

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

Q. Because of the injuries on defense, you put some guys in maybe sooner than you would like. Do you think this is accelerating their development?

TONY ELLIOTT: It is. But I think a couple of them we knew. Kam Robinson we felt like would be a guy that we would have to accelerate the process. Some of the other guys having to grow up really fast.

Tough now to deal with it. Got growing pains, but long-term it's going to pay off. In the short-term, it's next man up. You got to go.

Q. (Mekhi) Buchanan another guy that you thought over the course of the season would work his way into the rotation?

TONY ELLIOTT: Athletically for sure, but at the position he plays, there is a lot of football that you have to learn, for all of them, to be honest with you.

You talk about Kam Robinson in there at the Mike (line)backer position. He has to set the front, make a lot of calls. That takes time.

Just really proud of James Jackson and just the support that he's given to Kam (Robinson), his willingness to move on to Will and help Kam, because he's more comfortable at the Mike position.

Yeah, (Mekhi) Buchanan athletically was a guy that we felt like rushing the passer should be able to do that. But however, when you got a drop in coverage and fit the run and got run stunts, it's a big learning curve.

Tell you what, he's a kid that loves ball. He is very conscientious. He's going to work hard. I'm excited to see his growth and development as

we persevere through some of the injuries at the bandit and d-end position.

Q. What are about recruiting Dre Walker, and what has enabled him to play when there are some older transfer guys in there, too at corner?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Dre, first thing? I remember is he came to camp, I guess it was the first camp that I had as a head coach. We're out there and you see this big, long lanky kid, and then you watch him put his foot in the ground and explode.

I was like, hey, this guy here, I'm surprised he doesn't have a ton of other opportunities. Great family. Mom and dad raised him the right way. I believe we're one of the first big schools to believe in him, and he was loyal to us, we were loyal to him.

Throughout the process, really quiet. Wasn't high maintenance. He's one of the few guys I got a chance to go see play, because as a head coach I'm always in on Friday nights, but you have an open week here and there or might have a Thursday or Friday game and maybe I get two opportunities.

He's one I wanted to go see play, and watching him on the field as a receiver, as DB, as a punt returner, you just knew the athleticism was there. His length, athleticism give him a chance right away as he learns those positions.

Snap-wise, you want to have a rotation. It's hard for a guy to play 75 snaps, plus if he's a special teams guy you could a guy playing 99, 100 snaps a game. Throughout the season, that's a lot of wear and tear on your body. You.

So want to have rotation, and he has the athleticism and the length right now as he's learning the position. Gives him a chance to be out there.

Q. Do you have an update on Kam (Butler)?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Kam had his MRI last night. Don't know the details of it, but right now definitely wouldn't be able to play this week. Hopefully hoping for the best. Think this might be more pec than shoulder, so hopefully we get the MRI results and we get good news that it's not season-ending. Right now still waiting on those results.

Q. Bryce Carter stepped up when Kam (Butler) went down. Talk about how much you've seen him grow.

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, Bryce is a guy when I first got here, I think his athleticism jumps out at you. We had to challenge him to kind of, hey, man, get your motor going. Start learning what to do.

In fairness to him, because of necessity we've had to play him a little bit inside, a little bit outside, so he's had to toggle between two positions. We're really proud of him. I think ability was never a question on Bryce. It was just the maturation process, and like some of the other young guys, it's going to be accelerated for him now.

I think he would be ahead of Mekhi Buchanan and the Jason (Hammond) and the true freshman guys, but excited for his opportunity.

You know, he's made plays for us and he's going to have to make a lot more plays. I think he's ready to accept the challenge.

Q. Talking to Kam Robinson, he remembers the staff rolling deep in one of his basketball games. Early signing day. I think he was said eight coaches that ended up going there.

TONY ELLIOTT: That's right.

Q. What stands out about his recruit when you look back to all the chaos also leading up to early signing day?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Kam (Robinson) was a guy when I first got here, just evaluating tape, he jumped out at you on tape and you saw him doing so many things. He played receiver, linebacker, kick returner, punter. He did everything for his school. It was small-school ball so to speak. I felt like we had a diamond in the rough.

