

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

TONY ELLIOTT: Definitely got a few veterans that I'm leaning on right now, and I thought the guys came back, and for us it's a short week, so one of the positives is that we didn't have a long time to sit and stew about what happened. We had to get right to the accountability, put it to bed and then move on.

Sunday everybody was hurting. Like I don't know about y'all, but man, when I went home, I didn't eat. Couldn't do anything but just say, what can I do to get better to help us get over the hump.

Then showed up on Sunday, everybody was still a little bit down, but that's an opportunity for us to grow. Like it doesn't matter if you win or you lose, when you show back up on Monday in our game week, you have to have the right mindset. You've got to put the game to bed and start looking forward.

By the end of the meetings and out on the practice field, I thought the energy picked up. Yesterday we had a good Tuesday practice and was proud of the guys for that because again, you're on a short week, you're right back out. It's a two-hour practice. You're full pads, getting after it, and I thought the guys had good energy.

Then today I thought the guys were very spirited, as well.

Seeing growth within the team. It's all about how you respond, and I think the guys are learning to respond quicker, and they're learning to respond the right way.

Then we have to come back tomorrow and put everything together and have a really good mental practice because you take the pads off

on Thursday and kind of dress rehearsal polish but you've still got to be mentally in tune, and then we've got to win the battle between the time we finish our Thursday practice and the time we kick off up in College Park.

The guy that I'm leaning on from an energy standpoint is Kam Butler. He brings it every single day. (Josh) Ahern has been really, really good this year with having great energy coming out to practice.

Malik Washington has had good energy. The quarterbacks, both Tony (Muskett) and Ant (Anthony Colandrea), bring good energy.

I've got some guys that I'm leaning on. Mike Hollins has been awesome. Every day that he's out there, he's got great energy, and he's got great positive body language. So it's just some of the younger guys and then some of the other guys that we've just got to pull through the knothole and get them to turn it loose to help us.

Q. Some of the guys that didn't play last week like Josh Ahern, Lex Long, Antonio Clary, what's their status?

TONY ELLIOTT: So Sackett (Wood) is back, (Josh) Ahern is back, Lex (Langston Long) is back. Antonio (Clary) unfortunately is still day-to-day. The ligament in the ankle is just taking its time. He's pushing hard. I know Kelly (Pugh) and the medical staff are working daily, but it's just a day-to-day thing with Clary.

I think those were the main guys. I feel like going into this game is probably the most healthy that we've been all year, having everybody back from last week with the exception of Clary being a day-to-day game-time decision.

Q. When you look at Maryland and you see their QB (Taulia Tagovailoa), what do you see from him?

TONY ELLIOTT: I apologize, Tua (Taulia Tagovailoa), I'm just calling him Tua because I don't know how to do it properly and I don't want to mess it up.

But man, he's a gamer. He's a competitor. He's a sneaky good runner. He likes to stay in the pocket and keep his eyes downfield, but when he pulls it down, he can go and hurt you with his legs.

He's very comfortable in their system. You can see that he's comfortable in their system. He knows the progressions. He can make all the throws.

You can see that this guy is a seasoned quarterback, and we've got to do a good job. We didn't put much pressure on Jordan (McCloud) last week, and that was something that I really challenged the defensive line.

We've got to put more pressure on the quarterback from all facets of our pass rush. This guy, he can beat you in the pocket, and what he can also do is those kind of off-schedule plays when he's improvising, he does a really good job of that.

Q. Dave Herard has played more in the first two weeks than in his whole career really. What has allowed him to get on the field? What have you seen from him that's allowed him to get on the field?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Dave is playing faster now. I think the processing of the game has slowed down to him, so now he can just go, where in the past I think he was thinking a little bit too much, which made him a step slow, not from a speed standpoint but just from a timing standpoint. Now he has a much better understanding of what we're doing.

Obviously with the situation with (Antonio) Clary being down and then Coen (King) moving out to corner it's created an opportunity, and

he's seized the moment. He's taken advantage of his opportunities and doing a good job.

Q. You have a number of sixth-year seniors in the program and a handful of them have been at UVA for all six years. Besides good play, what do you expect from Coen (King) and Perris (Jones) and that group?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so shout-out to those guys that you mentioned that have been here the whole time, that have been through the transition, which wasn't easy.

