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**Tony Elliott**

**Q. Noticeable uptick in energy and enthusiasm from players coming off a win after you've lost a couple games right before that?**

COACH ELLIOTT: It was definitely the last two and a half weeks of the guys with good energy, good intensity at practice and becoming more comfortable with the staff, having a better understanding of philosophically our approach week in, week out what it takes to be consistent, the type of energy that you've got to show up with every day the mindset understanding what the theme of the day was, what work we've got to get accomplished. But definitely after a win, a lot of excitement at the same time, too, it's an opportunity to teach the guys today you've got to handle success well.

That's something we learned early and hopefully we can continue to make steps forward so that whether we win or lose we have the right energy, but at the end of the day every day is a day of its own. Every week is a season of its own and we've got to take that approach.

**Q. What does it mean to you guys, how do you look at the opportunity of four straight games at home?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Right. Just excited to have a normal routine. It's been, I'll tell you, you're traveling in a hurricane. You're on the road. You've got short weeks. You've got an open week. It's just been kind of abnormal. But just excited to get on a routine and be consistent for the next three or four weeks. Definitely want to take advantage of the pride that's here at UVA of playing at home. I think 23-6 something like that over the last several years. One of the better home records in the Coastal. Excited to be back in front of our fans

but get on a routine and be consistent and kind of get back in the normal battle rhythm.

**Q. You guys are just outside the top 10 in several defensive categories, particularly turnovers gained and sacks and things like that. Can you just talk about the job the defense has done and how that could help you?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Definitely really proud of defensive side of the ball and just the energy that they bring every single day and the guys buying in schematically to what we're trying to do. But I think it really starts with the effort that they're playing with. Those guys are playing with tremendous effort. I think it starts up front with just the influx of guys up front has raised the competition level, which has elevated the performance level and I think in leadership you have from Nick Jackson; I haven't been around a better leader all the way around. And he's a really good football player on top of that.

And played through injuries. He sets the tempo. And then on the back end you're starting to see us get some guys back. You've got Coen King back and Jonas [Sanker] is more comfortable and I'd like to see Lex [Langston Long] get back and going playing how he was. You see those guys playing with confidence it starts with trust in what they're doing from a scheme standpoint. They started the year with the new staff and the transition looking for something to believe in.

You could see that they wholeheartedly believe in what we're doing on that side of the ball. They understand that we've got to play complementary football and truthfully, they've been compensating a lot. Creating turnovers. Sacking the quarterback, giving the offense an opportunity to try and stay in the game and figure it out.

But just starts with the guys up front. I think we have some competitive depth, which is an advantage that you can play guys. You are

starting to see some of the young guys now get to a point where they can jump in there and Michael [Diatta] and Su [Olasunkonmi Agunloye] and hopefully to get Bryce Carter going here. But really proud of what they're doing. Starts with Coach Rud [John Rudzinski] runs a tight ship over there. He's a military guy. He's got everything very organized, very efficient. The staff has really, really gelled and I think it's a reflection of how those guys are playing.

**Q. Part of complementary football, also includes special teams. How big are those individual things, or is it something operational that part of the ball hasn't been strong?**

COACH ELLIOTT: I think we had to have a come-to-Jesus with the team. Something I've been stressing from day one is the buy in you have to have from your best players and your most talented players on special teams. We were banged up with Nick and [Josh] Ahern some of those guys being banged up. In the meantime we had to play some young guys. Young guys are hungry and eager but they just don't have the experience.

You're seeing some of that show up in special teams. And bottom line we had to go back to the drawing board and tell these guys, the approach I'm taking now I'll rest you on offense and defense before special teams because those are critical. And I told the team that we should have lost the game based off how we played on special teams.