When you actually have a chance to meet him he has a big beautiful smile, he's very engaging. Then you meet his family, outstanding family. Very, very strong upbringing there. His brother plays college baseball, so it's an athletic family.

He wasn't a high maintenance guy. If I could say this, just a small down country boy that likes hunting and fishing and really didn't care much about recruiting. There at the end the secret kind of got out and we were crossing our fingers. I think OV (official visit) to South Carolina, OV to Florida State, and, man, we were holding on hoping that we could get him.

I felt like him in particular could be like a program changer. Just with his athleticism would be a big upgrade athletically. Being an in-state kid, having success here, big smile, serious about his education.

So I felt like he could be the total package. All the other guys are outstanding as well. I just felt like I wanted to build around him, and that's why you saw eight coaches at one basketball game. We wanted to make it a point of emphasis, if we're going to get into really recruiting the state, it starts with Kam Robinson.

Q. Obviously we saw (Anthony) Colandrea again Friday night. Is that because (Tony) Muskett is still unavailable? Where does that stand?

TONY ELLIOTT: So each week (Tony) Muskett is getting better. As I said, I want to do what's best for Tony. My philosophy you is don't lose your starting job because of injury. Each week we go into it with Tony being the guy until we get to the game and we assess what the situation is.

I think he's much closer. I anticipate that Tony will be ready to play this week, and that's how we'll roll.

Q. And then with such a tough start to the season, how do you make sure the guys in the locker room aren't getting too down on themselves, or for lack of a better word, losing hope?

TONY ELLIOTT: I put it in perspective for them just like I put it in perspective for the staff. You go back about a year ago and where we were as a program and everything that we were enduring and just the hurdle of playing football, again and then for two quarters of that first game, amidst all you had to do to get there, you're battling.

The next week you come back and you're getting ready to bring a home opener and you're still dealing with all the things from a year ago. A big ceremony before the game, big ceremony the day before, and you're up by 11 points in the fourth quarter and you don't finish.

Then you're at Maryland and it's 21-14 with the ball on the 12-yard line with the chance to tie it up in the fourth quarter. You get here this past week and it's a tie ballgame with 36 seconds left in the game.

So put it in perspective. Everything they've had to do to get to where they are should be encouraging that we're going in the right direction. Stay the course. Stay the course.

One of the things I tell them is research shows most accidents happen within a mile of the destination. We can't lose sight now. Got to put two hands on the wheel and keep pushing. You challenge them from a competitive standpoint. The competitor wants to compete no matter what the situation. A big word for us has been competitive stamina, and competitive stamina is the ability to compete regardless of the circumstances.

So showing them the progress that's being made, right, putting in context what they have accomplished despite what the record says. I don't think anybody in that locker room believes we're an 0-4 football team, but our actions and the things that we did is a result of where we are.

But we believe that we can continue to improve. We believe we can compete. That's what it takes. You're going to have situations that are always going to challenge you. Biggest thing is simplify your life. Don't listen to the outside voices. Talk to yourself. Don't listen to yourself.

So really just challenging the young people to keep that inside-out mentality and the results will come.

Q. Going off that, do you have to do anything to make sure they aren't listening to those outside voices?

TONY ELLIOTT: I mean, you can't stop it. I can't control it. All I can control is the three and a half, four hours that I have them per day. I hope that during that time the coaching staff and the environment within the program can help them to have the discipline when they walk out.

At the end of the day the credit goes to the man in the arena. Everybody is going to be a critic, right? What these guys -- they would not be in the position they are if they didn't listen to the inside voice as opposed to the outside voice.

So nothing I can do other than try to model that. I don't listen to what anybody says. I'm not on Twitter. Not on social media. I'm trying to focus on what I can do better each day to be able to serve the people I'm around.

Q. So speaking for the critics, I guess...

TONY ELLIOTT: I mean, not critics. You have a job to do. I understand.

