

Virginia Football Media Conference
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Head Coach Tony Elliott

Press Conference

Q. When you're coming off a game and you have some things to clean up, is it harder to get your players' attention after a win than after a loss, or is this an ideal situation, to have some teaching points but also to have won?

ELLIOTT: As a coach, it's an ideal situation to have success but still have an opportunity to get better. Most times we know adversity is where you go. The time when you take the leap is when you have success, appreciate victory but also stay humble enough to be able to focus on constructive criticism and go attack those things we didn't do well. There's a lot of things that they did well, and I'm excited about, some things that I wasn't sure, and then there's also a lot of things that we could have done better. Coaches, as well, and I was transparent with them, with the players, there's things that I've got to do better as a head coach. In my first time out, I was very critical of myself to make sure that I'm helping these young men be successful. All around as a staff, as a team, as a program, there's things that we can do better.

Q. Your assessment of Illinois: And would it be fair to say that you're going to meet a much more physical team this week?

ELLIOTT: Illinois. Man, I told the guys we've got to be careful because you're walking into a situation where they play to the end. It didn't go their way. They're at home. Virginia beat them last year. There's a lot of motivation on their end, and they're a big, physical team up front. They run the football. They're going to be committed to run the football. They've had success. Their running back is very, very talented. You can see that he's very, very comfortable in the scheme. He understands and anticipates where the run lanes are going to be. He doesn't try to do too much. No. 1 [Isaiah Williams] is a jitter bug. You can't tackle him in a phone booth. They're confident. The quarterback has played a lot of football. He was at Syracuse, transferred over, and he can beat you both with his arm and with his legs, and then defensively they're aggressive. On defense they're aggressive. Three-man front, but they make a five-man front and play a lot of man coverage and basically say, hey, let the best man win.

You don't see a ton of that anymore where people just play five-man front, create single blocks. So it's a game of match-ups for us, and they're coming from a league where the league takes pride in running the football.

You look at the Big Ten, man, that's what they pride, big offensive linemen that can mow you down, and they're not afraid of a 13-7 game, a 9-6 game, so they're built to control the clock, so our guys got to understand the mindset, and that's really what we've been stressing these last two days is the mindset of this type of game that we're getting ready to go into.

Q. You touched on Tommy DeVito, the new quarterback. What does he bring to the table for them that they might have been missing before?

ELLIOTT: The ability to extend plays with his legs. He can make all the throws. He's got experience, so you can see that he's poised and calm, doesn't get flustered, and just gives them balance because they're going to be able to run the ball, and then he has the ability to beat you with his arm off of all the play actions and the move the pocket stuff that they do.

Q. Looking back now on Saturday, how would you evaluate the offensive line? It seemed like maybe sharper in the first half than the second half.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, and in fairness to our guys, and this was a lesson that I learned, and the question came up at the press conference, sitting there, we had four straight touchdown drives after the opening drive offensively. We were in a rhythm, defense gets a stop, and I'm sitting there like okay, 'Des [Kitchings], run the ball. If we have a big play, then we'll be aggressive and go attack.' I probably should have just came out attacking and set their mindset going in at half, because as I evaluated the week, Wednesday's practice last week, strategically as coaches we kind of pulled back a little bit to save their legs, and we didn't have a great practice. Then I equated that to kind of the middle eight of the game.

It was a learning opportunity for all of us. I should have put my foot on the gas so these guys could come out in the second half and get off to a fast start. So that's a learning opportunity, but overall with the offensive line, I thought they protected really well for the most part. We did get Brennan [Armstrong] hit a couple times, gave up one sack, but the times that we got him hit, it was more missed assignments on the back end, running back being too fast, things of that nature.

I think it took them a little while to kind of get settled in in the run game, but once they had some success, they were able to establish the run game.

Still got a lot of work to do. You think about it, [Derek] Devine, first start, I think [Logan] Taylor's first start, [Ty] Furnish's first start, so there was a bunch of first-time starts. I was hoping to get some young guys in there. Was hoping to play a lot more people, to be honest with you, and I felt like if we came out in the second half and took care of business in those first two drives and defense settled in, we would have had a chance to play some guys.

But man, we're looking here, it's a tighter ballgame than we wanted it to be, and offensively we put the defense in some bad spots right there in the second half.

But overall pleased with their effort. I think the guys up front tried hard. Technically we've got some things to improve, but it was good for them to get that work together, have some success, but also see tons of opportunity to improve.