You miss field goals and extra points, getting punts blocked, you should lose the football game from a special teams standpoint. Luckily going back to the previous question. Defense created some turnovers, they got off the field they were able to take advantage of the field position. That's what I was proud of, challenged those guys one area we thought we needed to improve was if Sparky [Daniel Sparks], I call him Sparky, if Sparks punts one down inside the 10 needs to be good field

position for the offense. Two or three times they got stops and got us good field position. Special teams we were one block away for several weeks on kick-off return and then we just had a snafu. Younger guy out there we told him hey we're not going to return it. And again we gotta grow situational football but special teams we've gone back to the drawing board and you'll see more of the guys that you are used to seeing on special teams and again we're going to take the approach if you need plays off or you need to rest because you're tired we'll do it on offense and defense and get our best personnel out on the field on special teams.

**Q. What did you see in terms of what happened the blocked punt, was one of the misses [field goal] blocked or just a low kick?**

COACH ELLIOTT: It was a low kick. Inconsistent with snaps, protection wasn't great. Young guy we've been challenging him to get the ball up. He's been kicking low kicks.

Couple times he was watching the snap, threw him off. Snap was off right, snap was high. Got him off kilter. So we have to be more consistent with the snap.

First time prime time under the lights for a young guy. That's where you have to be prepared and every day in practice you've got to go through routine. So the blocked punt, unfortunately, bad technique.

We got a couple of guys in there again because we're injured at some spots. We're having to play some guys that don't have as much experience.

Wrong targeting, we should be on the far target. We're on the near target. So now what we're doing is we're turning extra guys loose on a two-man shield.

Kam's [Butler] got his eyes on one guy. Next you know there's three guys that flash on him. Anybody in that position has to pick one. He tries to pick one, ducks his head next thing you know it's blocked. A lot is trusting the technique and trusting footwork and understanding the difference between what we're teaching, open step, cut step. Targets are when we say near number, far number, near via the neck. Proper punch. It was a combination of schematically they put us in a tough position. We've got to slow down. Recount. Kam as the quarterback of our punt team he's got to slow down, let the guys recount, make sure we're targeted right. But fundamentally we've just got to be better up front. It comes down to guys trusting what we're telling them from a technique standpoint and then going out and transitioning to the field and executing.

**Q. You mentioned before talking about success and kind of learning to deal with success, how do you reinforce that just kind of coming off a win?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Monday is Monday. It's mindset Monday. Had a chance to celebrate it over the weekend. Now it's time to get back to work and understand that the plays that you made last week, they don't carry over. Now you have to start all the way over. You've got to reset every single day and understand that you must respect the process at all times and challenge yourself now. You're in game eight. The body is starting to tell you, 'man this is a long season I'm a little bit tired' I don't want to start feeling sorry for myself. As coaches we have to do a good job applying the pressure and respond the right way go to work and understand if you want to enjoy the feeling that you felt on Thursday night, then you've got to pay the price. Challenging these guys with the mindset and the perspective and the way that they think and also again understand that whether you have success or failure, winners think a certain way.

If you have failure, you respond. The right way. You don't let it beat you twice. When you have success, you say you know what, I had success because I trusted the process and I'm going to continue to trust the process and not do my own thing.

So we'll challenge them every day of the week with a different theme. But the biggest thing is being consistent in the message and then us not changing as coaches and making sure that as coaches we continue to harp on the little things, push the details, demand the effort that we're looking for.

There's still some opportunities I feel like from a team perspective that we can play a little bit harder in spots.

**Q. Brennan referred to that touchdown as vintage [Dontayvion] Wicks we saw on Thursday night. How close is he to being vintage Wicks being the guy first team all-ACC last year?**

COACH ELLIOTT: I think he's really close. I think he has to turn it loose. Turn it loose. I know we're asking him schematically to do things that may be different from a thought standpoint and processing standpoint. But he's more than capable. And it was good to see him have that. He's been practicing. He's been practicing a lot better over the last couple of weeks. You're starting to see him become a little more comfortable in what we're doing. I think it's critical that he does, because if you watch Brennan in the game, two turnovers in five plays. Six points for the opposition. Now he's like 'I've got to go make a play'. You start to get antsy in the pocket where sit in the pocket you've got good protection, deliver the ball now the ball is on time you're not scrambling to the left throwing it behind the receiver. Still have to make the play. But if you trust the process we've got to get the receivers to understand hey this is how we're doing things.

