

**University of Virginia Football Media
Conference
Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2023
Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference**

Q. In a short week like this, I know you don't have time to do everything you would in terms of normal prep, what do you have to kind of let go of?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's a film study. Coaches are going to find a way to cram in and give you responsibility to make sure the film is watched. I think the thing that you lose the most is the players' recovery because typically they're off on Sunday, and then Monday is a lighter practice, and then they get back to banging on Tuesday, where we had practice this morning and we're already back in pads. So it's a Wednesday type practice.

Yesterday, you're right back on the field, the day after, less than 24 hours, and it's an hour and a half type practice where you've got full speed activities.

So I think the biggest thing you lose is the guys' ability to recover, and they have to turn it around very, very quickly.

Q. Do you have an update on your quarterback situation with (Tony) Muskett and (Anthony) Colandrea?

TONY ELLIOTT: Tony (Muskett) is day to day. We'll keep evaluating him. Obviously played a little bit longer. It happened on the second play, on the run play. It wasn't a designed run. The snap was off a little bit to the right, so the exchange wasn't on time. He did a good job of just following the running back. That's when it happened. He had to play a couple more plays and had to come out.

He's being evaluated and progression each day. But it will be a day to day.

Q. If it's (Anthony) Colandrea, what's the challenge in preparing a rookie quarterback during a short week?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's a challenge to prepare anybody in a short week, to be honest with you, but the biggest thing for A.C. (Anthony Colandrea) is, man, he's such a competitor. You could just see it in his body language. But you also have to be able to manage the game and understand that the margin for error at this level is very, very thin.

You want to try and eliminate as many mistakes as you possibly can because you might not be able to overcome them, whereas in the past, maybe in high school, you were able to kind of get himself out of trouble, make a play, and if he had a mistake then he was on a team that could kind of compensate.

But at this level, you give away possessions or you make the wrong read, you don't convert in critical situations, those could be the plays that impact the game the most.

Q. Do you feel because it's a shorter week you have to make that quarterback decision earlier or because there's a comfortability because (Tony) Muskett has played with the first team?

TONY ELLIOTT: Tony Muskett has played. The thing is this late in the season, you play a decent amount of ball, and you'll carry it up until game time. I look back at Josh Rawlings, Josh Rawlings was a guy with his knee that had very limited practice but was able to play.

Some of the veteran guys, you don't want to make a living doing that, but there are some situations that you feel that you could take it up to a game time to make that decision.

Q. Some other guys were also hurt in that game, (Mike) Hollins and (Kam) Robinson. Any updates on those?

TONY ELLIOTT: (Mike) Hollins looks good, moving around well. Kam (Robinson) is progressing. I'm hoping for him to be a game-time decision as well. So we're optimistic about him potentially being ready to go. Ahern was a guy that was kind of in and out. I think he'll be fine.

Sackett (Wood), looks like we're going to get Sackett back this week. So that's a big positive for us. Noah Josey was banged up a little bit in the game. He practiced today. (McKale) Boley practiced today. Feel good about those guys. It's more Kam (Robinson) and Tony (Muskett) will be game-time decisions.

Q. When you struggle with injuries as much as you have this season, do you kind of reevaluate training at all? Do you try to look for anything, or is this unavoidable?

TONY ELLIOTT: So some of the things that we were experiencing earlier in the season, we asked questions about, but it's football. Now what you're seeing is just wear and tear on the body.

I think the biggest thing we're realizing is the importance of depth. When you can play multiple guys, you limit the exposure. There's always going to be injuries in the game, and some of the major ones that we have, training, I don't believe, prevents those.

When you start having the soft tissue, a lot of soft tissue, for us, it's just wear and tear in the game. You look at Kam (Robinson), it's like a bruise to the knee. You get hit on the knee, you really can't do much to train for that. The biggest thing is what I feel good about is how quickly we're able to get some of them back, which tells you that the training on the front end is paying off.

That's why you do so much and invest so much in strength and conditioning is not so much to prevent you from getting hurt, but it's to help you bounce back and recover quicker.

Q. And then eliminate for game bowl contention this week, so when you don't reach one of those season goals but you still have more to play for, what is the message to the team?

TONY ELLIOTT: The biggest thing is we're playing for pride. I've got a group of seniors that we want to send out the right way. As a competitor, it doesn't matter. It goes into competitive stamina. My message for the guys post-practice today is we've got to decide. We've got three games left, and we want to decide that going forward this is what the standard is going to be.

