

**University of Virginia Football Media  
Conference  
Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2023  
Athletics Director Carla Williams / Head Coach  
Tony Elliott  
Press Conference**

**CARLA WILLIAMS:** First of all, I want to acknowledge Lavel (Davis Jr.), Devin (Chandler), and D'Sean (Perry) and their legacies at the University of Virginia.

I also want to acknowledge their parents -- **Dalayna and the late Quentin Chandler, Sr.; Simone and Lavel Sr.; and Happy and Sean Perry -- their siblings, grandparents, aunts, and so many other relatives and friends who have lost so much.**

We promise the family members that we would never forget their loved ones, and we will keep that promise.

To the UVA and Charlottesville communities, we encourage you to not only support these players, but to support the families of Devin, Lavel, and D'Sean as we celebrate their legacies this weekend.

Please wear orange. Please arrive by 9:30 for Wahoo Walk. Please be in your seats by 11:30 for the pregame ceremony. Thank you.

**Q. As we've just heard, there's a lot going on around this game, particularly late in the week. Especially for the players who were here last fall and knew Lavel, Devin, and D'Sean, how do you strike the balance between paying tribute to the players and their families and also preparing for a football game?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Great question there. You've got to compartmentalize and be strategic with the hours in the day and know when you need to focus on football. They also have academics that they've got to continue to focus on, and then also spending the appropriate amount of time mentally preparing themselves for the

emotional, you know, roller coaster that they're going to have late in the week and also on game day.

So it's a delicate balance. You want to make sure that you fill all the buckets properly. Like I said, there is no formula. So when we're doing football or focusing on football and then we step away from football, we try to be present in the moment so that we can capture the moment and be ready for this weekend.

**Q. Do you have an update on your quarterback situation?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah. So Tony (Muskett) is day-to-day. He's getting more range of motion in his shoulder. But, you know, he wants to play. He is pushing to play. Each day is encouraging. But right now he is day-to-day with the shoulder.

**Q. Obviously, if he doesn't go, it would be (Anthony) Colandrea, I imagine, and where is your confidence level in what he has been able to learn so far?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, I think that we've seen it when we've been in the stadium scrimmaging and in different situations. As I've said, his confidence level is high, is always high. He has a moxie about him.

I think the challenge will be for us to make sure we put him in the best position to be successful. Still got to go call it to win the game. There's no question about that.

So by the end of the week, we'll have our plan condensed and concise and tailored to fit either one and have the ability to expect Tony (Muskett) to run out there, and if not, if it's (Anthony) Colandrea, then we have a plan for him as well.

He is a competitor. He has leadership qualities as a freshman. He's got play-making ability. The biggest thing for us, if he is the one that runs

out there first, is just making sure that we kind of keep him level-headed and calm and collected so that he can go do his job, which is to distribute and manage the system.

**Q. You just touched on kind of the approach of how you get there, but is there a drop-dead date for you in terms of, hey, if he can't practice Thursday, he doesn't go? Has he played enough college football that you're comfortable with him missing practice, and what's your approach?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** With him it would be a game-time decision on that. We know his background. We also -- he had an opportunity to show us kind of how he was going to react and respond in the situation that he was in this past Saturday.

So with him it would go all the way up until game time.

**Q. What is the biggest growth you've seen from (Anthony) Colandrea? I know he has that Florida swag and moxie, but where is the area where you say we've seen this growth from him?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Just playing within the system more. Day one he wanted to show what he can do because I think he's been a guy that's always had to prove himself, and he doesn't mind that.

If you look at his background and where he chose to go to high school and compete and the guys he had to compete with, he had to prove himself. I think he came in the door just really wanting to prove himself, and now we're trying to get him to understand the total responsibility as a quarterback.

It's not just the big play. It's the routine play, and sometimes the routine play is throw the ball away. That's where you've seen him grow a little bit is that now he's trusting that the

routine play is the right play to make and not try to force the big play.

**Q. Three guys not on the depth chart -- Chico Bennett, Su (Olasunkonmi Agunloye), and also Antonio Clary. Any update on those guys?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Su (Olasunkonmi Agunloye), we obviously all saw what happened. I don't think in the moment anybody knew the extent or the magnitude. But it was pretty serious for Su. He had to undergo surgery. Surgery was successful.

