

Virginia Athletics Press Conference
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Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

Carla Williams & Tony Elliott Press Conference

CARLA WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us. Obviously a very difficult time for our families, our players, our program, our university.

I want to start by thanking some people that have supported us through this difficult time. First and foremost, our board. Rector Whitt Clement and Vice Rector Robert Hardie and the board of visitors have been extremely supportive of us. Also want to thank President Jim Ryan and J.J. Davis for their support of our program during this time. Their support of our student-athletes during this time has been tremendous.

I want to thank the community as well. Charlottesville community, university community. We've gotten a ton of support from our colleagues across the country. I even saw a shirt that -- a hash tag Hokies for Hoos, so we've gotten tremendous support from our friends in Blacksburg in the ACC and across the country. We've gotten a lot of support from our fans as well.

We compete hard, and this industry is very, very competitive, but our fans have been remarkable and shown tremendous support to Coach (Tony) Elliott, to me, to our department, to our university, but especially, especially to our student-athletes, and that has been a source of comfort for them to see how much support there is out there.

Thank you for being here today.

TONY ELLIOTT: I would echo a lot of the comments that Ms. Carla (Williams) just made. Extremely traumatic and hard time for our team, our program, our institution, our community. Just grateful to all of those who have reached out in support at all levels.

Just my heart is hurting right now for, again, our university, our community, the team, the players, their families, the young men whose families have been impacted the most. That's where my thoughts are at this time, trying to provide all the resources and support that I possibly can.

I have to acknowledge the strength of our players and our staff at this time in coming together to be able to work to process what has taken place. Just like many of you all and many of those that are very close to the situation, still in shock trying to rationalize, but also find encouragement in the community with those that have come out in support, and then also those internally who have banded together to try and figure out how we move forward after going through a situation like this.

So, again, just heartfelt sympathies go out to the players, their families, their communities. I think beyond just our communities, but communities in our states have been impacted by the loss of three beautiful, young human beings that had an unbelievable future ahead of them.

But the message to the team is we're going to celebrate those lives going forward and the impact that they've made thus far and the legacy that they're going to be a part of helping us establish going forward.

THE MODERATOR: As a reminder, I said initially there is an ongoing criminal investigation, so some matters we will not be able to answer or address. I'm going to work my way back and apologize for stepping in front of the cameras at some point.

Q. Tony, if you can describe the past 24-plus hours just with the team and kind of how y'all have approached this past day.

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, it feels like it's a nightmare, to be honest with you, and I'm ready for somebody to pinch me and wake me up and say that this didn't happen.

It's been a long -- I don't even know how long it's been since it happened. The minutes can't go by fast enough. The approach with the team is once we were given the clear to communicate, we immediately got the team together and just started the process of grieving together and fellowshiping and trying to make sure that nobody was isolated, that everybody was together.

Pulled all the resources we could from a counseling standpoint to give these young men the support that they need. The first meeting was really, really tough. Really, really, really tough (tearing up). Today was much better. We were able to transition from the pain to finding a little bit of joy and celebrating the lives of Lavel (Davis), D'Sean (Perry) and Devin (Chandler).

Today started probably how the last two days have started, but it ended a lot better. I think the guys are on the road to healing, but it's going to take some time. Our approach is to keep them together as much as we possibly can to make sure we have

eyes on them, because nothing can prepare you for this situation, and we just want to be there to support the guys.

We're slowly trying to process and move forward, but we're looking for the positive and keeping close rings on each other so we can grieve together.

Q. Carla, what kind of steps for counseling – like Coach Elliott just touched on, what have you been doing for these student-athletes moving forward?

CARLA WILLIAMS: So, fortunately, we have three in-house psychologists for our athletics department, and our lead sports psychologist once worked with the university. He has great connections with the university.

So in our first meeting with the student-athletes we had a lot of counselors on hand that were there and available to work with the student-athletes. Not only our football student-athletes, but all of our student-athletes we had counselors available for.

Q. Tony, just your memories of Lavel (Davis), D'Sean (Perry), and Devin (Chandler) and some of the maybe memories that your players shared with you today?

TONY ELLIOTT: I appreciate you asking that question. Lavel (Davis), I have known Lavel for a long time. Recruited him starting his freshman year. Just to see him grow, but big smile. Lights up the room. Most people would say because he is the tallest guy in the room, but just his presence.

