

**University of Virginia Football Media
Conference
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Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference**

Q. Would make Tony Muskett available for more than emergency duty?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yes, to answer that question I have seen improvement that makes me think he's beyond emergency duty. Still working through some of the other things and kind of milestones and hurdles that I want to see him finish a practice without having any noticeable grimaces because he's still got some pain involved and some soreness, and there's certain aspects of his job that bother it a little bit more.

Obviously throwing, he's a little bit more comfortable with the violence of throwing, but there's other things when you start talking about the mesh with the handoff, you don't think about that, but when you're meshing the ball with the running back, you take some movement on potentially that injury side. I definitely think he's progressed beyond emergency status and still day-to-day and he's improving all the time, and he wants to play, and he's trying to prove that every day at practice.

Q. When you look at NC State and Brennan (Armstrong), what do you see? Some of the guys said that Brennan can be a little interception prone and they're looking forward to some opportunities in that regard. Do you see that when you watch him?

TONY ELLIOTT: No, I can't. I can't say that. Obviously some of that is going to be based off of last year. But you can see that he looks comfortable, back with Robert (Arae). He looks comfortable, which is good for them, not so much for us.

He can run the ball. He's still running it, with his confidence. When I say interception prone

versus double cloud coverage, that shouldn't get in there.

Q. Antonio Clary, Demick Sterling, where do they stand?

TONY ELLIOTT: Antonio Clary decided to go -- you heard of the tighrope surgery, which would have gave him the ability to play now but only be kind of a place holder for the long-term surgery, so he decided to go ahead and get it fixed.

Demick, his situation is we've gone back and forth a little bit throughout the course of our time, but we mutually agreed -- and then he can figure out from there what his future looks like with football, so it was a mutual agreement that he wanted to take advantage of the redshirt opportunity.

Then Lex (Long) not going to be available this week. Still waiting on the results of the MRI with the foot, but he's not been able to practice the last couple of days. Paul Akere is day-to-day with his knee.

Just an update on Su (Agunloye), I think I want to keep him in everybody's thoughts because, again, two patella tendons and double surgery to fix both of them, his life is a little bit different nowadays, but saw him two days ago, and he was in good spirits and hoping that he can be released to be able to come to the game and just see it from the press box or something. But he's doing better from his recovery after the Tennessee game.

Jimmy Christ is full go. Starting to see more confidence in the knee. Got some really, really good reps today. Feel good that he's closer to being able to go in and play. He's cleared, now it's just a function of the confidence in himself and the strength in the knee.

Q. Des (Kitchings) was at NC State for a long time. What did you see when you decided to hire him, going back to things you noticed when you played against him?

TONY ELLIOTT: So when you go back and you look at NC State over those years, they would always have a 1,000-yard rusher, they would always have a 1,000-yard receiver and a 3,000-yard passer. They were really good on offense.

I know most of those years he may not have been the coordinator, but he contributed, but he coached some really, really good running backs.

Our relationship started before that, and the connection was at Furman, and I know many of you guys know the story, but as competitors in the ACC, I coached running backs, he coached running backs, so we're recruiting battling over the years, and NC State was always a tough, tough, tough physical battle every time we played them, and sometimes it was a low-scoring fourth quarter game or it was a high-scoring shootout.

I can remember a high-scoring shootout in Raleigh. I also can remember -- the win loss column. Those are the things that I saw, and then just over the years we built a relationship.

If you sit down and you want to talk football -- like if you want to talk football, Xs and Os, sit down with Des and just talk Xs and Os. It's very, very high-level football IQ, and then you can see over the years players that he's coached that he was able to help them develop from a football standpoint.

Q. On the flipside, NC State has gone to an offensive identity that Virginia used to be. Any surprise there that NC State has kind of changed its ways to go air-raid and go a different direction?

TONY ELLIOTT: You know, I think just in my experience, and I can't speak for (NC State Head Coach) Dave (Doeren) because I don't know the ins and outs of his program, they also went through a change philosophically from a defensive standpoint. For a long time they were under defense, played quarters coverage, and

you knew exactly what you were going to get, and then transitioned and the new defensive coordinator came in and brought a different style of play, then they transitioned to a 3-3-5 with multiple coverages on the back end.