Even though we may not have accomplished our goals, at least we're changing the mindset and setting the standard for what's going to happen these next three weeks and then going into the future.

Q. Question about James Jackson. You guys went into the year with some questions at linebacker after losing Nick Jackson. How has James Jackson maybe filled that leadership role in the middle of your defense? What can you say about the season he's had?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's been fun to watch. He's a guy that waited his turn and then next thing you know we're asking him to, hey, move over because we've got this talented freshman we want to you help. He took it in stride. He's been the ultimate team guy.

Each week you see the game just starting to slow down a little bit for him. Really, really proud. He's in the Com school (McIntire Commerce School), so he's burning it at both ends. He's putting in a lot of works in both aspects and really, really becoming a guy that his teammates respect and will follow his lead.

Q. In Louisville, their running back Jawhar Jordan is having an outstanding season. Would

you sum up his play and the challenges he presents to the defense.

TONY ELLIOTT: They've got three of them, all three of them. I'll tell you what, each one is different, and they all do a good job of running to their strengths, and they can run all the different schemes that they ask them to do. But he's electric. He sees it, and he finds the creases. He can get small when he needs to get small, and if you give him space, he's going to outrun you.

He's been fun to watch as he prepare because you just have an appreciation and respect for the way that he plays.

Q. You don't have a lot of depth at quarterback. Your number 3 guy came here as a walk-on (Grady Brosterhaus), but you put him in situations, and he's looked pretty poised in that small body of work. What has impressed you about Grady? Did it jump out last year?

TONY ELLIOTT: Grady (Brosterhaus) had other opportunities. He chose to come to UVA over scholarship opportunities at other places. He was a guy that was being recruited. First thing that you like about him is his size. He's a big, strong guy.

Then what I've seen here lately is the game has slowed down a little bit for him. Early on it was moving fast, but now you're starting to see that it's slowing down, and he's really embraced his role. His role is going to increase now depending upon the situation with Tony (Muskett) and A.C. (Anthony Colandrea), and you're one play away.

In this day and age at every position, you're one play away, and trying to find depth and keep depth is going to be something that's of the highest importance and is going to be a challenge as well to make sure that you have guys because everybody wants to play. When you can go different places and play right away, you're probably not going to find as many guys

like Grady that are going to say, you know what, this is where I want to go. I'm going to be here for the long haul and put in the work and persevere.

I'm proud of him. He was our 12th man. We give out an award. He came in and not just handed the ball off, he looked poised throwing the speed cut. That gives us just more confidence in him.

Then he's been part of our quarterback sneak package. He comes in, and those are big moments, especially when you're coming off the sideline cold, and now you've got to go up under center and take a snap in a critical situation. It just shows the growth and accomplishments that he has.

Q. You talk a little bit about Louisville's run game on Saturday. Georgia Tech had nine runs of 10 yards plus and * of 30 yards or more. Do you see a theme when you look back at film?

TONY ELLIOTT: We just didn't tackle well. When you look back, we just didn't tackle well. I think about third and seven when a quarterback goes for 30-plus for a touchdown, we got one right there at the point of attack, got to come to balance and make the play. We've got an unblocked safety that's got to be clean with his eyes, that's got to be there to clean it up.

Third and 14, we had several guys that were there. We just didn't look like ourselves. We had been improving in tackling. We just didn't get the ball carrier on the ground. I anticipate that this week these guys are going to accept the challenge. You're going to have to put your pads on each running back in this run game to get them on the ground.

The biggest thing was we had guys there and we didn't make the tackle.

Q. You guys have already beaten a top 10, top 15 team this year. Any confidence that that

gives you going into this one with this group, knowing that they've done it before?

TONY ELLIOTT: If there's any pressure that is arising or the guys have coming through their social media and text messages and whatnot, we've been here before. So there shouldn't be any pressure. You've done it before. It's something that you're capable of doing, so don't put any more added pressure on yourself.

We just need to focus on the short week, making sure that we do everything we can from a preparation standpoint to get ready to go play our best game, and that's what we're chasing. We're chasing playing a complete game, but playing our best game, more importantly.

Q. Back to the quarterback stuff, because of the depth issue, you guys have had a little bit at quarterback this year, will you look during the off-season to add another quarterback, transfer portal or through recruiting or don't know yet?