And yes, I know you guys have made plays in the past and vintage Wicks throwing some up, those plays will come but we can't force them. Those have to be when plays break down that's what you guys do when plays break down.

When the plays are there we've got to make the routine play.

**Q. Jay Woolfolk wasn't dressed. And Mike Hollins didn't play. Any long term issues?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Hollins is back and Jay is back. Jay, Thursday, in noncontact practice just felt something in his knee. MRI showed that it was more stuff that he had in high school. But still was swollen and sore and so it wasn't in his best interest to have him try and go. A little bit disappointed because we had some stuff planned for him.

But he's back in practice, full speed, running around and Mike was out last week because of protocol but now he's cleared to go and ready to help us.

**Q. With Miami, do you see similarities with them and what they're going through under Mario [Cristobal] in his first year to what you guys have gone through a little bit this year?**

COACH ELLIOTT: I would imagine. You're seeing it, if you just watch us, in particular offensively, guys that had success and now you've got a new system coming in. It takes time.

It's a whole new chemistry that you have to develop. And the same thing defensively. You see those guys flying around at times but then you see times where you'd like to see a little bit better.

And again that's to be expected. I haven't been around Cristobal long, but the impression he's had on me he's going to do it the right way. Make it about building the right culture based off the values that he believes and in my

opinion I believe his values are in the right place based off what I know about him.

It's just a transition. It's just a process and obviously all of us hope and wish that it would happen faster than it does. But the gurus that talk about changing cultures doing things like that says it takes at least 18 months or so before you get your culture set.

So I don't know exactly what they're trying to do. But I do see that the guys are playing hard. They're trying to have fun. But at the same time too you could see those opportunities. I think they had eight turnovers last game. And those are a reflection of practice. I go back to Perris [Jones], Perris is not trying to fumble the football, but it goes back to practice habits. And breaking bad practice habits.

You've always got to cover the nose of the ball that's number one thing. We talk about nose the ball, wrist up to your chin and being consistent with the mundane. You see some of those aspects when you get on the film. What I anticipate -- what I will say about Miami, they're still Miami now. They're still talented. Lord, they're still talented. Dudes running around everywhere. Looking at them defensively they're in similar situation to us from D-line standpoint. They're playing a lot of guys. Playing guys that's quality depth for them that you don't see much of a changeup and I think they're in the country in sacks that they've had is because they're fresh. They're rolling. They can push the pocket. They can collapse the pocket from the inside.

They've got speed off the edge and they get you behind the chains, they're going to get a rabbit package going. Their linebackers are downhill. Their secondary guys have creatures in the secondary.

They can play you man coverage. They can lock you up offensively. They're going to throw the ball down the field. They don't have their RPOs, establish the run game. They've got dudes on the outside that can really one-

on-one you and a quarterback that can put the ball where it needs to be.

Just trying to get this team to understand better not be looking at records. You better not -- you better not be falling for the bait. This is a very, very good football team and very talented football team that is close to having a different, completely different record.

So we'll have to play well and play hard and match their intensity and at the end of the day we'll have to trust our fundamentals because when you get in matchups like this and try to get these guys to understand, Miami. This University of Miami. It's the U. And when they were at their best, it was line up and play football.

And you've got to come beat us. And I see a little bit of that starting to develop there. They're going to line up. They're not going to try to trick you. They're going to line up and the best man is going to win. You've got to have your jaws set the right way for a game like this because it's going to be a battle. It's going to be four quarters.

And you have to work hard throughout the course of the week to make sure that you got the proper muscle memory with your fundamentals and techniques. That's what's going to win. At the end of the day fundamentals and contested plays that's where we've got to get better. All the way around comes down to contested plays.