Q. Year ago after the Duke loss, I think you four or five 15-yard penalties. You came in here and said you were irate and told the coaches there was going to be lineup changes. Guys weren't going to play if they had those kind of penalties. Things did improve after that.

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah.

Q. What has been your tact after what happened Friday? Are you similarly irate?

TONY ELLIOTT: I think it's different circumstances. The only one, if you look at the three, would be the one on Ty (Furnish). That was something that guys -- in the trenches it was chippy all night and the referees were coming over on both sides and saying, cut it out, and rightfully so.

There was an underlying situation there that made it a little bit chippy. (Anthony) Colandrea, I don't know what to tell him other than your helmet is partially coming off. You just made a big throw. You put it back on or -- but I think it's one of those deals where it's coming off. He takes it off the rest of the way. It's an unbelievable play. He's excited in the moment.

The ref sees what he sees, he throws the flag. I can't be mad at the official. He has to do his job. I don't know what I tell the kid, because emotion, we all got emotion in that moment. Then the one on James (Jackson), you know, we just got to be smarter right there. There is a guy that's being desperate wanting to make a play. If you're going to jump you got to already be in the line of scrimmage. You can't take a running start.

So those are different than the penalties that we had at Duke. Each one will be addressed a little bit differently, but still unacceptable. What I always tell the guys is don't put it in the hands of the ref to make the call. Live above reproach. The one that is most frustrating is the one between Ty, because that became a more personal situation there.

He's very remorseful and got caught up in the heat of the game with emotions. That's part of football. But you got to be able to stay within the lines. You can't let somebody else force you to get out of character.

The other two, those are different than the ones per se up at Duke.

Q. You were talking about Kam being a program changer. What do you like about his game? What separates him from other freshman you've seen at that spot?

TONY ELLIOTT: First of all, you look at his body. You don't see many bodies that come in like that as a freshman. Here is a guy that was a three-sport athlete that wasn't in the weight room and comes in at 220 pounds and looks like what I football player looks.

You watch him take off and run, he's very explosive. He's got good football instincts. He's athletic. He can do things in pass coverage that you don't typically see out of that position.

Then when he diagnoses the play he arrives fast and he arrives violently. And then you see him in space be able to make some plays because of his athleticism and his length. Athletically he's a big, fast linebacker that can play the run and he can give you some matchup opportunities in the passing game.

Q. Looking ahead to Saturday, I think Louisville scored their first seven times they had the ball against BC.

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah.

Q. A lot of explosive plays. The way your offense seems to be improving week by week, do you think you might be able to take advantage of some things?

TONY ELLIOTT: That one got out of hand quickly. When you go back and watch the Florida State

game, right, and then you watch Holy Cross, it's -- that's not what we're expecting.

My experience with Boston College, especially playing up at Boston College, is they play you tough. They got a ton of experience on defense. They got mostly seniors and graduates. So I don't anticipate that it's going to be like that.

Now, obviously their structure is built to stop the run which gives you some opportunities in the pass game, but you got to run the football effectively to be able to open up those throwing lanes in the pass game.

That to me is not indicative of who BC is. I think when you watch the other film and you are down to the wire with Florida State up there -- and it wasn't like it was the end-of-the-game comeback situation. It was tight from start to finish with Florida State.

That's what I'm anticipating. I'm anticipating them to be fired up and ready to play. We got to have a good plan. They're going to have eight-man front. They are going to get two extra hats near the box, so you have to make plays on the back end.

So possibly some opportunities in zone coverage, but also going to have to beat man coverage. Got to make sure we're prepared to play the bump and run that they play.

Q. Big picture program building, coaches love the idea of a quarterback coming in, sitting a year or two, starting two or three years, and you get that progression, guy after guy. With the portal, is that realistic? Is that your goal or is that a thing of the past?

TONY ELLIOTT: Great question. It's almost day-to-day to be honest with you when you're dealing with it, because -- and rightfully so. The players have leverage now, so it's not like it was before where as a coach you kind of dictated and you said this is what it's going to be.

