

Welcome to the Wahoo Central Podcast, our biweekly look behind the scenes at UVA athletics. I'm Jeff White from VirginiaSports.com, and this is episode 291. It would take more time than I've got to list all of the Hoos' successful programs. Two of the hottest teams in season now of football and swimming and diving, and that's what we'll be focusing on today.

Bronco Mendenhall's football team has won four games in a row, and its offense has been piling up yards and points at a historic clip. One of the mainstays of that group is the lineman, Chris Glaser, who seems like he's been in the program for a dozen years, but it's really only his fifth year. Chris, thanks for taking a break from your studies to talk a little football. How's it going?

Everything's going well. Thank you for that nice introduction.

Good, man. Brennan, Keytaon, Dontayvion, Billy Kemp, Ra'Shaun, Jelani. They get all the headlines as skill players tend to do, but the real unsung heroes of this offense are the linemen, right?

Yeah, I guess you could say that.

How would you describe the chemistry with your group? Like you and Olu, Ryan Nelson, Bobby Haskins, Swoboda, Joe Bissinger. You've been together for a long time. You've played a lot of football games. What's the group like?

The group? Man, it's just a good group of guys. Most of us are within our last year here at UVA or towards the tail end of our careers, and we know that a group like this, we won't be a part of something like this in a very long time. And we just want to be the best that we can be to have guys like the very many that you just listed. Jelani, Dontayvion, Brennan, Billy, Ra'Shaun.

All of them just to shine because we don't look for those shining moments. We don't look for our articles because there's two different trains of thoughts with linemen. But I think that the main one that most offensive linemen should have is that you don't look for yourself in the paper. It's a selfless job because at the end of the day, that's what we do.

Nobody celebrates touchdowns harder or better than the offensive linemen, though, it seems like. You guys sprint to the end zone and celebrate together. That's the payoff for all the hard work, isn't it?

Right, exactly. That's the only time that your work is shown. If we don't score a touchdown, or if we just get a field goal, then something's left on the field. We didn't really do our job to the fullest extent. So obviously, when we get that score, it's very rewarding, and that's our time, I guess, to shine, really. To get some type of limelight. But yeah.

I know you're focused on the next play and the next snap. Are you aware during the game at how prolific this offense has been? And how well you're moving the ball down the field? And how many points you're scoring? Or in the heat of the battle, you're just focused on the next snap and the next block?

Yeah, definitely more so of just focusing on what's next for us. But it's how explosive this offense is hard to miss. Especially with Dontayvion's long touchdown. I don't remember how far it was, but--

77 yards. Yeah.

Yeah, I remember sprinting all 77 yards to get down to him. So yeah, you realize how explosive this offense is, especially when you're running 77 yards as I don't usually like to run.

Now, isn't there an informal competition among the linemen? Aren't you guys sprinting and racing each other to the end zone? Because I think Olu beat you once, or you beat Olu. And the winner let the other one know about it.

Yeah, I think that started-- I don't know if it's within the whole line. It's definitely pointed out in team meetings who gets there first. But with me and Olu last year during the COVID year, we used to race in practice, and we carried that into the games. And so, it's just all going now to see who wins.

I know Ryan Nelson likes to pick up the guy who scored the touchdown because I always see those photos from [INAUDIBLE]. Lift him up over his head. Is that just Ryan's job? Would he get upset if one of you guys tried to do it?

That's just his thing. We don't touch that. But me and Olu, we pick up each other. I think that started last year, too, because-- Yeah. Just doing something for each other, and it's just funny. You typically don't see offensive linemen lifting each other up, and we just thought it'd be a funny thing to do after a touchdown. So hopefully, you'll see those pictures soon, too.

So this line has-- it's had its ups and downs like probably all offensive lines do. Early in your career, there were some rough moments. Is it any more gratifying knowing that this group has grown together? A lot of you guys were there. A lot of these guys were there in 2018 and '19 to be coming into your own the way you have this year.

Yeah, it's definitely gratifying to know that those rough patches, it was us. We were the reason. We were the cause of some of those rough patches, but to know that we have worked hard to be better.

Not only for ourselves, but for the team, especially, is very gratifying to know that we've made ourselves better in the light of being just, honestly, one of the worst position groups in-- on the team at the time back in the day.