This is going to be a good test for our guys and I'm excited to see how they're going to respond to a challenge like this because by far this is the most talented team that we'll play, that we played all year.

**Q. Ty Furnish started the last two games at center. I think he's been out there for most of the reps. I know Jestus [Johnson] has been in some. What was his response to**

**losing his job if only a little bit to Jestus just kind of midseason.**

COACH ELLIOTT: These guys understand it's day to day. We want to play more guys. We want to have competitive depth. I think at your position what you're starting to see is an understanding one guy may be better suited to do certain things as opposed to the other guys so Ty may have strength in this area where Jestus has strengths in other areas. Both have played for us. They've shown they can perform on the field. What you're seeing is just a combination of trying to get the right guy in there for the right situation. But then also having two guys ready to go and then rewarding the guys that deserve to play and that's where we're trying to push offensively is just to be able to play more guys with competitive depth. Especially at receiver. We're throwing J.R. [Sean Moore] in there. He's a young guy. Talented. Ton of upside he'll be awesome but he's still a young guy. We get him in there. He goes the wrong way. So that's where we are offensively is just trying to build competitive depth where I think on the defensive side of the ball you're seeing that's coming along a lot faster than what we've got offensively. But he responded the right way. Both of those guys compete. They understand that hey they've got to earn the job every day. And they understand they also have roles that we're going to try to take advantage of within the game.

**Q. I think seven games now as a head coach, how are you using analytics within the game to try to make decisions? How much of it is feel? How are you doing that personally?**

COACH ELLIOTT: So right now being transparent, it's mostly feel because the analytics will tell you one thing but the kicking situation tells you another thing with where we are, having had to make a change. So you lose some of your range.

In the course of the game, you get a feel for what your kicking situation is. So a lot of it is

conversation amongst the staff making sure we're all on the same page, thinking right. But more feel right now than it is analytics especially with the inconsistency that we had on offense and then sometimes me trying to send a message like, hey, conventionally I shouldn't do this but hey I'm going to go for it to show these guys I have confidence. Build confidence with the offense.

A lot of it is more game-specific. More feel. I think as we grow and we get the foundation laid within the program, then we'll be able to incorporate a little bit more analytics.

From the analytical side I think the question you're asking me, the outside, with the books that tell you to go for it on fourth down all that stuff. But in terms of preparation over the course of the week we're using analytics to make sure percentage-wise what we're getting and what to anticipate for us so we can build a plan to be prepared to cover all the situations and then I think what you're specifically asking me is more down the road for me. I'm still trying to figure out how to manage the sideline, when to press, when to back off, when to encourage, when do I go look the guys in the eyes those are the things I'm getting a better feel for in the first seven games.

**Q. You're talking about the Miami defense earlier. You have some familiarity with their offensive coordinator. How similar does it look to what you saw at Clemson?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Coach [Kevin] Steele, South Carolina guy. We share those roots. But one I worked with him at Clemson when I first got there and he was very, very good to me first and foremost. I have tremendous respect for who he is as a person and how he was as a coworker.

But then having competed against him when he was at Auburn and at Clemson for a little while and now at Miami. One, these guys are going to be fundamentally sound. He's going to be fundamentally sound. He's going to

attack your protections. He's one of the best at applying pressure, attacking your protections. And then he's going to have his guys get into the clues of what you're doing from a formation standpoint, from a lineman standpoint. That's why he's one of the best in the business.

Great challenge for us as coaches and then also for us personnel-wise on the field because you're going to be challenged physically first and foremost and you're going to be challenged schematically.