Q. Where would you evaluate [McKale] Boley, where he's at? And do you have an update on [Jonathan] Leech?

ELLIOTT: Yeah, so starting with Leech, Leech was available last week from an emergency standpoint because he had gotten the stitches out of his hand. He could play with a cast. This week he's back in practice, so I'm excited to finish up here and then go back and watch practice and see how he did.

But talking to him coming off the field, he said he felt good. He said the cast that he was in made his hand still very functional for him. We anticipate that he'll be ready to be in the rotation and see where his conditioning is by the end of the week to determine the breakdown.

Boley is physically gifted as a young guy. We've just got to pull him through the knothole at times of being a freshman. Sometimes a freshman is like, man, I just want to be a freshman. But hey, buddy, you're the starting left tackle. You don't have time to be a freshman. You've got to be ready to go.

So coaching him through that and being able to get him to stay locked in the entire practice, the entire game, he's still a young guy, but he cares. He wants to. He just has to mentally be able to push himself.

Q. Logistically going on the road for the first time, what's that look like for you guys, and what are characteristics of successful road teams look like for you?

ELLIOTT: Sunday through Thursday will be the same, and we're not going to deviate from that plan. That's one thing that I'm trying to get the guys to really internalize and buy into is the process that it takes, is that Sunday is Sunday, Monday is Monday, but Friday does change. So instead of having more time throughout the day, we'll do everything on the front end and then we'll head to the airport and try to get into Champaign somewhere around 4:30, head to the hotel and then jump into our Friday night routine. But the biggest thing is today we prepare for crowd noise. Illinois's fight song was playing, so the guys by the time they go to sleep tonight that's all they're going to hear, just so they're prepared. You want to try and minimize as many distractions as possible, but in order to be a good team you've got to go win on the road. And the same formula, and it really shouldn't matter where you play, to be honest with you, whether you're playing in Scott Stadium, whether you're playing in Champaign or playing in the parking lot, it doesn't matter, it takes what it takes, but you do have some added distractions because now you're worrying about families traveling and they want tickets and all those things. We try to get all that stuff out of the way early in the week and then really challenge them to simplify their lives so they can be prepared to be focused on Saturday.

Q. Is the fight song, is that something you picked up before? Is that something new for new practice?

ELLIOTT: I'm used to it. We typically in the past would play it to get the guys used to it, to create noise. We practice with music, and typically the music is loud. But I wanted them to hear something different to try and get them used to, so it's not the first time they strike up the band is the first time they hear it, so they're kind of used to it. Now it's not even a distraction. They probably won't even pay attention and hear it once they get up there.

Q. Looking at Perris [Jones] and coming off his performance, a lot of times with new coaching staffs some guys get new opportunities or a chance to show themselves. What to this coaching staff did Perris show over the past couple months that made y'all comfortable with giving him this opportunity?

ELLIOTT: That he's got the right abilities and the most important abilities, that he's dependable, so his dependability, availability, accountability. Those abilities he's shown.

Then he's got a lot of physical ability, too. He's very talented.

But all of the intangibles are what he's shown. He's a great young man, first and foremost. He's fully committed to being the best at everything that he does. He's a team guy. It never was about him, and you can see that he has a great appreciation for an opportunity, and he took advantage of it.

Q. As a former walk-on yourself, do you have a special appreciation for what it takes to do what Perris and other guys have done, to come in, put in the work, earn a scholarship and then actually earn playing time?

ELLIOTT: You know, I do, because I've been down that road. I also have an appreciation for being a recruited guy out of high school and signing as a scholarship guy to go play Division I and then walking on, having to earn a scholarship. So I got a great appreciation for both perspectives, and then trying to get those guys to understand that it really doesn't matter whether you're a walk-on or whether you're a scholarship guy. It's all about performance, and it's all about seizing your opportunity and taking advantages of your opportunity.

But really, really happy for him, happy for the other guys. Jared Rayman is another one I think about. He's been around for a long time, but he's got a critical role, and he takes pride in his role.

There's guys that I can think of. Hunter Renfrow, he's the first one that comes to mind as a guy. And sometimes you wish that you could get some of the guys that are on scholarship to think back to when they didn't have a scholarship, when they were grinding for a scholarship, and that's one of the things and challenges in the recruiting process is to stay level-headed, to stay humble, and to keep that chip on your shoulder.