I remember my senior year I was asked to come back to play. I had already graduated and I was coming back to play for my receiver coach, and then I make that decision and then he decides -- not decides but he gets an opportunity to be a coordinator and he leaves, so I went through that transition there, and it's not easy because there's a lot of unknown.

So they muscled through that, and then obviously everything that happened last year, so what I expect out of those guys is just to display daily the maturity, the growth, the experience that they have here because they've got a lot of experience, not just football-wise, they've got a lot of life experience, and they can be great role models and examples for the younger guys that are coming in that don't quite understand the challenges and the struggles that the program has been through over the last couple years with the transition and then also with the tragedy.

Q. I know everybody expected the offensive line to struggle a little bit this year because of inexperience, and they were banged up in training camp. What have you seen there? Is it something that's just going to have to be a work in progress, or do you have hopes that these guys are going to eventually put it together?

TONY ELLIOTT: I do have hope that these guys are going to put it together, because I've seen it

at times. What I told the guys during the game and I continue to tell them is man, when you five guys are on the same page, man, it's poetry in motion. It's a beautiful thing.

I've seen what it can become, so I am very, very hopeful. Big picture-wise overall with the offensive line, in recruiting, that's a position that you can't miss. That's the one position -- like that, quarterback, those are positions that you can't miss because one, there's nowhere for the offensive line to go. Typically when you're recruiting a D-lineman you say he's athletic enough. If he's not quite a D-lineman then he can be an offensive lineman, but there's nowhere for the offensive lineman to go. If he can't play offensive line, there's nowhere for you to go with him, so you've got to be right, and you've got to develop, too. It's probably the most developmental position in football is the offensive line because of the technical piece of it, because of the understanding and then just how much changes on those guys. Four inches, four to six inches, that change right before the snap affect five guys where it's not always the case at other positions.

I'm hopeful that the guys that we have can put it together. Jimmy (Christ) coming back off of injury gives us a little bit of depth. We've got to get better snapping the ball. We've got to be more consistent there. I thought Saturday was better than the previous Saturday, but still not the consistency that we need, so we've got to make progress there.

The biggest thing is communication with those guys. It's got to be consistent. That's where experience comes into play because you're used to the guys sitting next to you, used to the calls. You know how to make the calls, you know when to make the calls. A lot of that is on-the-job training, as well.

I'm hopeful, but big picture, it's a rebuild on the offensive line, and it's going to take a little bit of time because you've got to recruit the right guys, you've got to develop those guys, you've

got to have consistency in the developmental process with those guys because if you change coaches, it's a different set of terminology with that coach, a different set of fundamentals that you have to go through, and you want to be as consistent as possible with those guys.

I'm hopeful, but I also understand that we've got work to do. Not going to make an excuse. We're going to coach these guys that we've got. We're going to coach them hard, and then in the recruiting process we're going to try and address the needs that we have going forward. **Q. This may relate to what was just asked, but the tight end position you've not gotten a ton in the pass game out of them, probably in part because you're asking them to stay and I know at times block and blocking in the run game. How would you evaluate what you're getting from those guys versus maybe what you hope to get?**

TONY ELLIOTT: Well, I think that each game is going to dictate kind of their production, depending upon what we ask them to do, and obviously we feel good with Misch and Sackett, but we didn't have Sackett (Wood) last week, so now Josh (Rawlings) is trying to grow up on the job. Josh has done a really good job of developing in the run game for us.

Carson (Gay) is a guy that we feel like can be a match-up, but we've just got to get him to that point to where he can function in both aspects because it's very hard at that position to substitute a guy based off a run pass. You have heavy tendencies.

Just overall I think the guys have done what we asked them to do. I do believe that we can have more production, but as we improve on the offensive line, we'll be able to allow those guys to do more in the passing game, and then each game plan is going to dictate their level of production.

Pleased with where they are. Asking them to do a lot. Hopeful we can get to a point to where we

can incorporate them in more aspects of what we're doing offensively than just the run blocking and the pass protection.

Q. This will also tie back to the offensive line, but a lot of (Anthony) Colandrea's best throws were what we call broken plays. Is that something as a coach that you would game plan for? Okay, the line is struggling, we're going to need those plays, or is that not the way you look at it?