**Q. Going back to special teams. In terms of the approach of having a coordinator who also coaches a position. In your case, a guy whose background is more in offense than special teams, is that what you all did at Clemson? Is that your plan going forward?**

COACH ELLIOTT: When I was at Clemson, Coach Pyramid was the special teams coordinator and tight ends coach. He was actually in the box. So a lot of the special teams were run by other position coaches, Coach [Dabo] Swinney down on the sideline, I like that [Keith] Gaither is down on the sideline so he could be involved with the guys I think an area where we got to a point where we got pretty good at Clemson everybody knew what they were looking at. There was a heightened sense of urgency with special teams.

What we got from the standpoint, this is something I told the players, too, because again I've got to have accountability. So before I talk about their pride and performance I talk about my pride and performance. That was one of the areas that I said I've got to do a better job is making sure that the staff stays locked in on special teams because it's easy when you've got offensive coaches and defensive coaches as soon as you come off the field what do you want to do? You want to go right to the bench and correct what just happened on the field, while there's special teams going on.

Being more consistent and disciplined with our eyes and where they need to be so that we can get proper communication because having Gaither on the field you can correct things a little bit quicker and easier than having a special teams coordinator in the box.

The problem is one person can't see everything or two people can't see everything. You're limited too because we have an analyst that helps on special teams, but he's in a situation that he can't talk on the mic because you've got listen only headsets.

Getting in the rhythm of being able to communicate and transfer information so let's say I've got Clint [Stintim], that he's looking at this side of the punt team. Well, Clint's on defense. Special teams coordinator on offense. Special teams analyst in the box. So now Clint has to -- special analyst has to communicate to Clint if he saw something on the other side, Clint has to be able to get -- it's just working through those mechanics and those details to be able to get all the information to where it needs to be and corrected. But a lot of what you saw with the other night was fundamental breakdowns. You talk about on field goal, we've got guys right next to the staffer that are supposed to be latching and batching with their eyes up and crossing and diving straight to the ground. And giving up penetration. Allowing guys to get their hands up. The snap is off to the right. Snap is high. Now when [Jared] Rayman tries to bring it down he's not exactly hitting the spot he's trying to bring the ball down because the snap is off. And kicker sees the snap is off and he's trying to adjust his approach. Next thing you know he's off by a millimeter and next thing we're missing or we're on the punt team and we are left hash and we know what direction we're going. We're supposed to be on the far pad we're on the near pad or we're supposed to be on the near pad we're on the far pad. That allows the guy to penetrate you, push the guy wanting to go get coverage. Then three guys on the shield. Again a lot of it is more just

getting the guys to understand fundamentally. You've got to take the proper footwork. You've got to have the proper aiming point. You've got to make sure you punch and strike before you take off. And some of it is younger guys that haven't played many snaps on either side of the ball respectively so they're getting an opportunity on special teams and then they've got to grow. But I've been harping on - - and I pointed it out just being transparent just as we're talking about it, I pointed out I stopped the film we're getting ready for Georgia Tech's punt rush team and they're playing Clemson.

And I see [Andrew] Makuba starting. And I see Davis Allen. Myles Murphy. I see all of these starters that are on both sides of the ball on special teams. These are high draft picks. And when you cut on our special teams I'm having to beg guys to go give the effort to special teams. I've had to fire some of the older guys because I'm just not getting the effort.

And now we're playing with younger guys, no offense to the younger guys, but they just haven't played. They don't have game experience. I said the heck with that. I'm putting a stop to that. Jackson, you're going back out there. Jackson wasn't one of the guys but Jackson you're going back on the punt. James Jackson you're going to be on the punt. James Jackson was one of the guys he's going to be a really good football player.

He's probably the most talented of all the linebackers, right? But he was playing on kickoff. He was playing on punt. He wasn't giving the same effort. He was kind of taking those plays off because he was conserving himself for defense.

I ended up firing him to make a point. Now, I'm going to demand it and we're going to get it. You're going to get it.

I think the guys now, seeing that you can lose games on special teams and understanding how in a game like that you've got how many turnovers did we have? We had three. We had three turnovers. We had a blocked punt. We missed two field goals and an extra point. You're not supposed to win games like that. It's just defense gave us a chance. They stopped the run, forced them to be one dimensional we found a way to win the game. Proud of that but let's be honest that we can't win football -- we can't win football games like that.