So yeah. Definitely gratifying to know that we are one of the best position groups now.

So you guys do more pass blocking than run blocking in a typical game. Does one of those take more of a toll on you physically than the other? Because they're two distinct skills, aren't they?

Yeah. I would definitely say, run blocking is a lot more physical. There's nothing passive about pass blocking, but it does take more strain, strength than just pass blocking. But they help each other out, I think, a lot. When you have a strong running game, then that opens up the passing game, and it gets easier for offensive linemen just because it keeps the defensive line, and the linebackers, and all the blitzers guessing of what it could be.

The coach who oversees the O-line, Garrett Tujague. You've been with him from day one. What's it been like playing for him? And what's the mood? I guess you don't really have a position room as such anymore. You have a position area in the indoor, but what's the mood when you guys go over film? And you meet as a group?

In team meetings, we like to point out a lot of the positive plays just so we know-- you obviously see the good in all phases of the team, but when we dial it back when we go to our position meetings, it's more of, what can we do to get better?

And I think that's the mindset that we always have to have because we got ourselves to this point of being a good offensive line, and we don't ever want to have slippage. We don't want to slip back into being subpar. We want to Excel at being the best o-line that we can possibly be. So fixing every kink is very important to us, and I think that's what we tend to do looking at film.

So Coach Tujague played at BYU. He coached at BYU. That's where your next game is. He's obviously not the only coach on the staff with ties to that school. Do you get any sense from Tujague this week that this one's any bit of a bigger deal for him?

No, I think what's been talked to us about is, it's just another nameless and faceless opponent. Just another opponent just farther away, and that's what's been preached. Obviously, no hard feelings towards BYU or anything. We just got to go out, and perform, and showcase our skills, and win. And honestly, that's the bottom line, is just winning. And it doesn't matter who it is. We have to win, and that's the goal.

You started two games as a true freshman in 2017, seven games the next season, 13 games in the next season, and all 10 games last season. That's a lot of starts, a lot of football. Once you learned that you had the option to use an extra year of eligibility because of COVID, was it an easy decision for you? Were you always going to come back for that fifth year? Or did you go back and forth with it?

No. So I had burned my redshirt my first year. So I didn't really have the option, and the whole time I was at UVA, until the COVID year, my intentions were after my fourth year, I'd have to leave because I, obviously, didn't have a redshirt. But with the COVID year, once I had it, I decided to stay, get the surgery that I needed, that I absolutely needed.

Because it was a problem in the beginning of the year, and it made-- having to get the surgery made it an easy decision, and I always wanted to stay at UVA another year just to get a full four years. Just because my first year was only, like you said, two starts in five games.

You've had a couple of surgeries while you've been here, right? Didn't you have two early on? You played hurt most last season, didn't you? Or much of last season? What was that injury?

So both my surgeries were on my hips. I had labral tears in both hips. My first one was after my second season, and then, when we looked at that one, we also looked at my other hip. And the doctor said, this one looks like it's going to go eventually as well. It's just a matter of time.

And that time came in the summer going into my fourth year. And so, we found out that it had torn, and that I'd need surgery. But they gave me the option of playing on it and getting the surgery. After getting the surgery now, and I just decided to wait.

Tough it out?

Tough it out. Why not?

You have roots in two very different states, Hawaii and Ohio. Here at UVA, you get to block for Wayne Taulapapa, who's from Hawaii, and you block for Brennan Armstrong, who's from Ohio. A cool connection there, isn't it?

Yeah, definitely. I have ties from both my homes, so you get the sense of both. And you see the difference in hometowns from both guys, but they're both great runners, great players. And that's just what both states produce.

So for listeners who are not familiar with your background, can you run it down quickly for us? You were born in Hawaii, right? Where your dad was stationed in the Navy?

That's right. My mom was born in American Samoa and then lived in Hawaii, and that's where she met my dad because he was stationed in the Navy there. After eighth grade, my dad retired, and we decided to move. And, honestly, Ohio was the last place on our list, but when it came down to it, it seemed like the most responsible and smart move.

And then I moved to Solon, Ohio, which is a suburb of Cleveland where I started-- I started there in ninth grade and ended-- finished high school there. So that's where my career up until UVA starts.

So I know that the UVA coaches were excited to find out about that Hawaii connection, weren't they? Because there's obviously some guys on the staff. One of your uncles went to high school with Coach [? Otiwaye, ?] right?