Even as a coach, I experience it as a head coach now because everybody wants to do something for you, everybody wants to be close to you. You can easily get full of yourself. But I try to stay humble and remind myself what it took to get to where I am so I can be the best for the players.

Q. Josh Ahern made quite an impact in the second half when he came in. What does he bring to this defense, especially against the run on Saturday?

ELLIOTT: He's a football player. He's a football player. He's a contact, violent guy. He loves to practice. He loves to play. He's passionate. He's got great intensity. He's got great instincts. He's physical. What I'm hoping is -- and you know, James Jackson, in fairness to James Jackson, that's his first start. He's out there trying to figure it out. Live bullets are

moving. I anticipate that's going to be a great learning experience for him.

But you can see Ahern has played more football. He doesn't have to think. He just reacts to what he sees because he's already anticipated it, and he finds the football.

What I'm hoping is that he's able to bring that physicality that we need, and when their OL [offensive line] gets to the second level that he's able to not let them create more space, that he's able to meet them quicker to the line of scrimmage, and I think when you watch the game, Nick Jackson is going to find the football. James was close, but he was trying to figure it out, where I think Ahern is going to be a guy that's not going to have to figure it out. He's going to be able to get in his gap, stay in his gap and also restrict his gap and trust that his pursuit and his teammates are going to come make the tackle.

I think just from an experience standpoint, he's going to give confidence to those guys up front to do their job because they know that he's going to fill his gap.

Q. I believe that was the first fumble of Dontayvion Wicks' career. Did you see anything technique-wise that caused it, and how did you address turnovers in practice?

ELLIOTT: So that's a slippery slope there because you want the guys to be aggressive, and he's trying to make a play. But it's the guy that you don't see.

From day one, we spend time every practice that we have, that we have pads on, focusing on ball security with all of our offensive skill guys. It's our ball security circuit. What we're trying to do is put them in as close to game-like situations and also put them in situations where you have awkward body positioning because a lot of times what happens is whenever you stumble or whenever you get off balance, the first reaction is to do what? It's to use your arms to bring you back in balance.

Well, as a ball carrier you have to keep yourself from responding to that instinct. So you have to create the muscle memory that in those moments, now instead of me worrying about breaking my fall or trying to come to balance, I want to protect the football.

So it was a guy that he didn't see, and he's a guy that takes pride in his work, so today we went right back to our drill work. We chart the balls in jeopardy, we chart the turnovers.

Not going to panic in the first game. Now, if it becomes a trend then obviously we'll have to dive deeper into it, but the biggest thing is he was trying to make a play, and he was scrapping and fighting and didn't see the guy that caused the fumble.

Q. It looked like Brennan got banged up on a couple of plays against Richmond. Have you had to take any precautions with him? And how important is it to try and balance both keeping him healthy but also being able to use him as a threat in the running game?

ELLIOTT: Good question. So precaution-wise, it was a scary moment there for a second because he was grabbing his left shoulder. But as soon as I got to him in the huddle, and just in Brennan fashion, waved like I'm all right. I'm going to be okay, so I was like, all right, he's okay.

There was also one, too, where I was like, dude, be smart. Don't drop your pads on three defenders and try to be a running back and split them. Let's live to fight another day.

So just trying to find that happy balance because what you don't want to do is you don't want to take away what makes him great, and that's the edge that he plays with. But you do want him to get him to understand field general now. We need you in the battle. I don't need you on the sideline for something foolish. There's nothing wrong with you. Now, my running backs, you're not running out-of-bounds. You're sending a message. Quarterback, get your butt out-of-bounds and get on to the next play.

So he's fine. It was just a little bit of one of those football things that for a second you feel something and then you realize it's nothing major and you move on.

Not going to take away from him what makes him special, but at the same time, too, I addressed it to the team and challenged the running backs, I said, it's great to have two 200-yard rushers in a game, but I don't want my quarterback having to lead the way. I want my running backs to carry the load, and what I want my quarterback to do is keep us right, make us right with his legs. But what I need out of my quarterback is I need him to be the field general, I need him to command the offense. I need him to be in control of the game and manage the game.

Sometimes we're going to ask him, we're going to put the ball in your hand and say you've got to go get it. But when you have opportunities and you extend plays, let's just be smart and not be foolish and be reckless, and getting him to understand, too, more so for him is that his greatest asset as a football player is his body, and as a football player there is a shelf life on your body, and there's only so many hits at any position that your body can take before your body says, hey, you're expired, it's time to hang it up.