I think some of it's probably the person that you hire and giving them some flexibility to be able to do things, but from what I've seen this year, I'm not going to say air-raid. They're running the football. You watch them, they're running the counter, they're running the wide zone. They're trying to run the football. They're running the quarterback, and then they have the passing concepts.

So I think you can see the identity that Robert (Anae) has in terms of spreading you out and being multiple, but you also can see that they're committed to running the football just from a philosophical standpoint.

Q. You talked last week about Maryland's quarterback's ability when the play broke down and he got out of the pocket. Does Brennan (Armstrong) pose some of the -- does he have some of that same ability to improvise?

TONY ELLIOTT: No question, but where I think that Brennan is different is that Brennan is going to run the football with authority and with violence, and he's going to go get those extra yards, whereas last year you knew once he broke the pocket, his eyes were downfield and he was going to run, but he was going to run to get what yards he could, and he was going to go down, whereas BA (Brennan Armstrong) you've got to take him down. When he takes off to run, he's not running like a quarterback, he's running like a running back. He's trying to go get those extra yards.

Mentality-wise, that brings a lot to your football team when your quarterback is a guy that can extend plays out of the pocket. He can throw the ball downfield. Well, when he runs it, he runs it with authority.

That's where I'd say the two are different.

Q. Staying on Brennan (Armstrong), with guys who may be extra juiced up because they are going against their old teammate, do you encourage that, or do you want them to have the it's just another game mentality?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's just another game, and for BA, what I will say about BA is I'm grateful for BA for two reasons. One, for everything that he did for the University of Virginia and this football program as a player here. I'm grateful for how he handled his departure. He handled it the right way with me, and when he was here, man, he made an effort. He made an effort to transition, to help myself and this coaching staff with this team.

For me, there's nothing personal about this game when it comes to BA other than he's the opposing quarterback, and I would never use that as motivation with his teammates because at the end of the day as we're learning and I'm teaching this football team, emotion doesn't win the football game. It's a part of it. It's essential. But emotion alone cannot win the football game. You've got to bring all the other components with it.

For me, I want to win because it's the first ACC game, it's the goal on our goal board, to win our ACC opener. It's a really, really good football team that's coming into Scott Stadium. That's why I want to win the football game.

This is the day and age that we live in. The kids may have that. I wouldn't encourage that. I'm not going to talk about it. I'm not going to try and live in their world. To be honest with you, I bet you there are probably going to be some hugs and some daps before the game because they're friends, also. It's the day and age we live in in college football.

Last year we played against a team that was a teammate that was a really good player, and we're going to go Louisville and we're going to

play against somebody else that was on the roster. It's just part of it nowadays.

Q. You've got the top two receivers in the ACC in terms of catches in Malik Washington and Malachi Fields. How would you evaluate the production you're getting from those two guys in particular but the passing game in general?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so somebody mentioned that to me today -- not today but this week, about where they were in the ACC. I'm really not a stat guy other than when I look at the end of the game stats to kind of see how we compared, it's a long stretch until the end of the season. All you care about is being there at the end of the season.

But week to week you've got to produce.

I'm happy for those guys. I think they've worked hard to be able to go to another level, and then the challenge for them, you've got to be consistent. It's week in and week out for 12 weeks.

But just exciting. I felt like the protection was a lot more solid than it had been in previous weeks. We did get the quarterback hit a couple times, but I thought overall they played better with a lot more cohesion.

Then that's where it starts. If you can protect the passer, then I believe we have some skill guys that eventually will be able to make some plays.

I'm not hyping it up too much with the guys because I know that it's week to week, and you've got to earn it. But those guys have definitely put in the work, but they're also getting challenged to continue to improve and let's see can you develop the consistency on it so at the end of the season when it matters you're still up there at the top of the list.