That's correct. Yeah.

That's crazy. So there's another connection in Ohio. Solon High School is also the Alma mater of Steve Greer, who had a fantastic career as a linebacker here in Virginia. I know you didn't overlap with him. Did you ever meet Steve when you were coming up? Or hear about him or anything?

I never met Steve face-to-face, but we had talked on the phone a couple of times. I don't remember how we got into contact with each other. But when I was seriously thinking about UVA, either I called him, or he called me just to have questions. Give me his thoughts on the school, and what he went through.

And he told me similar to what Micah Kaiser said a long time ago that it's not a four-year decision. It's a 40-year decision. So talking about the great academics and the great football that UVA is.

You were only 17 when you enrolled here. Did you skip a grade, along the way?

No, I started early because my dad was in the military, and my mom also worked. So it was just easier to start me early.

Well, that early start has not stopped you from excelling on the field. In the classroom, you were an economics major here. You got your degree, what, in May?

No, I got it last fall. So I graduated in three and 1/2.

Wow. Did you come here with credits? Or was that just piling up summer school hours and--

No. That was a lot of summer school hours. I took almost every summer session every year, and mainly because I came in as a chemical engineering major. Found out that it was going to be a lot more than I had originally intended it to be, so I switched out of that. Went to econ. Just good with numbers, so I figured that'd be a good route for me, and I was fortunate enough to be able to graduate in three and 1/2.

So whenever you play your last football game, have you thought much about what you'd like to do then? Do you put your econ degree to go to work in finance or with numbers, with money in some fashion?

Yeah. I would love to work with money in some fashion, whether that be with banking, consulting for different companies. But definitely something with money. It's something that will never go away, so it's going to be a for sure job.

So your second year here, I went back and re-read a story I wrote on you. You live with Terrell Jana, Zane Zandier, and PK Kier. They're all gone. Does that make you feel like an old guy now?

Definitely. It's weird when you go out to-- we used to go out to very famous places out here to go eat, and I used to recognize everybody there. Or I see people walking on grounds. You can recognize them, and now, I just--

I don't recognize anybody. And even though I'm young for my grade, I feel old around these younger guys. And it's something that it's new, and it's weird. Definitely.

Who in the next generation-- at some point, there will be another generation of offensive linemen at UVA. Who among the young guys have impressed you so far?

I think Noah Josey has impressed me a lot. He came in in the summer, and he's really excelled in knowing the playbook, being physical. Ty Furnish is a guy who is underweight, but he still-- He exactly has the right mindset that offensive linemen should be. The only thing he needs is more weight.

Logan Taylor is improving every day, and then Justice Johnson as well as just taking the role that he is in right now and excelling in it. And hopefully, all four of those guys will eventually get the role that they want.

I'm going to ask you some rapid fire things about the offensive line. Who's the smartest member of the group? Feel free to vote for yourself.

Smartest? In terms of football, I'm going to say Olu. Did you hear that?

Yeah, Olu. Who's the funniest in the group?

Bobby. Bobby. Bobby Haskins.

I think he's on the walk through this week, so--

Joe Bissinger is also funny but not because of the jokes he tells. Just him being him.

Being from Texas, right?

Being from Texas. Big Joe.

Who's the best dancer in the group?

Me. No question.

Who's the strongest in the group?

Olu.

And who's the best singer out of you guys?

That's a great question. I'm going to have to go with Joe just has that Texas accent that it's a good singing voice. I'll have to go with Joe Bissinger.

Final one. Who's the best looking of the group?

Man, that's me. That's a no-brainer.

There you go.

That'd be me.

Let me make sure I have my math straight. Six regular season-- that's not right. Four regular season games left. Two of them are at home. The crowds have been good at Scott Stadium this season, but they can always be better. The two home games, November 13th against Notre Dame, November 27th against Virginia Tech. How much of a difference can a distinct home field advantage make? Particularly against a really high-caliber opponent?

I think having a great fan base and having a great showing out for those games are going to be huge, especially when we-- Notre Dame, traditionally a great team, and Virginia Tech, our rivals. Being able to mess up their offense is going to be huge, especially because I think those are their strong points of both teams.