So he'll be out obviously for the rest of the season. Then once I know more, I'll give you a better update on that, but he won't be with us.

Chico (Bennett) is back in practice, and obviously it's a day-to-day thing with him. So didn't want to list him on the depth chart because didn't know, but he was out there today. Limited reps, but able to go full speed, so we'll ramp him up. Again, he'll be a game-time decision.

(Antonio) Clary is getting closer. He was out in practice today, modified just from a rep standpoint. But he is moving around a little better, so he will be a game-time decision as well.

Both of those guys could be in the lineup, but it's really going to be how they progress throughout the rest of the week. Then from a medical standpoint, is it the right time to put them back in the lineup?

Then just an update on a couple of other guys. Sackett Wood, Josh Ahern, and Lex Long are probable for this week. They're dealing with some injuries that may keep them out. So I would say probable with those guys. We won't know until later in the week if we'll have those guys available.

**Q. You just mentioned (Josh) Ahern there at the linebacker spot. Kam Robinson gave you some good snaps against Tennessee. How do you feel about him potentially taking a larger role?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Got to go. Got to go. As I tell them, man, nobody cares that you're a first year or nobody cares that you're a freshman. You're the next man up.

So it would be a combination of he and Stevie Bracey. Those two would have to fill that role. Then looking at James Jackson. He has played a significant amount of football, so he has some flexibility. So he could move to the Will spot if one of those guys is more comfortable and more suited to play the Mike. He could stay at Mike, and then one of those could fill in at Will.

We try to cross-train them as much as we can. Stevie (Bracey) would be further along just because of his time in the program. Kam is still figuring it out.

But it's next man up. Some of those freshmen, they got thrown in the game. They had to go. They were the next man up. That's our current situation from a depth standpoint.

At the end of the day JMU is not going to care, and nobody is going to care. You have to be ready to play. And we have to do a great job, if we're in that situation where we're counting on them to play a significant amount of snaps, and then we have to help them from a coaching standpoint.

**Q. What did the reviewing the film reveal that maybe wasn't immediately apparent to you after the game?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Right. Just it's a game of inches. You see the end result a lot of times in real time, and then you go back and watch the film.

I'm really proud of the guys because of the effort on the sideline. You felt like it was really good effort, and then when you watched the tape, there were guys that were straining. There were guys that were playing a lot of snaps, and they were still fighting all the way until the end.

Missed opportunities. Missed opportunities. There were several opportunities where we had chances to get the ball carrier on the ground, and we didn't get them on the ground at the point of contact. Then it resulted in explosive plays.

Then offensively, man, just a game of inches. One more inch as we reach on the outside zone, and the ball is going to spit, you know.

We overset just a little bit too far on our sets, and then that gives a defender the ability to go up and under on you and get to the quarterback.

So what it revealed for me from a positive standpoint is we're headed in the right direction because it wasn't just from our standpoint turning guys loose. We got beat in some one-on-one matchups. We lost some one-on-one matchups. And there's not much you can do about that other than go back to work and figure out fundamentally.

And then it also revealed that we still got work to do with our guys to get them to completely trust our fundamentals all the time. It revealed on tape that at times in the heat of the moment we reverted back to some old things that we were trying to eliminate. That's a great opportunity for us to teach our guys that, man, it's fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals at all times.

**Q. What's Sam Westfall done really well to earn that cornerback job and be the guy there?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** He runs well, and so he has a really good feel for being able to stay on top of routes. And obviously in the system that we play, that's a premium, being able to stay on top of the routes. That's what he's shown.

His experience picking up the scheme quickly and then he has the ability from a coverage standpoint to stay in position where he's supposed to be relative to the scheme.

**Q. Then on James Madison's quarterback, Jordan McCloud, what do you know about Jordan, and what do you think the challenge is in slowing him down?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I know Jordan very well. I think you set me up with that question.

Having spent time recruiting his older brother, Ray-Ray, first of all, it's an awesome family. He has great parents. They did a great job raising all of their children, and there's a younger one that's playing ball down the road at a place I'm familiar with.

But Jordan, just getting to know him through Ray-Ray in the recruiting process, man, he is an outstanding young man, first and foremost. Very humble.