The stretch run we're getting ready to play, you're getting ready to play some teams that are really talented that will take advantage of that. So going forward you'll see more of the guys that are playing on offense and defense out there contributing on special teams.

**Q. I'll move away from special teams. Brennan Armstrong ran a season high 13 times in this past game. You mentioned Woolfolk having a package. With some of those designed to go to Woolfolk, do you plan on leaning on Brennan's running more?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Woolfolk wasn't quarterback run stuff. It was other things. I think with Jay, he reminds me a lot of Will Taylor that was at Clemson. Baseball guy that came in as a quarterback. And Jay's going to be a quarterback of the future. There's no question about that. He's very dynamic with the football in his hands.

And actually we're getting ready to let him be our punt returner. If you watch him go track the ball he's so natural tracking the ball because he's a baseball player. And then you're looking at Billy [Kemp]. Billy is out there playing at 75 percent giving us everything that he has. Really proud of him. He's gutting it out. But Jay was going to be a guy give him an opportunity because we've been practicing him as a returner.

His stuff was more just getting involved on the perimeter doing some of those things with his package.

It wasn't necessarily a wildcat type of deal where we were going to try to run him.

I think Brennan is starting to understand too that sometimes the play required is for you to pull the ball down and go get five and then slide.

As opposed to sitting around running around, trying to wait for somebody to get open. So I think some of that was some design quarterback stuff, in particular down there on the goal line. That was designed but some of the other stuff was just extending plays. I think back to the first championship that I was a part of out in Arizona. And versus Alabama, we lost that game but Deshaun [Watson] extended a lot of plays with just pulling the ball down not forcing it, not trying to extend the play other than pull the ball down let's go get five now we stay on schedule.

**Q. Recruiting questions. Veteran coach on TV the other day said that nowadays you not only have to recruit the high school kids but the transfer portal. And you have to recruit your own locker room. How much time do you devote to all three of those phases? How challenging is it? Have you added more -- head coach personnel do you have that helps you recruit outside of your staff?**

COACH ELLIOTT: Outside of the staff, in recruiting, I'll start there. You have six individuals that are in the recruiting department. And you also have some student help as well.

So you have your student help fluctuates depending on their availability. But you've got six individuals that are helping you identify, communicate and do a lot of the background work. Then you have the ten assistants and

myself that have the areas that will be the primary point of contact for the young men. And once we establish the relationship, then the recruiting folks will come side by side with us and it will be more of a team effort once we identify the guys. Pretty much every night you're doing something with the high school guys from communication standpoint, talking to them, texting with them, talking on Twitter.

Transfer portal, you know, that area is a little bit tough right now because of the new transfer portal windows. That will pick up once the season is over. That will pick up. And I think what the NCAA is trying to do is trying to make that more uniform so that it's not all year long. That guys have certain windows. In an attempt to protect the season. Protect the young men but then also give them ample opportunity to be able to move if they need to move.

That will pick up here. Not doing as much other than just monitoring it seeing who is in there. We won't know until once we get through the season what our true needs will be. We're projecting needs. We're planning on if we take three out of position I'll determine okay I want two high school guys and one grad transfer to kind of keep the pipeline flowing but then also get some experience and then with the locker room I think the way you recruit the locker room is to have a healthy culture first and foremost.

You play guys that deserve to play and that's an area that I'm pushing the coaches to, hey, let's make sure the guys that have earned the right to play let's play. And I spent a little bit of time today recruiting Nick Jackson. I told him today, you've got another year you're coming back. We don't even need to have this conversation at the end of the year.

So don't even think about it. I'm telling you right now, you're coming back. But you want to recruit your locker room by having

relationships. And then also doing everything you can on your part to make sure that you're providing them the best experience and all the resources and benefits that you can provide them within the rules.