So he's got to be mindful of that and don't take any unnecessary hits, and then all the guys around him have to take great pride in making sure he doesn't get him because they didn't do their responsibilities.

Q. You and Des both mentioned the drops from the receivers. First game out, how alarming was it, and do you do anything to address it in practice?

You're obviously catching the ball a ton in practice anyway, but are guys on for 100 catches with the JUG when they have a drop or anything?

ELLIOTT: Marcus [Hagans] has accountability for those guys when they drop the ball, and I think some of it is, too, and I challenged the guys today after practice, is some of our other receivers, they've got to step up so these guys aren't playing so many snaps. It's the same thing with the running backs. I need Cody Brown to come back. Ronnie Walker was turned loose today. I need those guys available. I was very pleased with Xavier [Brown] and his performance.

But a tired back usually fumbles the ball. A receiver that's playing too many snaps in a row and doesn't have a chance to catch his breath, it's already hard to catch a ball, it's not natural. You've got to concentrate. And when you're tired because you're playing 70 snaps -- I'm not going to tell him it's acceptable to drop the ball, but you understand, like man, that guy is tired; we should have got somebody else in there.

So it's a function of I need these younger receivers to show in practice. You don't earn trust in the game; you earn trust on the practice field.

[Demick] Starling and [Devin] Chandler, those guys, they've got to continue to make progress so that we can trust them and say, 'hey, dude, go in the game,' and especially in a game like that where you're one play away from truly flipping the momentum one way or another, you're going to go with your veteran guys knowing that, hey, you're taking a chance because they've played a lot of snaps. So I've got to get these younger receivers -- because that contributes -- [Grant] Misch just dropped the ball. I got on him. That was a big play. We were looking for more explosive plays in the pass game, and he dropped that one.

Some of them were competitive that we counted as drops because we expect Tay (Dontayvion Wicks) to make those plays and he expects himself to make those plays. Nothing alarming, just for us as coaches, we realize we've got to do a better job of helping those younger guys be ready to play so that they can alleviate -- I know it was the first game out, you think about it, the guys had Wahoo Walk for the first time; they're out early; they don't know how to manage

themselves. You have to kick them off the field and say, hey, it's warmups, this is not the game. By the time you get to the game, especially in an opener, they've expended a lot of energy, and I'm not making excuses, but a lot of that is just, man, later in the game you get tired, and then I think, too, what you saw is we got a lot of opportunity to grow as a football team and a staff in terms of winning the middle eight. We didn't win the middle eight, especially coming out of half. Those first four minutes we were not very good as a football team. We had the two turnovers and then we gave up the touchdown. We did have the one positive that we forced a missed field goal in that sudden-change situation.

But opportunity for us to grow as a program.

Q. When you say Ronnie Walker turned loose, does that mean available to play this weekend? What have you seen from him?

TONY ELLIOTT: So he's cleared for contact. He's ready to go. Still wouldn't say he's 100 percent, but he's at a point now where structurally he's good to go. Now it's just a matter of pushing through just the discomfort of the remaining healing that has to take place. So we'll see how he does the rest of the week, but we do get Cody Brown back, so we get Cody Brown, you've got Perris, you've got Mike [Hollins], you've got Xavier, so it'll be more situation -- if he's fully ready to go, then we'll turn him loose and try to get him some action, but if I see any kind of hesitation, especially at that position, if you're not ready to go, you can get yourself hurt as a running back, especially as much contact as you're involved in.

We'll play it -- it's a game-time decision on him to see if he's ready.

Q. Defensively I think the longest pass play you guys gave up was 17 yards. I think the longest run play you gave up was 20 yards. Not very many big plays. Were you pleased with that? Is it tackling? Is there any reason for that?

ELLIOTT: So I think structurally and just philosophically, Coach Rud [John Rudzinski] is going to try and keep his guys in position not to give up the huge explosive play and put pressure on offense, and as an offensive guy, you like the guys that take a chance and give you the explosives, because offensively, you're like, man, a 14-play drive, that's an opportunity for mistakes.

So what you're banking on is you keep everything in front.

Now, I did challenge them to not just give easy-access stuff because there are going to be teams that are going to be able to put together long drives and nickel-and-dime you.