TONY ELLIOTT: Definitely plan to sign a quarterback in this coming class, and then we'll evaluate the situation at the end of the season. Biggest thing is you want to find quality guys, the right guys that fit, but we definitely plan on signing us a quarterback. Depending upon the situation, it could change to two.

Q. Malachi (Fields) has had a lot of success on 50-50 balls. What happened on the first interception? Was that just kind of a fluke play at the end of it?

TONY ELLIOTT: From where I saw it on tape, it looked like he mis-timed his jump, and he jumped a little bit early. So he was coming down as he was catching the ball, which created a situation where the DB could get involved in the play.

It's one of those deals that you've got to secure the catch to the ground, and both of them had

their hands on the ball, and the way they fell, the other guy came away with it.

But what it looked like is he just mis-timed his jump and didn't catch it at the highest point. That's what you teach him, and that's what he was trying to do. It's tough when you're on that angle and see that ball and he mis-timed it. But if he goes up and catches it at the highest point, he'll shield himself from the defender, and he's able to snatch it out of the air.

Q. On Saturday you guys struck first, as we've seen before. How do you guys start to maintain that lead and build off of it?

TONY ELLIOTT: So I thought that we were driving, moving the ball, and we had the interception on the first drive. Then defense comes out, three and out, playing complementary football, good field position.

Then we go down, and Tony goes out, and A.C. (Anthony Colandrea) goes and scores. Then we get another stop.

Now we're driving, and we've just got to finish plays. So we're in on the fringe of the red zone with an opportunity. We don't come up with the catch down in the red zone. We get beat on a play which results in a sack, which is going to happen from time to time, and now we're out of field goal range. So we don't come away with points.

When I was challenging the guys is we've got to have the mentality that, man, every drive is like the first drive. Every drive we're trying to go score, we cannot be complacent, and we've got to stay focused and make the routine plays all the time and the impossible plays most of the time.

Right there I felt like, if you come away with points, now you go up 10-3 or you go up 14-3, it might be a little bit different ballgame. That's where we've got to continue to grow, and I've got to do a better job of preparing the guys and

helping them through those situations so that, man, we can truly capitalize and have that instinct of, man, we're not letting up. We're trying to completely take control of the game.

Q. Monday is the anniversary of the shooting. Is there anything that you guys are planning to do that you're willing to share?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, the university and athletic department have several things planned. It's going to be a tough week, and I imagine that guys are probably having a little bit of anxiety now because people are starting to talk about it. It's hard to really put your finger on where they truly are because everybody grieves differently.

But it's going to be an emotional day. I'm looking forward to it. At the same time, a little bit anxious because it's going to bring up a lot of emotions that we've been trying to work through and move forward with. I know there's a lot of things that are planned.

The university I know they have a couple things. There's a couple things planned through the athletic department. And it's not just for football. It's for the whole community, it's for the athletic department and all the student-athletes to provide an opportunity for us to be together. Nothing overly formal, just a space for us to be together.

Q. You say people talk about a part of the problem -- I just have one more question if I may ask. As a coach, how do you handle everything you have to do as a college football coach and then have this on your plate as well?

TONY ELLIOTT: The only answer I can give, and some people may say it's cliché, but faith, to be honest with you. That's the only answer that I have. Like any human being, there's days you don't want to get out of bed. You feel the weight of the world on your shoulders.

That's not just a college football coach. That's anybody, right? You're dealing with life, and life is hard. So it's faith what carries you.

When you look in the eyes of the young men, it motivates you and encourages you just to take one step forward day after day and focus on doing everything you possibly can to help them. That's one of the challenges but also one of the privileges of being called a coach is because people look to you.

And I lean on James 3:1 that talks about when you decide or choose to be a teacher, you understand that you're going to be held to a higher standard. So I remind myself of that. I have two little boys and a wife, and when I look at them, I'm reminded of what they mean to me and how they look to me that inspires me to continue to just carry the load. And I'm not doing it by myself. I have an unbelievable staff.

They have been rock solid. Man, they've persevered, they've endured, and they've rallied. They've cried together.

The real answer is faith. You just ask the good Lord to say, you know what, give me the strength to take it one day at a time because, you know what, I didn't choose this, but you chose me, and that's been a message to the team is none of us chose, and we wouldn't choose. Like if you knew you were going to be part of a situation like this, nobody would just say sign me up. But the Lord works in mysterious ways, and he said, you know what, I'm choosing you guys, and I'm believing that there is going to be triumph in the end from the tragedy.