So any time that there's a lot of noise, too much noise, communication is-- needs to be at a higher level for especially offensive players. And if we can disrupt that in any way using the fans and the noise that they bring, it's going to be beneficial to us. And ultimately them because they want to have-- they want to see a good game, so if they want to help out, just yell.

Well, first thing's first, before you get that next home game, take it on the road to Provo this weekend. Good luck with that. After we get done, I'm going to talk to another UVA student athlete, Kate Douglas, who is an NCAA champion swimmer here. How are you in the pool?

Man, pool?

I forgot to say, who's the best swimmer on the offensive line?

No doubt, no question, me. I grew up on an Island, so I'd say I'm probably the best swimmer. And I don't know if I have the speed, but I have the durability in the water. So I'm not saying I'd give Kate Douglas a run for here money, but I'm a decent swimmer. I'll give it that.

We'll leave it at that. But listen, thanks again for your time, Chris. Great seeing you.

Thank you so much.

Did you know that more than 50,000 Wahoo fans have already downloaded and are using the UVA sports app? It is the best way to keep track of Virginia athletic scores and news in addition to some great fan contests. You can pick your very own sports preferences and never miss a final score or breaking news. And don't forget that you can listen to all of our coaches shows live or archived on the app. Go to the Apple store or Google Play, and search for Virginia sports or UVA sports. So don't miss out, and download the UVA sports app today.

Now, I want to welcome in someone who's barely halfway through her college swimming career. And she's already an NCAA champion and an Olympic medalist, and that is Kate Douglas. Kate, it's good to see you again. How is your third year on grounds going?

It's going great so far. Coming back from the Olympics, it was definitely nice to decompress at home for a bit and then finally get back into a normal schedule of school and practice here at UVA.

With classes back in-person again, is that-- I'm guessing that's something you're happy about?

Yeah, definitely something I really enjoy. It's nice to be able to get out of my apartment for something other than practice because last year, it was just everything revolved around going to practice. And this year, we can focus on school more and enjoy going to class, which is really awesome.

So swimming was really like the only outlet, wasn't it, in terms of that was your socialization?

So when you saw your teammates?

Yeah, swimming was definitely just our only social life last year, which was pretty tough on all of us, I think.

So for listeners who are not familiar with Kate's swimming resume, she holds school records in five individual events. The 50 freestyle, the 100 free, the 200 breaststroke, the 100 butterfly, and the 200 individual medley. She's also part of three relay teams that hold UVA records. The 200 free, the 200 medley, and the 400 medley.

You were a heralded recruit when you arrived at UVA in 2019, but did you-- would you have expected to accomplish as much as quickly as you have?

Definitely not. I don't think I came in to college thinking I'd have that many records by my second year or even amount to making the Olympic team summer of my second year. I just think I really chose UVA because I wanted to be part of a growing program, and that's obviously what happened. We won our first national championship last year, and just being a part of that was really awesome.

So before we talk about that season and the current one, let me ask you about the Olympics. You were in Tokyo with three other UVA swimmers, Paige Madden, Alex Walsh, and Emma Weyant, and your coach here, Todd DeSorbo, was one of the US team's assistants.

When you look back on that experience, how do you view it? You ended up winning the bronze medal in the 200 IM. Alex took silver in that event. She was in lane three. You were in lane four. You finished right around the same time. What was it all like?

Yeah, it was pretty much like a whirlwind of a summer. It was everything focused on Olympic trials, and then once we made the team, then we were just gone for five weeks. And we were in Hawaii, and then we were in Japan. And we were gone for a long time, and it was just a really awesome experience all around.

And I think I was really lucky to have my teammates and my primary coach there too because my training pretty much stayed consistent all summer. Even when we were training in Hawaii for two weeks, and then we went to Japan for three weeks. It was just nice to keep everything consistent, and it was what I was used to.

Was it just crazy at all at the end of the race to look up, see that you had medaled? Have Alex right next to you, see that she had medaled as well? And I don't know how many miles from Charlottesville Tokyo is. But it's a long way away, and here you guys are together as you are during the season.

Yeah. That was just an awesome moment to-- I think when I touched the wall, I hadn't even looked at the board yet, but I saw Alex smiling at me. And I knew that we had both medaled because that was just-- that was the goal. From the second we made the team, the goal was then to medal together. So doing that was great, and then getting to see the videos of our teammates watching back at home afterwards was also really awesome.