I thought overall the tackling overall was solid. It was better than I thought it was going to be, considering what I had seen on the practice field at times in some of the scrimmages. They got the ball down.

Disappointed in the one Fentrell [Cypress] had in the backed-up situation. He's got to get that guy on the ground and don't miss that tackle.

But you could see that the guys are trying to work hard to transfer the drill work, because they work a ton on tackling. We're going to have to tackle this week. We've got to get that back on the ground. We've got to contain the quarterback. So we're going to have to down balls.

I think the biggest thing is the big plays in the run game just came from guys not being where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there. They were on the way, they just didn't get there fast enough, and if you're a step slow, it's going to be big plays.

But I was pleased with the down-the-field throws when they did take the chance to put the ball down the field. We seemed like we were in good position in the pass game. I felt like the guys were where they were supposed to be, and I think with experience, the timing will improve and guys will show up a little bit quicker.

But overall defensively, I've felt like defensively the guys played a little bit harder than the guys on offense. Just being transparent. I thought the guys on special teams, they played extremely hard.

So overall, I felt like we won the effort battle, and I have different things that I look at to make that decision. But offensively I think that there are some guys we need to challenge to pick it up play in and play out, starting with our quarterback.

Our quarterback had some lows in the game, and he wants to watch the play too much. I told him, hey, if you want to be a spectator pay 60 bucks and go in the stands. You've got a job to do. With our stuff, he's got to control certain defenders by the way that he fakes. Those are the type of things that I'm talking about, just the commitment to the little things that ultimately make you successful.

But I thought the D-line, man, they played hard. Those guys chased the ball. Got to get a couple guys on the back end to break to the ball a little bit harder. Then we had a perfect reminder, there was a reminder or one of those big plays, the reason we get the ball on

the ground is because Paul Akere, he's chasing. He's chasing. He's seven yards past the line of scrimmage and he's running back to tackle a guy because a guy broke a couple of tackles. Just a lot, a lot of opportunity to continue to challenge these guys to grow.

They're receptive. They want to. They've just got to go to work and do it.

Q. I was going to ask about you about your pass rush and if you were satisfied with it, and if not, what do you have to do?

ELLIOTT: Yeah, so I think some of the rush game, rush twists that we had, we didn't have quite the precision that we needed. We hit the quarterback a couple times but we got there just a split second late. They were going to hold the ball too long. They were going to try and get it out of their hand.

I think that our guys got to do a better job of playing with their hands. [Ben] Smiley, he hit the quarterback a couple times, but it was his first time getting a ton of game action. He's got to be better with his hands.

So I think the guys were able to affect the quarterback, move him around in the pocket pretty decent. We didn't contain the quarterback well. We let him get outside, and that led to some of the big plays that we had.

But I'm pushing these guys. We've got to be able to get more pressure. If we're going to keep everything in front and try not to give up the big play on the back end, then the front four has got to get there, okay, or the next step is then you've got to start bringing five. If you start bringing five and six guys, now you put yourself in man coverage situations on the back end. So the alternative is we've just got to get a little bit more pressure, as you said, with the guys, but a lot of it is the twist games. If we were a little bit more precise in our timing, we're better on the twists, then guys were going to pop free. But if you've got any kind of delays or you're looping too wide, the offense has a chance to bump it off and pass it off and pick you up.

So we're going to have to do a better job, especially with this group that we're playing. We're going to have to be precise when we have our twist game.

Q. Speaking on defense, Fentrell mentioned this morning just communication on defense and maybe that led to some of the gaps in the run game. Did you all kind of see anything with that, looking back at film?

ELLIOTT: There were some situations that -- again, it's the opener, so Coach Rud prepared them for some

of the things we anticipated we were going to get, some of the FIB, formation in the boundary, on balance, but they did a good job of changing up the look just a little bit that confused our guys, so we misaligned a couple times.

Then anytime you have motions and change of formations, there's a lot of communication. So that's a great, great opportunity for our guys to grow and understand in practice why we're always constantly on them like get the call, get lined up, get your communication, because the key is -- every football player that you coach has to go through this process and really, really internalize and buy into this concept, but you've got to -- the faster you get lined up, the faster you can play post-snap because you processed the play before the play ever happens, if that makes sense.

Last thing you want to do is be trying to process the play once the ball is snapped. You want to be able to anticipate and then just react based off of what you saw.