TONY ELLIOTT: I mean, to say that we're going to game plan Colandrea rolling to the right throwing to his left to Kobe (Pace) wide open, I wish we could. If we knew exactly when that play was going to come, but a lot of that is natural, or the one where he's scrambling around and he finds Perris (Jones). I don't know if you can game plan those things. I think it gives you some confidence that he'll be able to make you right.

But we've also got to develop from the standpoint of when it's five-man protection and it's quick game and you've got double edged pressure and you're hot, you can't go away from the pressure and then you go full progression with it.

Those are the areas where we're challenging Ant to grow, and he will, and again, that's game experience that's going to help him with that, but it's hard to game plan those off-schedule plays.

I think Andy Reid would probably say the same thing with (Patrick) Mahomes. You know you're going to get them, so I think you just let those happen, and then you try to focus on cleaning up the protection so he can sit in the pocket because he was pretty effective in the pocket when we were able to protect him. He stood in there and made some throws in different situations.

It's nice to know when things break down, he can be a little bit of an eraser for you.

Q. (No microphone.)

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so you work scramble drill, so anytime you have a broken play and the quarterback breaks the pocket and it's not a designed sprint out or move-the-pocket type situation, you coach the guys to be able to know I stay in phase. If I'm on the backside, I know I'm on a cross or if I'm on the front side I'm flat to the sideline until I get close and then I turn up. So you coach all of those things.

But the plays that he made, like it's hard to coach finding Perris (Perris). I think that's just the gamesmanship and the feel for the game that he has, and I think that is consistent with the things that I've said about him, like we know when the lights come on, there's a little bit different deal.

I think some of it is, too, those guys not necessarily practice that but they practice the arm angles to make those throws. That's more of the quarterback development that you're seeing because of the Patrick Mahomes and the guys at the highest level that have to. They have to, because in the league it's hard to block the guys that you're going against. I don't care how good your offensive line is. We've got to get better and protect him, but you can't really coach that in my opinion. You just try to coach if he does break the pocket, man, be friendly -- that's the word you say, stay friendly with your quarterback, and depending upon where you are on the field, you're going to have a different responsibility to stay friendly with the quarterback.

Q. Sticking on (Anthony) Colandrea, obviously ACC Rookie of the Week. What kind of confidence did he instill in you this weekend if Tony (Muskett) is not ready and kind of for the future of the program?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so I think the confidence has already been there, and obviously I know I have to be mindful of how I say things when I'm talking to everybody, but I've expressed that we

feel really confident this kid has a chance to be very, very good in the future.

He showed that the moment wasn't too big for him, so that gives you confidence. He also showed that he's grasping what we're asking him to do for the most part, and then areas where we've got to improve, but I've said he's got the moxie. He's got that "it" factor. He plays with a little bit of a chip on his shoulder.

Those are the things that I had confidence in prior to because I had seen it in some of the scrimmages when we went over to Scott Stadium. Spring game you kind of saw him when the lights came on, he was able to perform.

Just proud of him. Happy for him. Really it puts pressure on the young guys around him to step up because you might be the next man up, and he was ready when his number was called.

Now this week, obviously he has to show the consistency to be able to take, okay, one game plan, flush it, and learn a new game plan within a week. So that'll be a challenge for him as he goes forward, whereas on the flipside Tony has had that experience because he's played a lot of college football so far.

Q. Does it put pressure on Tony (indiscernible)?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, well, as I said, the competition was daily in camp, so I think he already knows that the competition level is there, and he appreciates it.

That's what I value the most is those two have a really good relationship and it's a healthy competition and they make each other better. You watch body language and you try to see what a guy is thinking by the way that he moves, the way that he talks, and Tony's body language has been awesome on the sideline. I don't think when I was paying attention, I don't think I saw anybody more excited than Tony for Ant to go out there and play.

Q. This is the first game between these programs in 10 years. For nearly six decades they played every year. What is your history with Maryland, and is this a series you would like to see renewed if not every year at least fairly regularly?

TONY ELLIOTT: Playing in the ACC in my college career, I played against Maryland, and man, they were always tough, always hard-nosed. At my previous institutions I had experience playing Maryland, and I remember that game, they jumped out to a big lead, and I think it was like an 18-point comeback up there in College Park.