It was great exposure for the program. There was a lot of love for UVA swimming on the TV shows and viewing parties. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 protocols, I know your family and other swimmers' families could not be at the meet in Tokyo. You're from Pelham, New York outside of Manhattan. Was there a viewing party back home? Or was it just a small family affair?

Well, my town put together a viewing party in one of the movie theaters in my town, but my parents did not attend. My family just stayed at home and watched by themselves, which, I think, was definitely a good idea. I don't think they needed the stress of the whole town being there with them. But it was great to see videos of just people I went to high school with, and little kids in my town just cheering me on. So that was awesome to see.

So in order to make the US team, you first have to survive the gauntlet that is the US Olympic trials. Todd has talked about how intense the pressure is at that meet because it doesn't really matter what you've done up to that point. If you don't perform at the trials, you don't go to the Olympics. You'd competed at the trials once before, right, in 2016?

Yes, that's correct.

Did that experience help you? You're a better swimmer now, I think, than you were in '16, but did just having been through the experience help you deal with the trials?

Yeah, definitely. I think Olympic trials is the biggest meet in the US every four years. So it's a pretty intimidating meet, so I think just having been there once and knowing what it's like and what it's like to swim in front of all those people made it feel less pressure and less intimidating this time around. So that was really good that I'd had that experience beforehand.

So did you take a break from swimming when you got home from Japan? A break from--

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. After my race, I didn't swim for a good three to four weeks. I needed a nice mental and physical break from the sport.

So tell me about your major. You're a statistics major, data science minor. Are those challenging at all to juggle with swimming?

Yeah. I don't know if I would say it's any more challenging than any other major because it seems like statistics is what I'm good at. I enjoy math and problem-solving as opposed to reading and writing. So I've been enjoying my major a lot. And it is tough to manage my time with practice and everything, but I think my team does a good job with time management and just staying on top of things.

You obviously have an analytical mind. Do you apply that? Does that help in swimming and athletics? Do you apply that at all?

I guess I never really thought about it that much, but maybe it could be applied to my training a little bit.

As I mentioned, you grew up outside of New York City. Your parents both went to school in the state of Virginia. I think you told me once your dad went to Hampden-Sydney and your mom to Sweet Briar. Did your folks play a role in your decision to pick UVA over Stanford?

Yeah, definitely. They wanted me to be closer to home, obviously, and Virginia's a lot closer than California. And they also, obviously, had been to UVA before because in college, they visited, and they thought it was a great school. So yeah, they wanted me to come here.

Had you been to the state of Virginia much before your recruiting started? Have you gone back to visit your parents Alma maters or been to Charlottesville--

No, I hadn't--

--visit?

I had never visited my parents' schools. And I guess I'd probably had swim meets in Virginia, but I had never visited UVA before the recruiting process.

So your first season here, the season got shut down by the pandemic before the NCAA championships. You got to compete last season. It was a historic season for the women's program, which won its first NCAA team title. You won an NCAA individual title.



On the team side, Virginia ended up winning in a landslide. What was that meet like for you? From both a personal standpoint and also as part of the winning team?

I think we went in with a lot of confidence as a team because our goal from the start of last season up until March was to win the National title because that got taken away from us two years prior. So we just went into the meet just knowing that we were going to win it, and we didn't really have another option.

Because we were the underdogs, and it's a good feeling to know that no one really believed that we could do it, but we all believed in ourselves. So I just think having the confidence in that meet really helped my individual performances, too. So that was pretty good.

So now, people not only believe that you can do it, they know that you can do it. If you weren't the hunted before, the team is now. You're going to get everyone-- all the cliches apply. You're going to get everyone's best shot now. What are your thoughts? What's the mindset, the approach for this season? Obviously, it's a very talented team again.

Yeah. We definitely have a target on our back this season because after winning it once, we want to show the rest of the NCAA that we can do it again. And I think our team really just wants to start building this Virginia legacy of winning national championship titles. So we're going to hopefully do it again this year. At least give it our best shot.

Is it strange not to have Paige Madden around this year?

Yeah. It is strange to travel to meets [? daughter ?] and stuff, but she's been here training with us for some of the seasons. So we've still got her around for a little bit.

