



#12/10 Tennessee 49, Virginia 13  
September 2, 2023 | Nashville, Tenn. | Nissan Stadium

## Virginia Head Coach Tony Elliott

### ***On how Tony Muskett is feeling...***

"We know it's his shoulder right now, we don't know the extent. We'll get back, get some x-rays to find out. Obviously couldn't return to the game, hoping for the best but still just don't know for sure."

### ***On this being the first game back since the tragedy and how the team handled it...***

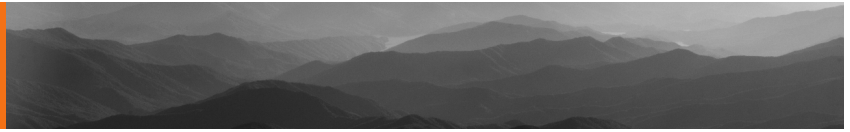
"I thought the guys did a great job every day to get to this point. It's hard to quantify and put into words just everything that they have had to go through just to get to this point. I thought the guys showed up and had a really good spirit about them, great energy, and I thought they played extremely hard. They fought and they battled and that's all you can ask from these guys. Just to see them get a chance to play football was the victory for me. Obviously, we got a lot of work to do. I know, ultimately, we'll be judged by what the scoreboard says. Internally as a program, I couldn't be more proud of a group of young men, an administration and a staff that fought. What we had to endure is unprecedented. Still, it's hard to quantify and put into words and just really wrap your head around it. For these guys to be able to make the decision to come back to the University of Virginia, that was a tough decision to come back and fight and continue to be a part of the program. Just to see their resilience and to see them in the locker room after this game still standing together, still believing in the best for this season, the best for this future because they believed in each other and that's what it took. I'm just extremely proud of the players, the staff, the administration and all those that are close to the program that supported us through this time."

### ***On how much they can build from not turning the ball over...***

"We say the program is the ball, so that's improvement there. The biggest thing is when we go back and watch the tape, we'll see that there were a lot of things that we didn't do that we've been doing. That's the key when you get into the heat of battle, being able to just trust your technique and not abandon what your coaching is. We got some maturity to grow there, but I thought the guys' want to, the guys' desire, their fight was there. They took care of the ball which was positive. Time of possession obviously was in our favor, but at the end of the day we didn't play our best football offensively and we didn't play complimentary football. So, when we had opportunities, when the defense was able to secure short fields for us, our special teams secured short fields, we didn't take advantage. That's where we got to grow and understand how important momentum is. If you score points, you hit that first field goal or you score points on some of those short fields, you never know what could happen. I think what you saw late in the game, especially in the late third, fourth quarter, Tennessee just had momentum and they were able to just kind of ride that momentum and finish up the game."

### ***On if Tennessee ended up being as physical as he thought they would be, especially on the defensive line...***

"We knew the game was going to come down to the trenches on both sides. It was going to come down to the strength and then also the depth in the trenches. I thought that we probably could've done a better job of trying to establish the run a little bit earlier. We were trying to be aggressive and take advantage of some of the short fields, but they did a great job. They had depth, too. They were rolling a lot of guys in there and you didn't see much of a drop off. Some of it was what they were doing, also some of it was us as well. Just not necessarily working in unison how we had been doing in the run or the pass game. Then, one-on-one matchups, at the end of the day they run their one-on-one matchups which resulted in our quarterback getting hit. We'll evaluate it and see where the fundamental breakdown was. Sometimes, you're just going to lose a one-on-one matchup. Sometimes a guy just flat out beats you. I can't say that was the totality of it until I watch the film, but it was the difference in the game. The flipside, on their offense versus our defensive line, where they just covered us up too much and we gave up too much in the run game. I thought our guys fought hard, but we weren't able to stop the run like we used to. From that standpoint, they can drive the pace of the game and set the mindset for the game if you're able



to establish the run. There's nothing more frustrating for a team than when the opposing team is just able to run the football."