He's a really, really good athlete, but he is a better quarterback, and I think that he kind of went on his journey to prove that he can be the quarterback that he believes and wants to show that to everybody.

So I'm excited for him and his opportunity just because I know his journey and how hard he's worked. Then, obviously, the relationship with the family. So it will be nice to hug his neck before the game and then go compete against him.

You know, obviously his body of work at JMU is not huge, right, so it's hard to truly evaluate that, but obviously, they saw something

throughout the course of camp and then also in the game to give him the nod versus us.

Obviously we're going to prepare for both quarterbacks. I think they have some similarities, but they're also very different, so we have to be prepared to plan for two different guys in the game.

**Q. Of course, this weekend will be emotional, but is there some ease or maybe some comfortability in knowing this is going to happen on your home turf in front of your fans where last week you didn't have that necessarily?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I'm excited to be back in front of our fans just to extend my gratitude to them for all the support that they've given us throughout the course of this journey since last November.

You know, hoping that that is going to bring some, as you said, some ease to our players because it's going to be emotional. I mean, there's no way around it, and it should be, right?

Obviously, everything that's going to be done is what needs to be done, what's supposed to be done in this situation. Then the best way that we can play our part as a team is to go out and play well, and that's my message to the guys.

The administration is doing everything they're supposed to do and need to do to honor Lavel (Davis Jr.), Devin (Chandler), and D'Sean (Perry), to honor their families the way they're supposed to, and then we need to go out and honor them by the way that we play.

And, again, outcome will take care of itself, but I'm just more interested in seeing these guys lay it on the line because that's what those three would want.

**Q. Sticking with that for one more, what is your expectation for the fans and the turnout,**

**and do you hope that there are some people that maybe aren't football fans but are just Charlottesville people that come out to support you?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** My expectation, considering it's a packed house. I would like to see a packed house, a sell-out, and everybody showing up in orange and supporting. Obviously we're there for the game in support of our players on the field, but also, when you think about the reality of it, three young men, man, they are no longer here. It's difficult for me.

Some days are harder than others, right, and same for those players and the staff. I can't imagine what it's like for their families dealing with it.

We have an opportunity as a community, as a football program, fan base to pay respect to the three young men, their families, and then also the other 125 guys that have chosen to stay the course, do what's difficult, and show up every single day.

So my expectation is that everybody shows up and supports these guys and helps these guys have some peace, kind of have some -- this is a big day, right? It's a big day. It's a big milestone, and I can only imagine because I know for me there's been anxiety leading up to it. I can only imagine what it's like for the players and the families.

So we're going to need the fans. I mean, we need the support, and so I would like to see everybody show up in orange and cheer these guys on and be a part of the services that are going to take place before kickoff.

**Q. I know we talked about Suderian (Harrison) and wearing the No. 1. Football-wise, tell us what has made him ready to contribute? What did he bring here?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** First, he's a dynamic athlete. He's very quick, very twitchy, runs well. Very natural playmaker. When you watch him, you can just tell he knows what to do with the football.

Being that he was a quarterback in high school, he has a command and a presence about him. He draws other players to him, even the older guys.

So he just has a presence about him. He has the ability to make plays. And the moments have not appeared to be too big for him. So the first time in Scott Stadium, man, he looked like he was a veteran, like he had been there.

You do that on purpose because it's different when you're on the practice field and then when you transition into the stadium. And you try to create somewhat of a game atmosphere, and, man, he didn't miss a beat.

So his confidence, his poise. He's got a great personality. He's fun to coach, and he loves to compete. He loves football.

**Q. When you look back at the tape and see the O-line, how much was it -- how can you evaluate them when you look at the D-line, you face Tennessee? How do you balance that?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** A lot of respect for Coach (Josh) Heupel and Tennessee and what they've been able to do over the last couple of years.

I think the speed and the depth, right, kind of shocked us a little bit just because it's hard to simulate that on our practice field. I think once the shock wore off, the guys kind of settled in.

I feel like it was a combination of the inches that we didn't take advantage of. There were instances where we were trying to do too much. I think that we were overzealous and

guys just wanting to will their self to victory and not using their fundamentals.