Q. Just to clarify on Demick Starling, do you anticipate him playing here next season, or is he redshirting --

TONY ELLIOTT: No, I don't anticipate him playing here next season. With all these guys, what I would say about we're in a different stage in college football, with the four games and guys can redshirt and you've got opportunities to move on after the year.

So with him, it's just a function of he's looking at big picture. He feels like he can possibly have a better opportunity somewhere else, and biggest thing for me is to make sure that he finishes, graduates, gets his degree from UVA, and that's my focus right now, and then we'll figure out long-term at the end of the season what's best for him.

Q. With the quarterback situation, obviously picking a wrong guy or struggling going back and forth, big picture as a head coach, how do you approach the idea that you want to win on Friday but you're also -- that position sort of dictates a lot of your success in time?

TONY ELLIOTT: I haven't given it thought about relation to my success, my tenure here. My thoughts as it relates to the quarterback position is, one, Tony Muskett and his long-term health. What I don't want to do is mismanage his long-term health. I don't want to put him in a situation where he can't protect himself and he's not ready to play and not ready to play at a high level. Then I think about what's best for the team next.

I think if Tony (Muskett) is healthy, then I think that's probably the best for the team. If he's not healthy, then it's not best for him and it's not best for the team.

In terms of managing the quarterback situation, I think dynamics have changed nowadays in college football, and for me right now, I'm just focusing on how we can figure out a way to win on Friday night and have a productive season going forward and then in terms of long-term, the quarterback situation, then we'll evaluate it more so when we get to the end of the season.

But in terms of week to week, it's more related to what is Tony's actual health than is he ready to go, and can he go and be productive, so the opportunities for him to grow and learn from some of the mistakes that he might have to persevere through.

Q. As a coach do you have to increase the dialogue?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, that's a slippery slope because you don't know what's inside their head and you don't want to put thoughts in their head.

I think for us, here's what I'm really learning, having transitioned to this seat, right, where you're responsible for everything and you have to think about everything. Sometimes I think the adults overthink it and think more about it than the kids do, and I think for them, sometimes it's more impulsive, and they don't give it much thought until it comes to that point.

For me, biggest thing like with (Anthony) Colandrea, my conversation to him is, all right, let's learn from the mistakes, and how do you respond, like how are you going to respond this week.

We don't know the situation until we get close to game day.

Even though Tony (Muskett) may be getting closer to being full speed and ready to go, you've still got to be ready. You've got to prepare as if you're the guy. So those are the conversations that I'm trying to have with the quarterbacks and with all the players and then as we get closer to that point that we know is coming, then we'll start to possibly have conversation.

But right now with this football team, we've got too much growth that we have to go through. We've got too many other things to be worrying

about conversations about that at this point, and I haven't heard anything from the kids.

I think this group here, they just want to experience what it feels like to be in the locker room after a win, and they're working extremely hard to get there and trying to create the ownership, accountability and self-awareness to be able to do the things that you need to do late in the game to secure victories.

Q. Just to clarify with Antonio Clary, would you be putting in a medical waiver for him since he'll be out or is that in discussion?

TONY ELLIOTT: So that'll be later in the year with Antonio and kind of see where it is because we don't anticipate that it's going to be the entire season with the surgery. It's about six weeks. So we may be able to get him back late in the season and then evaluate how many games.

That would be a situation like with him, we get close to the end of the season, he gets back and there's five games left, then you figure out, okay, what's best for him and his future, and does he have an opportunity to be able to come back, so do you take advantage of four games. Last thing you want to do is play a guy in a fifth game and he has the opportunity to -- that's another dynamic, too, that you're managing, so you're trying to manage that for the players. The players just want to play. Now you have to try and manage their year and take advantage of it, and it's the same thing with a lot of these young guys, these freshmen. I want to try and be able to play them in four games and take advantage of the opportunity that you have, but you've got to be in position to be able to play them in four games to get the development.

It's a dynamic that you have to manage, but with Antonio (Clary), we won't go down the route of a medical deal until we get later in the season and we know exactly what it's looking like, how he's projected to finish, if he's able to take advantage of a couple games or not.