He has a gentleness about him, but he is passionate about what he believes in. So a

lot of the stories today were just about just the silly basketball arguments they would have and debates in the locker room.

Everybody knew that they could get Lavel to kind of hunker down just by saying one thing, but the other thing that resonated is just how good of a teammate he was and how much he loved his teammates and would do anything for his teammates.

D'Sean (Perry), I don't think many people outside of our program understand how special D'Sean was. Very, very, very artistic. Could draw. Could shape pots with clay. Loved music. Very, very cultured and well-rounded. Just a great teammate. And he had a sense of humor that was one of a kind that only D'Sean could have. You knew immediately when somebody said something, yeah, that was D'Sean.

You talk about Devin (Chandler), man, Devin, he just -- he is what you wanted in a young person that is at this level, but he just was a big kid. Smiled all the time. Loved to dance. Loved to sing. Loved to compete, even though the guys revealed that he wasn't very good at video games, but he thought he was. But he loved to compete.

The thing I remember about him is he always brought a smile to my face because he just was happy with where he was, comfortable in his skin, and just had a very bubbly personality.

Q. I'm sorry for your loss, Coach. For the both of you, I just wanted ask, how are you coping and how have you and the other members of the football department -- how have you been able to cope and lean on each other? Do you have access to those same counseling resources?

TONY ELLIOTT: I'll start. For me the best coping mechanism for me is the young men. Having a chance to be around them and to see them, and to see their pain, to see their hurt just inspires me to keep pushing forward each and every day. There's no -- you prepare for this job. There's no chapter on a situation like this.

So I'm trying to figure out step-by-step how to be strong for these young men. I'm really relying on my faith, the foundation that I have there, trying to use that to inspire me every minute of the day.

Also trying to make sure that I stay empathetic to everybody and understanding that everybody is going to respond differently to this situation.

My job is to lead in moments like this. I've had my moments where I've broken down and showed my emotions, and I've even had those moments in front of the team. I think it's important that we all grieve. These are outstanding young men that we don't understand why they're gone so early. And I'll look for the signs as we move forward, but right now it's just to put my arms around these guys and tell them we love them and realize and figure out the best way to grieve.

We'll take it one day at a time and going forward in terms of the schedule, that will be determined as we continue to gather information, but the biggest thing for me is to just try to be present in the moment, you know, the best I can, manage my emotions the best I can so that I can see clearly to be able to recognize any sign. Right now I'm looking for anything that's out of the norm.

Then also when I see things that I expect to see, making sure that I don't just say that, well, that's expected. That we dig deeper and counsel men as they process this whole situation.

MODERATOR: Coach, would you mind for reference sake naming the players you referenced as former players that --

TONY ELLIOTT: Oh, so that would be CJ Fuller and Tyshon Dye were two young running backs that I coached, recruited, coached their entire career, saw them graduate, and their lives were cut short, way too short.

Q. Tony, I believe you were at the hospital. Do you have an update for us on Mike Hollins and his condition?

TONY ELLIOTT: I don't have enough information at this time. I was there just in support of the family. And out of respect of the family, I just don't have enough information to speak intelligently on where that is. I was just there for support.

Q. Carla, would you tell us what goes into the decision about whether or not there is a game on Saturday?

CARLA WILLIAMS: We'll make it together. It will be a discussion with Coach and the team. Obviously they're going through a lot, and we want to make sure they're involved as well. We'll use our best judgment, but it will be soon. We'll make a decision soon.

Q. You mentioned accepting the position as a coach. This is not anything you have imaged as part of the job description. As a parent, though, how do you address your

family about what's happened, and what do you tell them?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's tough. My wife (Tamika), she's right by my side handling things well. With her upbringing and my upbringing, you know, we've experienced some difficult situations independently and together. The tough part is my boys and my 9-year-old (A.J.) (choked up). He considers these guys his friend, and that's what's tough.

Then every time I see him hurt, I think about the 125 guys that I got, and that's how their moms see them. We're taking it one day at a time trying to teach a 9-year-old about the reality of life on a level that he can understand it, and we're just putting our arms around him, loving him, supporting him, and trying to teach him as much as he can comprehend.

My 7-year-old (Ace) is not quite at the age yet where he fully can process what's going on, but he is doing -- he is probably doing the best of all of us.