I think about the snaps that we had. When you go back and look at it, you know, we're leaning too much on the football, right, because we're trying to get off too quick, we're trying to compensate too much to try to combat what's on the other side.

They did a good job, and they were rolling them, so they had a lot of depth. So their depth was fresh, whereas our depth, we didn't have depth to be able to roll in to combat it.

So I think it was a combination of several things, and I also saw some pictures that when our guys did it right, they had success. Like when they trusted their technique and they were all working in unison and the backs were on track where they were supposed to be, we were able to have some success in the game.

So that's what you build upon, but then you also have to evaluate, okay, how do we get better, how do we put them in a better position, how do we get them to use their fundamentals more consistent? And then for us as a program, hey, we have some work to do from a recruiting standpoint to build the depth to be able to compete in games like that.

**Q. Is Jimmy Christ available now?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Jimmy Christ is back in practice. He is available. I have so to see where he is from a conditioning standpoint because he has been out for a couple of weeks. He has been available. He has been a full go in practice the last couple of days. That's an option.

He wasn't quite ready to throw him out there. We were anticipating by the end of the week. Another week of practice will have him ready to go, so he will be available.

**Q. I don't know how closely ACC players follow non-Power 5 football. Do you think your players are aware of the success that JMU had, first, at FCS in particular, but even more recently?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** They were educated yesterday. I think the record is a hundred and -- I just did the last ten years, like a hundred and like twenty-five or something like that. I know it was a 79% winning percentage. They've won two national championships. The record between UVA and JMU is 2-1. The last time we played was 1983. They're favored in the game.

So they've been educated. When you cut on the tape, you see it too. When you cut on the tape.

I don't know how closely they follow it. I don't know how closely they follow anything nowadays, to be honest with you, just because they have so much access to information at their fingertips.

But they were educated about it, and they were reminded about -- and you look at Coach (Curt) Cignetti and what he has done and his success. They're very well coached and a very disciplined team. They have really, really good players.

Those kids have a chip on their shoulder probably because they may not have been recruited by UVA. They're being educated this week on who their competition is. Not trying to -- that's not trying to make it about JMU because that should never be the case, but I do feel like I have a responsibility as their coach to prepare them for battle to know what they're walking into or who their opponent is.

**Q. For those of us that haven't seen a lot of JMU football, what impresses you about their defense?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** They're athletic, first and foremost. Athletic. Very sound. You don't see them out of position much. They're very --

they're twitchy on the edges. They can get after the quarterback off the edges.

I'm going to say they're sneaky stout on the inside because you're going to look at the stat sheet, you're going to look at the paper and say, okay, well, they're 6'2", 280, but when their D tackle, 99, (James) Carpenter, when he anchors down, he is hard to move.

Structurally they're sound. They're athletic. Their linebackers are two big athletes that can run sideline to sideline, and then their corners can come up in press coverage, and they can isolate them.

That's what you see. They have confidence in their corners to be able to play bump and run coverage with no help, which allows them to be able to dedicate more to the run, to be able to stop the run.

So very sound, very athletic, and they're stouter than you think when you look at the depth chart. You've got to watch the film, and it shows on the film.

**Q. If Tony (Muskett) is able to play, what did he do last week before he got injured that you liked?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** I thought, first and foremost, being in that situation, because that's the first time he's played in front of that many people in that environment, I thought he handled the environment well. He looked very poised in the pocket early on.

Man, he stepped up. He had guys barreling down, and he hit a couple of dig routes across the middle that he threaded with a needle. And so he did those things well. I thought his in-game demeanor was good throughout the course of the game.

There were a couple of things I would like to see, a couple of decisions in the run game with

the RPOs. That was part of the game plan, and again, their athleticism can quickly fool you, but I thought he managed the situation well.

I thought his leadership was there because you don't know in that moment. So his leadership was there, and he made some throws that let me know that if we can protect him that he is going to be able to win some football games.

**Q. Not to be negative, but if he can't play and (Anthony) Colandrea is your guy, do you have a third guy ready?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yep. So right now we have Grady Brosterhous getting ready, Jared Rayman as well, and then obviously Delaney (Crawford) could be an emergency guy for us if we need Delaney.

So right now, if Tony is not available, it would be Colandrea, then it would be Grady Brosterhous, Jared Rayman, and then possibly Delaney.