Ton of respect for the program. They've had a ton of really, really good players come out of there. Watching them on film, they're coached very well. They're very deep on defense. They challenge you with their defensive structure overall, and they've got depth, and they've got some really good depth on the defensive line that they can roll guys and stay fresh and not have a dropoff.

Then we talked about the quarterback and what he can do offensively.

Just big picture, I'm about the pageantry and the rivalries in college football. I think that just adds to just how special this game is, so I'm for any natural rivalries that you can have, I'm all about playing those games.

Q. Along those lines, having Chris Slade and Curome Cox on the staff, guys who played on both sides of the rivalry help at all in terms of getting the players to understand it?

TONY ELLIOTT: You know, I think that it could be. I really haven't had much jawing back and forth. There's not a whole lot you can say to Chris Slade. What do you say to Chris Slade? Like if you're Curome, what do you say to Chris Slade? I don't know if there's much you can say. But I know both of them will be excited.

I think this week in particular we have a little bit more -- some other things that we can use for motivation, and the biggest thing is we've got to get better. We've got to improve in a lot of areas.

We have not tasted victory this season, so there's a lot of motivation for us as a football team.

They made -- the hard thing is as a head coach, everybody avoids you. That's one of the hard parts about the job. When they're having fun, they don't want to do it around the head coach. They don't like to joke too much when I come in the room. Everybody gets quiet.

But I could use that. I know Chris had, what, 15 tackles in the last game he played? 15 tackles against Maryland in a game. If I need any more motivation, then I'll go to those two guys, but we've got plenty right now as a football team going into this game.

Q. Run defense-wise, you guys probably feel like you're giving up a little bit too much. Maryland has got a good run game. How do you look at that?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's right, and so the most disappointing thing coming out of the game was going into it our keys to victory for the previous week offensively was to run the ball. Like that was our key to victory was to run the ball. Then our number one key to victory on the defensive side was to stop the run, and I felt like defensively the run fits were better, but we're still just not getting guys on the ground on first contact. We're still having way too many missed tackles.

Then the last two drives, we just weren't very good against the run.

Definitely that's where it starts. I think you win football games up front by being able to establish the run and being able to stop the run. So we've got some work to do with our guys.

It's not just the defensive line. It's all three levels. When you're talking about stopping the run. Because everybody has got a gap, and then guys got to fit and then guys on the back end, once they diagnose their keys that it's run, they've got to fit, got to fit in the right gap, they've got to fit with the right spacing, and then when they arrive, if the ball is spilled back to them, they've got to get it on the ground, and that's where we've got to improve.

On the flipside to run the ball, it's five guys, game of inches, everybody being on the same page.

Q. With Su going down, you're relying now on freshman Jason Hammond and maybe a little bit of Anthony Britton. What have you seen from those guys?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, them boys got to grow up. They've got to grow up fast. Trial by fire. One, I've just seen an eagerness to want to do it. I thought in camp (Jason) Hammond showed some really, really good quickness, really good lateral movement, and (Anthony) Britton is just a big strong guy. Still a lot of development to do at the position, but he's a big strong guy.

Now the key is are you reading a base block? Are they reaching you? Are they working away from you, and can you process the call that if it works away from you, then I've got to lean back in this situation, or if I get a certain call then I'm getting vertical? Those are the things that have to improve there, and then with Britton, biggest thing is fundamentally getting his pads down.

A lot of promise. I think the future is very bright for those guys. It's just a matter of how quickly can we gain experience for them to be able to play at a high enough level with consistency to give us the depth that we need from a rotation standpoint.

Q. Chico (Bennett Jr.) was back in the lineup on Saturday. How would you rate where he is

physically compared to pre-injury and then how does that change what you guys can do up front with the defensive line?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, I think it's tough with 22 snaps to really compare it to where he was pre-injury because he's just got to get back in shape and all those things.

But I was pleased with the snaps that he played this week. He's been full go. He hasn't been limited in any way. Not only does he have the knee, he's still working through the shoulder, getting back there, being able to use his right arm.

I think we need a larger sample size to kind of compare it to where he was last year, but I am just excited that he's back out there. One, because of his play, and then two, because of the leadership that he gives us up front.