Because they do have the ability to move around and survey the landscape and figure out what it is they want to do. So I think you have the approach that you try to play them if they're ready to play. You try to protect the year of eligibility if you can. And then you are focusing on one season at a time as it relates to roster management. Big picture you have your philosophy, but your roster can change.

I think about just talking to NC State. They had a young man, really good young man that just kind of surveyed the landscape and said, hey, I'm going to protect my year and go somewhere else to play. I'm not faulting anybody for that, but it does make it challenging.

I think your philosophy and approach you have it big picture, but you're operating day to day trying to manage your roster.

Q. In your previous stop you saw the benefit of a quarterback that comes back, spends a couple years in the system and a lot of talent too. What is the benefit of a quarterback who plays two, three years for a school, for a coach, in terms of the system, the development, the two-way communication, all that?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right. I think it starts your fundamentals. You have consistency in your fundamentals. Each coach is going to have different fundamentals and a different way of teaching things.

Then terminology is different.

Cohesion and chemistry with the guys around you is different if you're in a different system constantly.

What it does is helps you from a fundamentals standpoint. Continuity allows you to go out and work in rhythm with your guys. And then multiple years in the same system gives you the ability to really, really drill down to the details.

And then when you're able to drill down to the details, then you can rep and rep and rep, have repetition and build muscle memory, what

happens it the game really slows down. As opposed to if you're having multiple sets of fundamentals, now you have different sets of receivers, all kinds of different things. You're constantly in that mode of transition where it's hard for you to get really settled in with the system.

So there is a benefit to it. We'll kind of see how it is going forward, not just for Virginia, but just in college football in general. Just because the landscape is changing.

Q. (Off mic.)

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, no, I have not. Again, the way I look at it is now it can happen any week, right, because obviously the first four games, but you're going to have young guys that you may have to play at different spots in the season that may come in and say that.

And, again, I fully respect their right to do that. Again, I'm not saying I disagree with it, but it does present challenges when you're trying to manage -- depending upon what your roster is. If your roster has already taken a hit because you got injuries and you're playing guys, and now -- you're trying to win. You are trying to field a team that gives out best chance to win.

The way that I've always approached it, again -- I'm kind of trying to figure out how it's going to be going forward -- is obviously you got protect the team first, right? Then you protect the individual, okay? And then you always try to, when you can, protect the young man and his year from a redshirt standpoint. But if you have depth at a position it makes it a little bit easier for you to say, okay, we're going to protect it. But if you're the next man up it's very difficult to say hey, I can -- it's hard for me to protect that year. I need you to play because you're the next best opportunity for us. And really every player on the squad is one snap away.

So you want to be sensitive to it. I don't fault kids for thinking about it and processing it. But at the same time, there is a commitment to the team, right? The team, as I've always been coached and believe, team rights supercede individual rights.

In certain situations you will have the luxury and the ability to protect the young man if he's getting close to that threshold of playing four games.

Q. In each of the four games there has been at least one special teams play that you would like to have back. How have you gone about trying to correct those mistakes? Are you putting more time in practice on special teams?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's right, so definitely spending as much time as we can a lot to special teams. You see some personnel changes. We've played some different personnel at positions just trying to figure out if certain individuals give us a better opportunity to be able to be successful.

It's a lot of coaching of the details. Again, I think special teams at the college level is a little bit different, right, a little bit more detailed, a lot more involved.

So that's the approach, is to try and find the right personnel with the right skillset for all the jobs we're asking them to do, and then spending adequate time not just schematically, but fundamentally.

So I think it's different skillset, different movement when you're talking about special teams, and you get a lot of reps, offense, defense, but special teams is the one area where you're taking the whole team. You might be asking a kid that's used to going backwards per se as a defensive guy and now he has to go forward and block in space.

So you're asking guys to do something they haven't had a lot of reps, so you got build the muscle memory there as well.