Q. Again, sorry for both of your losses. I'm not sure who can answer this question specifically, whether or not it's you, Coach, or you, Ms. Williams, but can you speak to whether or not the hazing incident that the police department talked about yesterday had anything to do with the football program?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I can speak to that. I'm not aware of anything related to that. And I don't have any details beyond that, but I'm not aware of anything related to that.

Q. Carla, any details on what led up to this on the bus, the incident at all?

CARLA WILLIAMS: No. And really anything related to the investigation I won't be able to speak to, sorry.

Q. One more thing. The vigil last night, the thousands of students, curious if you saw videos or were there, saw pictures, and what you have made of that support?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, and I meant to thank the students in my opening remarks. I was there with my son and his friend. It was amazing. It was remarkable to see all of those students out there supporting their classmates like that. It was healing, quite frankly.

There were a lot of student-athletes there from different sports. There were a lot of coaches there because everyone wants to support Coach Elliott and wants to support this team.

So for this university and its students to do something like that in the face of this difficulty was really healing.

Q. Carla, since this happened yesterday, how much internally in the athletic department have you all gone back to try to research the accused killer and what role he might have played with the football program previously?

CARLA WILLIAMS: You know, we have really focused on our players and their families. It's so shocking that you just want to love on our players, so that's what we've -- that's where we've spent our energies. That's where we've spent our time.

I think that's what we need to continue to do. So we haven't done that. We haven't done what you're asking. What we've done is try to focus on the families of the players who lost their lives, who were injured, and our current players.

Q. There are players that have transferred out since last year and there are coaches that were here that coached and recruited these players. What has that process been like with regards to reaching out to -- I know Bronco was in town; saw Jim Harbaugh talk about Olu (Oluwatimi). What has that process been like trying to make sure those players are in the fold, and even Wisconsin, you know, announcing statements about how Devin Chandler impacted their community as well.

CARLA WILLIAMS: We've heard from people everywhere. I mean, it's so tragic, and I think everyone can really place themselves in our shoes. Coaches can place themselves in Coach Elliott's shoes. Athletic directors, administrators can do the same with me. You know, it hasn't been a matter of us reaching out to people. People have been reaching out to us, and I think that that's helpful to all of us.

It's great for me to hear from my colleagues, and I think it's good for our players to hear from their friends, their peers at other schools. I've heard them talk about that as well too.

So in times of adversity you just don't want to feel alone, and so I think all of our peers across the country have recognized that and reached out.

Q. Did you talk to players or have you thought about the game at all on Saturday? I know sometimes the situations, that playing can be a form of healing for players or coaches. Is that something you would feel comfortable doing or think your players would feel comfortable going on the field?

TONY ELLIOTT: At this point with the sequence of events and the timing I just have been focusing on loving these players, consoling the families, trying to make sure that there's no ripple effect with the guys on the team.

Because, again, this is something that nobody is prepared to deal with until you're inside of it. For me the focus is not past today. I'm just trying to figure out a way to get everybody back together this evening so that we can see them again and spend some time, and then in due time, we'll collaborate on the path going forward in terms of on-the-field play.

Q. Coach, I know you said you didn't want to talk about Mike Hollins' condition, and we understand that, but I was hoping you could tell us a little bit about him as well and some of your memories with him and his impact on and off the field.

TONY ELLIOTT: I've said this publicly before, and his family is aware of this. I'm hard on Mike because Mike has a ton of potential. And what I've seen out of him is a very workman mentality and engaging the discipline and the structure, which has resulted in improvements in his play down the stretch, but he always has a smile on his face.

You know, he is very inquisitive. He is one of those guys that will ask you serious questions. He will tilt his head to the side and say, Hey, Coach, I have a question.

But, you know, he is a guy that does what you ask him to do. He has a big personality, and I think he's a young man that is fully invested in this institution, this program. He is a guy that I've seen, you know, really start to kind of come into his own from a leadership standpoint.

Q. Thanks for doing this, and I'm sorry. Can you give us any insight into the suspected shooter's history on the team? When did he stop playing and why? Did ever overlap with the victims on the team?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I'll take that one. What I do know is that the young man was a student beginning in 2018 and was a walk-on for one semester with our football program. I don't believe -- there was no overlap, so I don't know if there was any interaction outside of the class.

