

**University of Virginia Football Media
Conference**

Wednesday, March 4, 2025

**Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference**

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I just got a few couple comments before we start. Obviously, relative to the UVA family, just want Danny Wilmer's family know that they're in our prayers. Obviously, very well respected assistant here for many years. So heart goes out to them.

And also a former player, Corey Mosley. Obviously, life ended too short. And so I want his family to know that we stand with them and we support them.

And then also wanna extend a heartfelt, just it's hard to describe. I was texting with Coach (Pat) Narduzzi earlier today about the loss of one of their player, Mason Alexander. And really, I don't even have the words to tell him. Obviously, I know our situation, but just want him to know that we support him, thinking about him, thinking about his team, and then also thinking about the Alexander family as they deal with the loss of a loved one. So to all those that we lost, that were impacted, just want everybody to know that we're thinking about them, we're praying for them, and if there's anything we can do, just let us know.

Q: I know you got some guys out, what is the level of competition across the board? How is it different from what you've done in the OL position?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, it was good competition today, guys. A lot of excitement. Day one, they're eager to get back out on the grass and practice, but definitely looks a little bit different, especially up front, even with the bodies that were down on the offensive line in particular. But the new additions and then some of the young guys stepping in was good to see today. And then defensive line wise, we're probably in solid shape. We are down two

bodies there, but with the addition of the new guys. So it just brings competition and really the only position right now that we don't quite have the competitive depth that we would like is in the secondary. And we tried to address that, wasn't quite as fortunate as the other positions, but we got a plan to bring in some more competition hopefully in the next portal window after the spring.

Q: What are the challenges of having so many new faces?

Well biggest thing is learning what the practice expectations are and it's easy for me to get in here and put up a PowerPoint and say this is what we do but until they get out there and they experience it it's a different thing and then you got to learn who these guys are what makes them tick what their strengths are.

I mean you know you have an idea based off of what you've seen on film but it's different when you actually watch them live so it's gonna be a fun challenge for us this this spring but so far it looks like there's good chemistry and a good bond between the guys that are here and now as coaches It's our job to come alongside them and pick up where the strength staff left off for the next five or six weeks and make sure we don't mess them up too much because they're in a good spot.

But also figure out what each guy is capable of and see how that fits into our system or see how we need to adjust the system to fit the skill sets that we got.

Q: With so many new guys, when you have install new things on offense, defense and special teams, do you have to do things differently?

TONY ELLIOTT: The biggest adjustment is just you might have to slow down.

Whereas with years of continuity, you can Ramp up a little bit and then maybe introduce some of

the new things that you want to introduce from you self scout. But when you have so many new guys, you got to take it a little bit slower Which isn't all bad as well because now you really get an opportunity to focus on fundamentals and the details of what you do So there's a little bit of a trade-off, but in particular when you do have the number of new guys, you have to slow down a little bit.

Having a guy like Kam Butler come back and join you staff, it seems like the players enjoy him. What is it like having a guy like that back?

TONY ELLIOTT: For me from a program standpoint it's just confirmation. You know we talk about developing these guys holistically and that's living proof. You've got a living example of a young man who came in here as a player and then now he's developed and put himself in position to be employed you know at his alma mater that's pretty special. He's picked up right where he left off he's a ball of energy man he's a loud guy he's in your face so he's gonna make a great defensive line coach. He's also done a great job of being very humble too I think that's what's the hardest about that transition immediately from player to being on the staff. So a lot to learn, and he's done a great job of just absorbing as much information as he can. And he's also done a great job of managing the relationships that he has with the guys in the locker room because he's not a player anymore, he's a coach. So they might look at him a little bit different, but then also he has to be mindful of now the perspective and influence that he has, but he's done a great job so far. And seeing him run around out there today and kind of be all over the place and that's what I expected to get out of camp.

Q: One of the returners that looks a little different is Dakota Twitty. What have you noticed about his progression?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, good question on Dakota. You know he had gotten up to about probably 235-ish right there at the end of the season.

Now he's about 240 and he's got a new number. So that's really helped him from just an energy standpoint. He likes his number. He feels good wearing number nine.

He sees opportunity, right? He sees opportunity, especially with a couple guys not quite being full go this spring. It just gives him more reps. He knows he's going to have to compete for it still when we get into the fall, but his body is transforming.

He's really embraced the nutrition aspect the strength the conditioning aspect of that position because it is different than wide receiver. He's gotten just more opportunity to watch film and study the playbook So he's a lot more confident and we're expecting him to lead all right so right now. He'd be the elder statesman from a practice standpoint of guys in that room. So you just see a different level of confidence with him because I think the body is catching up with the position and then also it's starting to slow down because he's had just more time to absorb the material.