Q. Feel like you're getting closer to getting your running game where you want it?

TONY ELLIOTT: I felt like early on in the game we were rushing the ball effectively, and then I thought right there middle of the game, third quarter, kind of disappeared a little bit. We did have some backed up situations which makes it a little bit more defensive friendly when they can load the box knowing you're probably going to be a little bit more conservative with your play calls.

But then we found something with the quarterback late in the game. So really challenged the backs. I thought the backs could have run through some arm tackles, ran through the smoke a little bit better in this pass game. So I'm excited to see them respond this week.

Structurally we knew going against NC State, they're very aggressive. Going to have seven -- if you got six they're going to have seven. If you have seven, they're going to have eight. They built to stop the run, and they basically tell you you got to beat us throwing the football.

Last week I knew structurally we were going to have some challenges. Thought we ran it effectively early on. Hopefully we can really get it going. I think that will really complement what we're trying to do in the passing game and open up more of the move the pockets and play action type passing game.

Q. And back to the quarterbacks, are you open to play two quarterbacks?

TONY ELLIOTT: I'm trying to figure out how to win a ballgame and what gives us the best chance and best opportunity. I think in fairness to Tony (Muskett), right, he's played 45 snaps and has been out, so I think you got to give them -- he earned the job. He won the job

coming out of camp and he needs to be evaluated in the game as well.

So right now he's our starting quarterback. I think we have a good sample size of what (Anthony) Colandrea can do. Both of them have to be ready. I think that they have a really good relationship and I see them hanging out together. They push each other in practice. There is healthy competition.

For me, it's whatever gives us the best chance. I won't know that until we get a good sample size on Tony in the game.

Q. Just seeing the status of some of the other guys that are injured, like Lex Long after he got his MRI?

TONY ELLIOTT: So Lex Long won't be available this week. (Josh) Ahern is probable. (Ben) Smiley is questionable this week. (Paul) Akere is not going to be able to go this week. (Antonio) Clary is still out. That will be long-term. Probably another six weeks on him after his surgery.

Trying to think. Those are the main guys. Su (Olasunkonmi Agunloye), was awesome to see Su. Su was able to come to the game and be around the guys. He was in this the locker room yesterday around the guys, so good update on him. Yeah, we got some guys down, but it's next man up. Got to be ready to go.

Q. Malik Washington has been on a tear. What has he brought to the table?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so, one, very dynamic. You look at him, he's big, strong, physical kid. Running well after the catch. Catching the ball with confidence. Making plays once he catches the ball.

If you spend any time around him, he's a very serious young man. He's a very organized, detailed young man. He came in obviously pretty polished four years being at

Northwestern, so what he brings is just his skillset, leadership, attention to detail. He has a passion and desire to improve.

I think he has some goals set for himself and he's working every day. What I like about him, as I tell everybody on the team, is your commitment has to be greater than the goal. His commitment is at a high level, and that's why he's been able to be productive.

Q. Just briefly on BC's offense, I know they switched quarterbacks to the transfer guy. What do you think about their offense?

TONY ELLIOTT: Scary. It's scary because of the quarterback. You know, one, BC is going to run the football. They're going to challenge you. They're going to run you. They're going to run the gap scheme at you, the power scheme, and see if you can stop it. And then they can spread you out.

So they can go if 12 personnel, heavy run sets, and next thing you know they're in empty and then the quarterback, is, man, dynamic, elusive, and he makes plays. He can really, really hurt with you the off-schedule play. When he pulls it down and scrambles he can extend plays and find open receivers.

Or if you're not gap sound he's going to expose you because he's fast, quick. He is a confident runner. So he's not looking to go down. He's looking to get those extra yards.

So they challenge you because they're going to force you to be gap sound in the run game. For you to defend multiple different run schemes and then they are going to spread you out.

Once they get the run game going they can set up all the play-actions. And then they got that practice element in the quarterback run because they can design quarterback runs that give them an extra hat. This quarterback is not looking for four. He's trying to go 40 when he pulls a ball down.