliment to him. I'm very appreciative of his willingness to help me in this transition.

As much as he'll let me be around, I don't want to be a distraction. Just as I said to the team, this is Coach Bronco's team until the end of the bowl, but I wanted you to hear who I am, what my vision is, so I'll be a fly on the wall, try to stay out of the way, and whatever he'll let me have access to, I'll take advantage of it, so it could be film, it could be observing practice, but that's my plan.

**Q. Was this job more attractive because you guys don't play Clemson a lot?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** No. No. Well, we might have a chance every year.

**Q. Carla, I'm just curious, you guys had I think it was the 25th head coaching job open in this coaching carousel. What was your approach to navigating kind of a wild three, four weeks in college football of head coaching changes?**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** You know, I think every athletic director probably has a list of coaches to consider when needed, and we're no different. Coach (Tony) Elliott has been on everyone's list for a number of years, and so the opportunity to talk with him was valuable. We had one conversation by phone and then we had multiple conversations, and we were able to meet in person, and just every time we spoke and every time that I saw him speak I became more convinced that he was the right person for UVA.

There was a lot of craziness in our industry the last few weeks. We tried to stay above the fray and stay out of it and just keep our head down. We knew what we needed, and we knew that Coach Elliott would be a great fit for us here at UVA.

**Q. Tony, Dabo (Swinney) has said that you're like a son to him. Throughout this process, as challenging as it was, how much did you seek his advice, and what was the best advice he gave you?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So just to piggy-back on the first part of that, he is like a father to me. Our relationship started in 2003 when he came to Clemson. I was asked to come back for my last year, and right after the bowl game, Rick Stockstill leaves to take another job, and we're sitting in limbo. I was already a graduate, and I was debating whether or not I was going to come back, and then Coach Swinney came along.

He didn't have a reason to believe in me, but I was a former walk-on, wasn't a scholarship guy, asked to come back. There was some dudes coming back in that room from a receiver standpoint. But he saw something in me, and he believed in me, and he gave me an opportunity.

From there, the bond has been strong ever since. He was a mentor -- actually the worst advice he gave me was to not get into coaching. He tried to talk me out of it when I was trying to leave the engineering field.

But in terms of moving forward, he's always been in my corner, and he understands who I am. He understands the right fit. He's been the one that's helped me to stay patient, to look for the right fit, to make sure that I get into a situation where there is alignment.

There are jobs that he would give me his blessing on, and there were jobs that he wouldn't give me his blessing on, and when I heard him say that he felt like Virginia was the perfect fit for Tony Elliott, then that's all I needed to hear.

**Q. You were part of an in-state rivalry down at Clemson; Virginia Tech is also kind of entering a new era with a new head coach. How do you feel about kind of being a part of this new era of rivalry, and how will you approach that game?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So good question. As I said before, we want to win the Commonwealth, year in and year out. That's going to be a goal and essentially a season of itself.

Now, as we approach the game, every game that we approach is going to be the biggest game on the schedule because that's the game that we're playing. So we won't make the game itself bigger than it needs to be, but everybody will understand when we get to that week of the game what's on the line and what's at stake. That's going to be our approach.

**Q. You've talked a little bit about it or alluded to your story kind of growing up. When you think back on it, maybe earlier this week, have you had any moments just to take a pause and think where you were as a child and kind of where you've come to, now being the head coach at UVA?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** As I was sitting down preparing, it kind of hit me. As I referenced, I was a lost child because of the circumstances. But by the grace of God, I was saved by my family and my aunt, football, education, and really the first moment I was sitting up on the third floor and I looked out and I saw the V and I realized, Dude, you're the head coach at Virginia. Like really. Like you're the head coach, and you're getting ready to have a press conference.

But it's just a tremendous testament to how the Lord works, and as I said to my boys, it's simple. Stand on the foundation of faith. Make excellence a way of life and keep a positive attitude and you can impact the world.



**Q. Carla, for you, we've heard the word "perfect" with this hire today. How quickly did he become the choice for you and how quickly did it become apparent how perfect a fit he would be here?**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** Well, I was impressed the very first time that we spoke, and I think I sent a text to my staff or even called my staff and just said, wow, just super impressive. Coach talks about alignment, and I think that's so important. We're aligned together. We're aligned with President Ryan.

You have to have that in order to do something special, and that's our intent. Our intent is to do something special.

We are very similar in that we come from humble beginnings, and we're very appreciative of everything, every opportunity, access to higher education through sports, very, very similar. We also believe that scholar athletes can compete for championships, that our football student-athletes could and should compete for championships.

We don't have to compromise one for the other. That's important to Coach Elliott and that's really important to me. A lot of the same things that drew him to Virginia also drew me to Virginia. I'm looking forward to just getting to work and getting started.

**Q. Do you have any memories of playing against UVA or at Scott Stadium?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** What I remember is UVA always had the tallest guys I've ever seen. I swear, every one of them on that D-line was about 6'7" all the way across the board. But no, it was always very, very competitive, and I remember a game down in the valley where it came down to the last play to win it. Always highly competitive and always had a tremendous amount of respect for the program.