So I use that to motivate me, and I use the young people that I'm around every single day. I know you didn't ask this, but I do have to take a moment to acknowledge all of them -- the players, the student workers that work with us. Man, they've been so inspiring to me just to see how resilient they are every single day.

Especially when there's so many, quote, unquote, easy outs.

I could walk away. I could move on. I could say this is not my fight, this is not my problem. But they show up every single day and they respond every single day, and that's been a blessing to me. That's one of the things that I'm grateful for and thankful for is that I get to see them every single day and witness their resilience, and it inspires me just to do my part.

Even though I'm the head coach, I'm just doing my part. But I've got a ton of support that's helping hold me up when my arms might get a little tired.

Q. Louisville's defense has only given up 3 points the last three weeks. Can you talk about what makes them special?

TONY ELLIOTT: Defensively, starting up front, they can play multiple fronts. So they can challenge you schematically, and they can generate a ton of pressure on the quarterback by just rushing four, which allows them to play a lot of different coverages.

They can play some Cover 2 on the back end and rush and get some pressure on the quarterback, and you think you're going to be able to run it and you can't run it versus their front four.

Then they roll in a second group, and the second group is just like the first group. So they're very deep on the defensive line, and their linebackers are athletic and very active. Then they have some experiences guys, juniors and seniors across the board on the back end that have really gelled well together. I know not all those guys were present last year when they played them, but they've done a great job of being able to take that group and get them to mesh together and to gel together.

You see that they're very well coordinated. They communicate very, very well. They're able to

make adjustments to the formations, but the biggest thing that I see is they can stop the run with their six-man box. They don't have to get an extra hat down there. And then they can rush the passer with four and create pressure, especially on early downs, which allows them to play a little bit more coverage.

So where your quarterback has to freeze a little bit with the ball because there's not as many open windows.

Q. Suderian (Harrison) has been a little banged up at times, and he's playing behind the most productive receiver in the ACC, but he has shown some flashes in games. Has he kind of been progressing behind the scenes to a point where, when Malik (Washington) leaves, you think he can kind of move into a high profile role?

TONY ELLIOTT: I was definitely seeing that progress, then he gets banged up with the shoulder, was out for a little while, but I believe so. I think that there's still room to grow there, and we've got to do a great job as coaches of kind of getting him to the point of having just the savvy of Malik (Washington).

I remember Malik played four years, and now he's an older guy, but I see a lot of similarities in the two. If he'll continue to work and continue to progress, I think he can get to a point to where he can be a very, very productive receiver for us.

Q. One of their secondary guys (Cam'Ron Kelly) was with you guys briefly in the spring. Why didn't it work out with you guys, and what's impressed you with what he's done at Louisville?

TONY ELLIOTT: I wish I could tell you the answer to that. Like I don't know, it was one of those deals. Without getting into too much detail, I know he was making the decision that he felt was best for he and his family. Things were progressing well. He was going to be a starter at

safety for us coming out of the spring. Things changed quickly, and I really don't know much more than that, to be honest with you.

I've seen a lot of similarities to what I saw here. He's a talented guy, a smart young man, and you could see that he's helping him on the back end with the adjustments because he's in a position where he may have to rock and roll in certain situations. See him down there in the box playing in some of their exotic defensive structures. He's playing in the box for them.

You can tell he's got a ton of experience. So far it looks like it's been a good fit for him there.

Q. You mentioned Louisville's depth. Where would you rate in terms of where you stand with the people you play in terms of depth? How has that kind of held things back for you?

TONY ELLIOTT: We've got a lot of work to do there. That's how I would describe it. You're not always going to be comparing apples to apples and oranges to oranges, but we have work to do there at all positions across the board.

That's our plan. We're going to continue to recruit hard and supplement where we need to and where we can in the transfer portal if opportunities present themselves. But we've got some young guys we have to develop too. I think that's probably the biggest opportunity there is we've got some good young talent. We've just got to grow them up.

What I've noticed here in particular these last couple weeks is, especially on the D-line, you've got -- you've just got more experience, more experienced guys. So when they pull maybe their first team guy out, now they're running in another junior, another senior behind them that has experience whereas we may be in a situation where, when we sub guys, we're playing guys that are out there for the first time.