If you don't get lined up and you don't communicate the calls, then now you're just kind of in catch-up mode, and it's too late.

Q. Cypress had three pass breakups the other day. He had none last year as a starter. Did you come in and review the defensive guys when you took the job, their tape from last year, or do you just kind of leave that to Coach Rud? What's the biggest between Fentrell so far and last year?

ELLIOTT: So I didn't dive in too much. I let Coach Rud evaluate that because I didn't want to create any kind of preconceived expectations or notions on these guys. The thing with Fentrell is just confidence. He's a lot more confident. He's getting opportunity.

I made it known that I believe he can be a really good player, to him, so I think he feels that there's trust from the coaches that he can do what we need him to do and do it at a high level. He was the player of the game for us from the coaching staff, so we voted him the player of the game.

Obviously Nick Jackson is going to get a lot of recognition for his tackles, but we felt like overall Fentrell played the best game of the guys on defense. Perris was the player of the game on offense, and then we had Elijah Gaines as the special teams player of the week, and we'll do that every week as a coaching staff, and then I know Jim [Daves] and the media, they'll have some recommendations for like the conference awards.

But Fentrell is, it's just confidence and experience and understanding and relationship with new coaching

staff and understanding, too, that he's got to go, that we're pushing him, like now you've got to go and you need to step into your role as a starter and play with that confidence.

It was good to see him have those pass breakups because a lot of it is, too, with both Des and Rud, you're still evaluating, and you don't know until you get to a game. Now to see him be able to go up and play some balls in the air down the field, now gives you a little more confidence as a play caller to be able to put yourself in a situation where you can be a little bit more aggressive and take some chances or some calculated chances.

Q. You mentioned Akere chasing down a play there. I think he only played like 20-something snaps. Is that an example of how you can show the guys the competition is still open and these are the things we notice?

ELLIOTT: Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Coach [Kevin] Downing and Coach [Chris] Slade, they're doing a great job because there's a lot of guys that want to play. Playing time is going to be earned. It's not about how many plays you get to play, it's about how you play on those plays.

If you're a guy that plays 50 snaps or a guy that plays 10 snaps, it's the quality of the snaps that you've got to focus on. That right there, when you have the ability to play multiple guys and show instances of what it takes to win at a high level, it just reinforces the competition that you have in that room.

In my experience, to win and win at the highest level, it starts in the trenches. Yes, you've got to have a great quarterback. You've got to have dynamic skill guys. But you've got to have guys in the trenches on both sides of the ball to be able to win at the highest level, and that's where we're going to have a focus and a point of emphasis going forward. We're going to recruit every position, but we're going to make sure that we recruit offensive line, defensive line and create healthy competition right there and depth because that's really what wins in my opinion is in the trenches, and you have quality depth behind it in case you have some type of injuries down the road.

Q. You mentioned earlier, the Big Ten mindset. It's a unique conference in that regard, that it has a real conference-wide identity. You've got some guys, [Jack] Camper, (Devin) Chandler, (Ronnie) Walker, who have played Big Ten football. Do they help spread the message of Big Ten does have an identity?

ELLIOTT: I haven't tapped into it. I've kind of led the message and the charge. But at the same time, too, the ACC has got an identity. We've got great quarterback play, and we're very, very balanced as a league.

So there's things that we can sell, as well. So I think we've got some things that can challenge them from the style of play that we have in our league.

Also, too, I think that there's a different mindset between the Big Ten football and then playing football -- southern football. So now it's going to be a challenge to kind of see -- those are always fun matchups because it's kind of like everywhere has their own style.

You get around the players, they're going to talk about if I'm from Georgia, Georgia football is better than South Carolina football and South Carolina is going to say South Carolina football is better than North Carolina. But it's going to be fun because they do -- the league does have an identity.

Rightfully so; the Big Ten has been a highly successful conference throughout the years. You look at the teams that are in that conference right now, they're sending somebody to the college football playoffs every single year, and late in the season they've got multiple teams that got a shot, that are in contention for the College Football Playoff. So it's going to be a great test for us.

But I think at the end of the day, whether it's Big Ten, whether it's ACC, you win football games in the trenches, and so the challenge for us is to see can we match their physicality, from their physicality and their toughness.

The team that can establish the run and be committed to the run and have the most success more than likely -- and takes care of the ball is more than likely going to be the team that wins the game.