Q. Because of some of the injuries some of the freshmen had to kind of step up a little bit in your depth including Dre Walker and Caleb Hardy in that secondary. How much have you seen them grow and how confident are you in them?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Dre, felt sorry for Dre with the PI (pass interference) called down there, but he's a guy that shows you he can be in position for the most part. He's got to learn how to keep his hand off the hip of the receiver and go make a play there, but I feel really confident.

I'll tell you what, Caleb was having a great preseason camp until he sprained the ankle, which set him back. He was looking like a guy even prior to the ankle that was trending in the direction of a guy that was going to help us early on, and then we had the ankle that slowed it down a little bit, and now he's back ready to go.

But feel confident with those guys. They're I would say probably a little bit ahead of some of the other first years, and so we were considering their production prior to the break of fall camp with those two. But Kaleb got a little bit behind because of the ankle, but now he's back ready.

Q. You mentioned Tony Gibson's 3-3-5 defense. What's tough for an offensive line when you face the stack?

TONY ELLIOTT: How long you got? You got a while?

So the 3-3 stack, it just screws with your identification, right, because you practice so much against a four-down structure and then you're starting to see the odd Okie structure, but when you get the 3-3 stack, okay, which two linebackers are part of the slide, which ones are a part of the back's responsibility and your protection. All right, when we're going -- just

perfect example, if we're running a zone scheme, right, typically we have a particular point. Well, now you have three of them in there; where are we setting the point? Then each run scheme, it changes a little bit, right, the identification.

It's almost teaching -- I wouldn't say it's like option football, but you don't see as much of the 3-3 stack as you do see of four-down and some of the other Okie defenses, so you have to reprogram, and you're trying to reprogram in the course of four days.

Then when you're in a 3-3 stack you can bring them from everywhere because then you've got the two overhang players. So now you can easily overload a run concept, you can overload a protection really, really quickly, so guys have to be really locked in and communicate very, very well.

And then when you're doing it with guys that are very big, fast, athletic up front and then your linebackers are very athletic and very fast, it happens so fast on the guys.

So I'd say it's more just a function of you don't see it quite as much. There was a time when you were seeing it more consistently throughout the course of a season, when you'd see it three, four times, then you're a little more prepared for it. But we went from four-down to a four-down mix to an odd mix four-down, now we're going 3-3 stack. So you've been preparing against different defensive structures up to this point, and now you've got a new one, and those guys are confident and they're fast. They know what they're doing and where they're going, and it makes it challenging.

Q. (Anthony) Colandrea's interceptions obviously was part of the maturation process, but Locksley said he kind of drove him crazy during the game and called him dangerous because he can extend plays. You've coached a lot of really good quarterbacks in your time;

how dangerous is he? What do you see his ceiling and potential?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so I think the first touchdown pass, like you kind of see something that excites you. I mean, the guy has got a guy barreling down, and he stays with the concept and he gets the ball and he puts it where the back can catch it and go make a play.

Then you see he escapes the pocket, and then he's not just running but he's making guys miss. Still has to learn how to slide a little bit better at times, got to protect himself. Then you can see him sit in the pocket, and he can deliver a strike.

I think the thing that everybody is getting to see about him is just how poised he can be. Like he's got a ton of poise, a ton of confidence.

Now where we have to help him develop and grow is to make sure that you manage that confidence and that you don't take too many chances and unnecessary chances.

A perfect example was the first interception. In that situation, you got points or you feel like you have points. You got the ball on the 12-yard line, take a shot at the end zone. Either your receiver catches it or nobody catches it, and then you kick the field goal and you feel good about that drive.

Well, he gets flushed from the pocket, he should know it's man coverage, timing is off. That route, probably not going to get back to it. Protect the ball. Could have possibly ran for it, get positive yards. We kick the field goal, we move on. That's a situation where confidence right there, okay, I need you to manage that situation.

You see he can extend it with his legs. He's going to play kind of like BA (Brennan Armstrong) with that mentality. He's going to run the football to go get extra yards, not just to get a few and slide, slide down. We're going to

have to teach him how to manage that, as well, and he's got moxie and he's a competitor, and he loves to compete and wants to win.