Q. I'm just curious how students and faculty members and community members can support not just the football team but the entire Virginia athletics community, all student-athletes?

CARLA WILLIAMS: We've been working with the university, in particular Robyn Hadley with Student Affairs, and she's talking with student leaders about how we can honor our three student-athletes moving forward and support the team.

We've had several meetings with the university in this regard, so we'll continue to do those. But working through as a student, working through the student leadership

groups. That's where we're getting some information, some feedback from those groups as to how we can support the team moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: Carla, do you want to give an update on our other athletic teams this week?

CARLA WILLIAMS: The only athletic event that we canceled was the men's basketball game last night, and we'll continue on with our normal schedule for the rest of our teams competing this week. Several in post-season.

Q. Ms. Williams and Coach (Elliott), as your team and your players are trying to deal with their grief and process everything, are they coming to you with questions? What are they asking? What are they finding hard to process?

TONY ELLIOTT: I would say the biggest questions right now are how are the families of their deceased teammates? They're really just trying to process everything that happened, and all the questions that I've gotten for the most part is, okay, Coach, how do we move forward? What's the next step in this process?

I think you have a football team that is grieving, that is hurt, but that is also very self-aware that this situation is bigger than football and it transcends football.

They understand that football has an opportunity, right, to show its beauty. They understand that, you know, this institution and this community has an opportunity to show its beauty through this tragedy. But their biggest questions are, you know, how are the families and when will we have an

opportunity to possibly interact with the families?

Q. Coach (Elliott) and Carla, I just wanted to start by saying really my sincerest condolences to you both and to this entire community. Our hearts all break for you. You talked about each of the players as individuals, both as players and people. Can you kind of describe the dynamic on your team amongst those players and the rest of their teammates prior to this incident?

TONY ELLIOTT: So from a dynamic standpoint, Devin was the life -- he was the life of the party. He always kept everybody entertained. He was the one that was in the weight room when everybody else is. He was serious, but he had his own way of being serious, and he would keep everybody energized. He found a way to make it fun even though sometimes the work that they have to do on a daily basis can be very monotonous in order to improve their skill level.

But he brought just a ton of personality.

Lavel was one of the big men on campus, so to speak, because everybody knew who he was, but he always found a way to keep them entertained, but he also set the standard for what it's supposed to look like to work in the way that he practiced, the way that he prepared, and then all the things that he did when the coaches may not have been present that his teammates saw.

And D'Sean was the quiet guy that everybody wanted to know more about because he was, like I said, a very, very interesting young man in terms of the

depth. When you look at him, and you might not think that he listens to classical music and draws and shapes pots, but his teammates knew that, and they wanted to know more about him.

So he was probably the most interesting man on the team if you had to kind of compare him to somebody. I've told him that, and I've told his teammates that because I value the skills and talents that he possesses beyond the game.

So that's kind of how all three of them fit into the dynamic of our team.

Q. I understand there's a lot of logistical issues in this question, but if you have thought about do you want to take the team to these players' funerals? And, Carla, if you could speak to what the NCAA rules are in regards to transportation, paying for that kind of a trip?

TONY ELLIOTT: There are a ton of logistics associated with what you just asked. My initial thoughts are to be sensitive of whatever the young men desire to do as it relates to their teammates.

Per Carla's response from an NCAA standpoint, I won't stand in the way of that because this is way bigger than football. This is a life situation here.

So I haven't given much thought beyond. Okay, we don't even know those details at this time, so my initial thought is to support them in whatever they decide that they want to do and support the families.

Because, again, not only is this community impacted, but I think about the community in North Carolina, the community in Florida,

and the community in South Carolina that are impacted by this tragic event.

CARLA WILLIAMS: The rules are permissive, so we'll do whatever it takes that helps our players heal and support the families of our three players.

Q. Tony, one piece of information (UVA Police) Chief (Timothy) Longo told us yesterday there were 25 people on that bus on that trip. Were any of your other players on there who weren't injured, but were they on that bus on that trip?

THE MODERATOR: I'll answer that. That's something we feel is involved with the investigation, so we won't cover that at this time.

I want to thank everybody. Carla and Tony both have to get back to matters with the team and the families, so we were going to try to go about 30 minutes, and we're right at that. So thank you for your participation today.