**Q. Carla, this school has had a great history of making diverse hires, but you look at the college football landscape, there's still a bit of inequality in terms of diversity and minorities in the head coaching role. How important was that for you, and of course Tony if you want to weigh in on that topic, as well.**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** So I think what's really important is that we were looking for a coach that we felt like could be successful at UVA. It's a really tough job. College athletics is really, really tough, and being a Power Five football coach, head coach, is a very tough job.

So we were looking for proven success, someone who had shown on the field, off the field, in the classroom, in recruiting that they could take us to the next level. So that was Coach Elliott, and he happens to be a person of color. So that's a bonus.

**TONY ELLIOTT:** For me personally, I've always just wanted to be respected as a man, for the quality of my character and the condition of my heart. Never made an excuse for the color of my skin. I understand the responsibility that I have; that's part of the reason why I've been patient.

But we're not going to focus on that, we're going to focus on being the best version of ourselves, starting with me all the way down to the lowest person in the organization. Hopefully that will inspire other people to follow suit.

**Q. Of the 14 Power five openings this cycle, eight have been filled by first-time head coaches. Whit Babcock did it and Jack Swarbrick did it and Nina King did it. Why do you think more athletic directors such as yourself are willing to take that leap, and were you influenced by your experience at Georgia with Kirby (Smart) and even before him Mark Richt was a first-time head coach?**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** Yeah, absolutely. So for us, we're unique, and we have a unique set of circumstances. So we were looking for someone that could fit those circumstances and thrive in them, and that is Tony.

Yes, first-time head coach Kirby Smart, we saw similarities in what he could do for his alma mater, which is different in this situation. This is a unique situation. So not only did I pull from that, I pulled from my own experience as a first-time athletic director, and what's really, really important is to have support, have alignment and surround yourself with people who want you to be successful and then just work your tail off.

**Q. I'm curious, you referenced the championship pedigree at Clemson and what Dabo (Swinney) built. Do you see similarities because this is a unique situation? Are there things about how you build a winner in the ACC that you can bring here that translate, or is it too different and there are just broad lessons? And Carla, is the fact that he was part of a championship dominant ACC program, was that important in your search?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I think that building a championship culture starts with making sure that you have alignment and a vision, that you clearly state the vision and you are particular in the people that you bring in and make sure that they align with the vision, and then you stay grounded to the principles that you set in place for the players and the staff, and you go to work every single day, and you keep an inside-out mentality. It's one day at a time, and eventually that will bring your championship culture to life.

There's a lot of similarities in my opinion. When you look at the state of the program when Coach Swinney took over, everybody sees Clemson now, but I started in 2011, and they were transitioning into a new facility, hadn't won 10 games in 20 years, so there's a lot of similarities between the two.

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** You know, one of the things that Coach Elliott said to me during the meetings or conversation was a lot of people want to have good teams, and he wants to build a great program. There is a distinct difference between having a good team and building, creating a great program.

So yes, being able to see, have a vision that is beyond right now for the university and for our football program was really important for me to get some insight into, and so that was a clear indication to me that not only was he thinking about the immediate needs of the program but also what we need down the road. What does the university need down the road to have a healthy, stable, competitive football program?

So that conversation, I don't remember which one it was, but just in that conversation was inspiring, quite frankly to me, so I do understand that it's important to have a track record of success. You have to know what it looks like, what it feels like, what it means, what it takes.

So yes, that was really, really important, also.

**Q. Recruiting the state of Virginia has always been a challenge for the Virginia program. How much do you know about the state? How much have you been around the state? What kind of premium do you put on it?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So I guess my honey hole has been south, in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida. But being in the program at Clemson, we benefitted greatly from some players from the state of Virginia, so you know that the talent is there.

As I said before, we have to make it a priority and start with building relationships. Knowing that we may not be able to take every player in the state of Virginia, but the ones that fit the profile, they need to come to the University of Virginia, and it's going to start with me setting the tempo from a relationship standpoint with the high school coaches and making sure that we start inside out and we take care of our backyard, because at the end of the day the program is going to be built on the guys that are committed to the university and committed to the football program, and actually those guys that are closer can spend more time in your program and become truly committed and invested.

**Q. Carla and Tony, I was wondering in the days and weeks ahead, how will you both collaborate to prepare for the transition during and after the Fenway Bowl?**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** We've already started, and I can't say enough about Coach Bronco (Mendenhall) and his staff with the transition. They've been absolutely wonderful. We've got a great staff here, and so we've already started conversations with the current student-athletes, conversations with staff, what do we need to do next, and I think what's important for Coach Elliott right now is trying to build relationships with our current players, understanding our staff, the makeup of our staff and how to put together a staff moving forward.

For us, we've been here four years now, and we talk about this every day. We talk about what do we need to do to ensure that we have a healthy football program at Virginia. It's not new to us, so the same things that we've talked about last year or

the year before are the same things that we're working on now, and they're the same things that Coach Elliott knows we need to be successful in football here at UVA, so we'll continue down that road.

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I'll echo the same thing about Coach Mendenhall and his staff and their openness to share information so I can get a great understanding of the overall state of the program so that I can start to blend what's already in place and then the things that I want to do to make sure that it's a smooth transition for the student-athletes.