Those are the things that we see out of him, and I believe that once Tony (Muskett) is healthy and gets in there, I think you're going to see a lot of similar qualities from him, as well.

Q. You were asked about Malachi (Fields) and Malik (Washington), their productivity. 37 of your 54 catches are from those two guys; 70-something percent of your targets are going to those guys. It's great that they're good players. Are you worried there isn't enough around them to take some of the load off them?

TONY ELLIOTT: Good question. So what we have to do is we've got to be consistent running the football, so we've got to make people fear the efficiency of running the football because now you have to commit to stopping the run. We've got to get more production out of the tight ends, and I think some of it is you have a comfort level with those guys, and you feel like they'll make a play for you, but there's been several situations on tape that I can think of in particular, man, find the tight end. Tight end and running back really is the quarterback's best friend. So if you look at football, like take the NFL, for example, right at the highest level, typically your running back is probably your third leading receiver because you check it down instead of forcing the play to your playmakers. It's not there, check it down.

I think about the sack in the JMU game where we're five-man protection, we're sitting on the boundary, throw too long. If we progress to the next progression which is the tight end, boom, we convert and now we have a 1st down.

I also think about a play in the game where we scramble, the tight end is wide open. Take the tight end, and if it's not there check it down to your back. That's an area where AC is going to grow just through experience and coaching and developing.

But we have to run the ball and we have to incorporate the tight end, and then the plan is to use JR (Wilson) more. You saw him in some of our passing sets. Try to get him more involved, see can we get a little bit more balanced, possibly out there to the field protect those guys by running the football and incorporating the tight end so now you make the defense have to account for pretty much everything.

We had opportunities. We've just got to take advantage of them because the tight end has been -- the tight end was productive for us last year, so we've got guys that can be productive, we just have to make sure that we get them the ball, and early on we probably asked those guys to do a little bit more from a protection standpoint just because of where we started the year from an offensive line standpoint.

Q. I was curious with the tight ends, are you releasing them a little more as you gain confidence in the offensive line because as you mentioned, early you kind of needed them in?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's right. We definitely are starting to feel more confident, and hopefully we'll take another step with the guys up front. There's always going to be situations where you're going to need your tight end to protect, and there's certain play pass concepts that you need the run action of the tight end to really sell what you're doing.

But as we gain more confidence, I'm hoping to see that the quarterbacks will develop a little bit more trust in their tight ends, and they've just got to give them an opportunity, and I believe those guys will accept the challenge and produce for them.

But I think as you said when 37 of those targets are to those two guys and you know they're making plays, you have a tendency at times, and that's where a quarterback has to make sure he fights the urge just to find his guy because his guy may not always be open. His guy may not

always be the No. 1 progression in the concept. So you've got to trust the scheme and what we're doing, and then the football will find the guys that are open.

Q. When you look at the other side of the ball with defense, you're not getting a whole lot of negative plays. Are you guys being more conservative on that side or are there plays there to be made? What are you seeing?

TONY ELLIOTT: I thought last week we did a better job of creating pressure on the quarterback, so even in the first drive we were able to create some disruption and flush him out of the pocket. We've just got to get guys on the ground. We've had several first contacts in the backfield, and then we don't get the guy down on first contact, and then they run through the first tackle, and next thing you know it's a positive gain.

Then you look in the game, we had two free rushers on the quarterback, and these guys are going to learn and grow, but you coach them to stay upfield shoulder, and man, they're so excited and so aggressive and ready to get the sack, well, they don't stay upfield shoulder and then the quarterback spins out on them.

I think there's plays that are there to be made. We've got to make them. But overall we do have to improve and increase our disruption and pressure on the quarterback and getting to the quarterback, and then if we have a guy in the backfield, we need to get him down on first contact.

So I think that's a function of why the numbers are not quite what they were last year. We've got to get guys on the ground, and then when we get a free shot, we've got to make sure that it sticks.