That's part of college sports. People come, and then they leave. So there's a very strong core that came back from last season. Todd added some elite swimmers, including Emma, who also medaled at the Olympics. Alex Walsh's kid sister, Gretchen, who is very talented. With that level of talent at the AFC, what are your practices like? Are they super competitive?

Yeah. I guess we're all competitive with each other, but it's honestly just-- it's pretty awesome to be able to practice with people who are just crazy fast. We're probably going the fastest times in the NCAA in our practices right now, and it's just pretty awesome to be a part of that. And I would say the environment is just really supportive and very-- I think it's helping build our confidence as a team to be able to have just such great competition in practice.

You compete in a variety of events. You swim every stroke. Which coach or which coaches do you work most closely with?

I definitely work with Todd most of the time. He's my primary coach.

As a sprinter?

Yeah.

You won the NCAA Championship in the 50 freestyle. You swam every straight. Is freestyle your best stroke, or was that just your best race that day? If you have a weak stroke, which one is it?

My weakest stroke is probably backstroke. Obviously, I guess my best event might be the 200 IM, but I would say my favorite events are the 50 free, 100 free, 100 fly, the sprint events. I like those the best.

So there's a lot of training that goes into making the Olympic team and competing, obviously. And are you eager to do that again? Did competing at one Olympics whet your appetite to get back there again? Or is that a decision for another day?

Yeah. I guess after realizing I made the Olympic team, I was like, I guess I might as well keep swimming until 2024 to try to do it again. But Olympic trials is a grueling meet, and you never know what's going to happen in three years. So I'm just focusing on one thing at a time. Right now, it's the college season. But I will keep swimming until 2024, and let's see what happens. It would be awesome to have that experience again.

So from a team standpoint, I know you want to help the Hoos repeat as NCAA champions this year, this season. What are your personal goals? You've done a lot. Anything specific that you put up on your wall or your bulletin board?

Yeah. I guess I just wanted to-- I guess going best times this season in all of my races would be great because I was improving a lot last year, and I think I've still got more to give. And as it comes to NCAAs, I would love to win an individual title again.

But I think something that is really important to me is being a part of a NCAA winning relay because last year, I was part of four second-place relays. And I know that we've got a win in it for us. So that would be really awesome to be part of a winning relay. Because relays, I think, are definitely one of the most fun parts of college swimming.

Not every program is structured the way Virginia's is with the men and the women training together and being under one umbrella. The UVA men placed ninth at NCAAs last season. They have a lot back from that team, and they've added some great pieces. Has it been cool to see that group on the rise as well?

Yeah, definitely. I think recently, we've really noticed it because we've had a lot of recruiting visits for the class that will be coming in once we've graduated. And the guys have been getting recruits like crazy, and I think it shows this program is really building and gaining traction across the country. And that's really awesome to see.

So both programs will be back in action next weekend, Friday, November fifth, Saturday, November sixth at the AFC against Texas, which is another power. Is that one you circle just knowing that it's a real chance to test yourself this early in the year?

Yeah. Texas is a great team for both men and the women. I think the women got maybe third at NCAAs last year, and the men got first. The men have been a consistently dominant team, and both teams have been consistently dominant, I would say, in the NCAA for many years. So putting ourselves up against them is going to be a challenge, but I think it's going to be great practice for early on in the season.

Well, it's a marathon, not a sprint, like they say. But anyway, good luck with everything. Congrats, again, on making the Olympic team and then doing so well there.

Yeah, thank you.

Take care. That's a wrap for this week. Thanks again to Chris and Kate for stopping by. The Wahoo Central Podcast is fast approaching its 300th episode, and your support is much appreciated. Please take a moment to subscribe to and rate this podcast.

To find previous episodes, search your favorite podcast provider for Wahoo Central Podcast. They're also archived under the media button on the front page of VirginiaSports.com, our official website. My guests this year have included Brennan Armstrong, Steve Swanson, Kip Turner, Diana Ordonez, Anthony Johnson, and Val Ackerman, to name a few.

If you're looking for my stories, they're archived on VirginiaSports.com under the content button on the front page, and I'm also on Twitter where my handle is @JeffWhiteUVA. Finally, be sure to check out the UVA sports app, which has been downloaded more than 50,000 times. It's available from Google Play or the Apple Store. We'll be back soon with another episode. Until then, thanks for listening, and go Hoos.