***On seeing Mike Hollins in an official game carrying the ball...***

"He's a walking miracle. I think that obviously things have moved forward, and people are going to see him play. Back in November, we had no idea what his life was going to look like, much less that he was going to run out with the flag today and be able to play and be a significant part of our gameplan. Just a testament to him and really, really proud of him. He's an inspiration to me and that's why I say he's a walking miracle. You're very fortunate in life if you're able to witness a miracle. For us, we've all been blessed because he is a walking miracle."

***On his emotions before kickoff and what types of things they can take away in terms of how the team responded for next week...***

"Prior to the game, I was at peace. I was at peace knowing that the victory had already been won. Just this team, getting to this point and being here in the face of everything. You got to remember, every day they walk out on that field they're reminded. Every day they walk off that field they're reminded. Every day they go to class on grounds they're reminded. Every day they're reminded of what happened. Not everybody is done grieving or healing. We're still healing as an institution, as an athletic department, as a program. We got families and individuals that are still grieving and still healing. That's the victory for us. The good thing was we were able to get to this point and even though the outcome didn't go the way that we wanted it to go, the guys can have confidence knowing that 'I can do it'. Now that they've gotten to this point and been through it, knowing that next week is going to be different though because we are going to be back in Scott Stadium and that brings a different component and there's going to be a lot of things done by the athletic department. There's another set of challenges, but we got to take it one day at a time. That's how we've gotten to this point and that's how we'll do it. We'll take it one day at a time. We're going to process this game, and as I told the guys in the locker room, part of having a winning mindset is humility. To learn how to win, you got to learn how to lose and take a loss. There's going to be a lot of learning in this experience. We'll flush it Sunday, and Monday we got to get our minds for JMU and then everything that's ahead of us in that Monday. Then, transition to Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday as we prepare for Saturday."

***On how big of a moment it was to get a stop on fourth down early...***

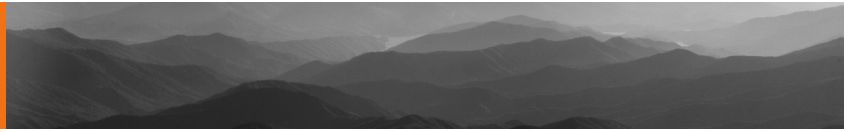
"Defense and special teams in the first half, other than the first drive, defense was playing hard and finding stops and a couple of missed plays on their part and next thing you know we got short fields, see them stopped so there's confidence. You build off of that because you're able to show them this is what you're capable of and then we just work on the consistency going forward to be able to do it all the time. There's going to be a lot of positive from the tape, but then also a tremendous amount of opportunities to grow. I got to coach better, we got to play better, we got to execute better. We all know that. It's a great opportunity, as I told them this is the first week, it's a small sample size. We're going to learn from it and then we're going to put it behind us and go focus on the next one."

***On Malachi Fields seeming like a potential star in the making...***

"There were a couple of throws I was hoping he was going to come down with. I thought the ball placement was pretty good. Their guys made a couple of plays I wanted to see him come down with. He made some big third down catches over the middle, made a huge play when we were able to kind of put together a little bit of a drive to go get some points. I think we know what he's capable of, and that's offensive football. That's the tough thing about offensive football, it takes all 11. For one guy to be able to do his job, the other 10 have got to be on the same page."

***On if he was encouraged from what he saw from the run game...***

"Probably kicking myself, I should've forced the run maybe a little bit more early in the game. Still, when we were handing it off, we didn't quite have the push or the backs weren't quite finding it. That's the thing with the run game, you got to stick to it and be consistent to get the backs lathered up so they can find it. Encouraged to see how the guys fought, encouraged for the running back room because they have a chance now to show some



leadership. It was a great opportunity for them to step up and I thought they did there in the third quarter. There's positive, but we probably should've tried to run the ball a little bit more in the first half to see if we could settle the offense down as opposed to being as aggressive as we were."

***On Olasunkonmi Agunloye getting a sack and fumble recovery and the injury...***

"Not surprised by Su, I think we know he's a very capable guy. He made a couple of plays for us last year and he had had a good camp and he was trending the right direction. My heart goes out to him with his situation. Right now, don't know the extent but it looks like it's both knees right now so we're hoping that we get positive results and I'm hoping that we're going to be able to see him through this one. Don't know the extent, but I know it's significant."