**Q. Probably the most important part of your video review, what did you see from (Matt) Ganyard's tackle attempt on the opening kickoff, and then overall how do you think he performed?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, man. How cool was that. When you think about it, I mean, that's what college football is about. You know, opportunities like that and to see him go out and perform and kick the ball in the end zone, it helps us, right?

You know, the one that was a little bit short of the end zone, man, we had a hat on the guy on the 20-yard line. We just fall off the tackle and it pops. I thought he kicked the ball well. He handled the situation.

So excited for him. Sparky, Daniel Sparks, is a weapon. We have to do a better job in coverage. I thought our protection was

improved from the year before. We were very leaky in protection punt-wise.

I think we might have outkicked a little bit of our coverage at times, but we also had opportunities to get the returner down on the ground, and we missed the first tackle, right, or a guy, does he take speed off instead of taking his attempt at the guy and make him go east and west? We pulled off a little bit.

So definitely areas to improve, but did see a lot of positive, but happy for Matt, and hopefully that will give him the confidence to keep putting him out of the end zone.

**Q. (Off microphone)?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** He slowed them down a little bit, and then Sparky saved one. Sparky went and ran one down. And trust me, we do not need our kickers making tackles. That is not what we want. The guy -- what I'll say is the guys have taken ownership of the opportunities that we missed. They've gone back to work. We've had two good days of practice already as we prepare for this weekend.

**Q. Just since last week the ACC added Stanford, California, SMU. Any thoughts?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** You had Miss Carla (Williams) here a second ago. She left quick. To be honest with you, we haven't even had a chance to have conversation about that.

Here's what I do know. President (Jim) Ryan and Carla, I trust their wisdom, their judgment. I know that their number one priority is to make sure that Virginia is in the best position possible, and I'm confident about that.

I'll learn more of the details when that comes out. Man, I got bigger fish to fry. That's down the road. I'm worried about JMU coming in here this week.

**Q. You touched on McCloud, but can you talk a little bit about JMU's offense? They're one of the few teams in the country that's been scoring 35-plus.**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Right. So they like to run the football. They can establish the run. Their backs are really good, and then that sets up their play action.

You know, it might be a little bit different this year than they've been in the past with their quarterback situation, but a lot of zone read, RPO-type stuff, and then take their shots down the field.

So they got playmakers. They've got some experience. They've got a very experienced offensive line. That's what you notice when you watch them. I think their senior and then juniors across the board that have played some football, and they've got good size, good length. They're physical. Their backs know how to find the creases, and then when they get into the open field, they're hard to tackle.

So, you know, we're excited about the challenge, anxious to see because when you watch them in this past game, they're a little bit different depending upon the quarterback. When they had 14 (Alonza Barnett III) in there, it was a little bit different offense than when they had No. 2 (Jordan McCloud) in there.

We're going to prepare for both, but the biggest thing is up front they can establish the line of scrimmage. They can wear you down running the football, and then they can throw it when they need to.

**Q. Wanted to ask you, either from your Clemson time recruiting or at any point in your life, Lavel (Davis Jr.) and Suderian (Harrison), their hometown, have you spent much time there, and can you describe that community? What is that area like?**



**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, yeah, spent a lot of time. First, one of my teammates, my college teammate, Ty Hill, went to school there, and then when I was coaching, my previous stop, Robert Smith went to school there.

So it's right outside of kind of the Summerville area, so it's not easy to get to. So football is really important because that's all they got on Friday nights. And the staff there has done a great job of putting money into the program. Even though it's a smaller school, they've invested in the program. They take football very serious.

And then it's very close to the Summervilles, the Fort Dorchesters, and the bigger schools in that area where football is important.

But they've taken pride in kind of building that program up.

**Q. So you've been there in person and in the schools?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, yeah, many times, many times.

**Q. And this is just -- if you said it, I apologize, but what was Su's (Olasunkonmi Agunloye) actual injury? What was the surgery?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So it looks like it was ruptured patella tendons in both knees. So it was pretty - - I was at the hospital with him, and just trying to figure out what happened, and I don't think he really knows what happened, to be honest with you. It was like a freak-type deal.

So keep him and his family in your prayers because he's got a significant road ahead from a recovery standpoint.