***On Tennessee having more explosive punt returns in the second half compared to the first...***

"I'm not going to take anything away from (Dee) Williams. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him. He had done it last year, but what I think when you boom it out there, guys have to get down the field. I thought we had some opportunities to make some open-field tackles, and we didn't. We missed a couple of tackles there, and once you miss the first or second tackle, he's punctured your coverage team. It's very hard after that. The key is to put it up there high, somebody get down in his face and force a fair catch. We did that at times, but the other times we were down there and didn't make the play. Once he makes that first guy miss, it's hard. We're going to go back and look at it. I thought our protection was a lot better than last year. Last year, our protection of (Daniel) Sparks was not good. We improved there. There are some incremental improvements, but coverage-wise we have to do a better job. On the last one, we had a guy down there in position, and he just didn't come into position, wrap him up and get him on the ground."

## **Virginia Offensive Coordinator/Tight Ends Coach Des Kitchings**

***On if he gives consideration to who the opponent was when he evaluates the offensive line's performance...***

"It's probably a little bit of a combination. I do believe in our guys that we have. That was good speed to go against in the first game. It gives good tape to evaluate. We look at technique, fundamentals and if we put them in the right spots for success. It's good to evaluate moving forward."

***On the importance of capitalizing off opportunities in games like this...***

"That's one of the things. In a game like that, when you're given those opportunities and you don't capitalize on them, that stings in any game. We had short field opportunities there and got no points out of it, which could have built more momentum for us and kept the defense off the field, because they got worn down there as the game went on. It's team ball. In those two situations, we didn't capitalize offensively."

## **Virginia Defensive Coordinator John Rudzinski**

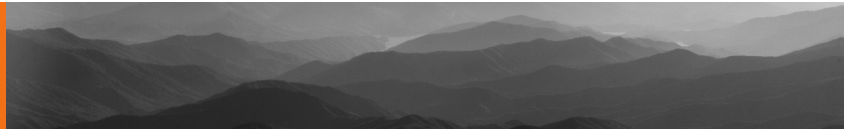
***On Tayvonn Kyle's tackling capabilities...***

"Tayvonn (Kyle) has more than enough ability to be a really good tackler. Unfortunately, there were probably some opportunities he wishes he had back."

***On Ben Smiley III and Kam Butler's performance...***

"As we dive into the film, I know they were physical, they were into it. We've got to continue to be a little bit better each and every day, and I know that those are two guys who will continue to make huge strides as we go throughout the season."

***On seeing his defense go up against one of the best offenses in the country...***



“Our young men did a great job as far as preparing. For the first 25 minutes, we competed really hard. We’re going to have to do a better job in that middle eight as far as that two-minute situation and then to start the half, but there’s a lot of opportunity for growth and I’m excited to see these guys continue to grow throughout the season.”

## **Virginia Junior Safety Jonas Sanker**

### *On looking forward to next week...*

“Windshield mindset. This game is in the past and we can’t do anything about it now...taking the things we did well, taking the things we didn’t do well and figuring out a way to respond. We’re not hanging on our loss, not letting this determine the rest of our season...it’s going to be a blur.”

## **Virginia Junior Wide Receiver Malachi Fields**

### *On reflecting on this game...*

“Just looking at things that we did well and looking at things that we did bad and going back to work and seeing how we can fix those things and seeing how we can continue to capitalize on the things that we did well.”

## **Virginia Defensive Lineman Kam Butler**

### *On how good Tennessee is...*

“They’re good. What they do, they do it at a high level. Obviously with the tempo, they do that at a high level. Everybody’s big. We just didn’t execute.”

## **Virginia Offensive Lineman Brian Stevens**

### *On takeaways from facing Tennessee...*

“With them being a prestigious opponent, that’s something you have to take away. Watch the tape. You find the good things, find the bad things and you learn from it. If you can compete with the best, then you can do it.”