Q: Suderian (Harrison), Dre Walker and Caleb Hardy all kind of had moments as true freshmen, for whatever reason, none of them was able to really take a big step. Is this a particularly big spring for them?

TONY ELLIOTT: I Believe so and there's always that challenge when guys get off to a fast start and making sure that they can carry it because again when you're a freshman, it's a little bit easier because there's a little bit of grace, you're kind of just working off of athleticism, but then when you're a little bit older, there's a different expectation. And then, for what, for Dre's situation, injuries, just, you know, and then Caleb was battling the ankle and then also the shoulder because he's out to spring because he had to have his shoulder fixed. And, you know, Suderian just had competition, right, at the position.

So I'm excited about where they are. I think what you've seen out of all three of them is a renewed sense of urgency. I think with the addition of the newcomers, and then also having went through a year where maybe they didn't quite have the production that they expected or they liked, understanding that it's not going to get any easier going forward. The biggest challenge is to make sure you got the right mental perspective. And what I've seen out of Suderian what I've seen out of Dre, Dre made a couple of really good plays out there today. And Suderian is back to being more vocal. That was one thing that Suderian did a good job with his quarterback background coming in from high school. He was very vocal throughout the course of practicing his freshman year. And I noticed that kind of dwindled a little bit.

But he's now back talking, being assertive, which I think is going to reflect in his play. And for Caleb, just unfortunately, he's going to be down for a little bit. But I anticipate when he comes back, he'll be ready to go hopefully he'll be fully healthy and be able to be confident to go out there and make the plays that he's made in the past.

Q: A number of programs around the country have turned down the amount of practice time in the spring because of injuries. How do you balance that with bringing in so many new guys?

TONY ELLIOTT: Great question, I think it's going to become and is a case-by-case basis. I think it's really relative to where your roster is. If you have a very experienced roster with a lot of depth, then I think it makes sense for you to be able to coach that more like a pro organization, so to speak. If you're a developmental program and you have a bunch of new guys, you have a bunch of young guys, you still got to balance the practice, the developmental-type practices.

So for us, we're kind of mixing a little bit of both. We got some high rep guys that are returning and then also some high rep guys that

we brought in that we have to manage throughout the course of practice. We are down some key contributors from last year that we have to battle through, but we also got a lot of young guys that need reps. So we got a plan that we'll start with and then we'll step back and assess. The good thing is we got three practices and we got spring break.

So one advantage is with the way that we got it structured, it's not a consistent constant grind and pound on these guys. There is a little bit of breaks throughout the course of the spring. We got the local school spring break, which I try to make sure that I do a good job of work-life balance with my coaches. So that week we'll only practice twice that week.

So I think we got a good plan, but we're also ready to adjust based off of where the wear and tear is and then you know there may be some situations where we're forced to because we just don't quite have the depth. So I think it's a case-by-case basis and I think it's gonna be like that going forward for each school because you got to practice, especially with the space that we're in, right? If we're still recruiting the high school level player and developing them and then we got guys moving in and out of our program, you got to figure out a way to develop. So I think it's going to be some trial and error, but I don't think there's going to be a cookie cutter plan that fits everybody because everybody's organization is different.

Q: You mentioned that Caleb (Hardy) is out for the spring. Anyone else that's out for the spring, are you expecting to come back?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so I got several of them out for the spring. Obviously, (Antonio) Clary we know is down for the spring. Keke (Adams) decided to have shoulder surgery, so he's down, (Caleb) Hardy's down, so that's the secondary guys that are down. Noah Vaughn needed shoulder surgery, so he's down for the spring. (Jason) Hammond, we knew about Hammond and his situation.

Chase Morrison, hip, he'll be limited this spring. Kam Robinson, played all year, was a warrior with his shoulder. He got it fixed. Trey McDonald, the same way, was playing on one shoulder. And then James Jackson had a back, and while he was doing his back, he figured he might as well fix his shoulder, too, because he'd been playing with a bum shoulder. Sparky (Daniel Sparks) my kicker's down with a shoulder. And then I got a, obviously, Karson Gay. Hopefully we'll get him back a little bit this spring, but Sage (Ennis) is down. And then (Drake) Metcalf's not fully cleared, but he's out there running around. He was a non-contact guy for us today, but he won't get any live contact.

And then (Noah) Josey, (McKale) Boley, (Blake) Steen, (Grant) Ellinger, (Dane) Wlenkski, and (Houston) Curry are still down for the spring. And it doesn't look like those guys will be back. And we also would be smart to try to rush them back to us.

Your old boss (Dabo Swinney) said the other day that tampering has become a huge problem. Have you experienced much of that?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so we know that tampering exists in our business. It's unfortunate. Am I aware of schools reaching out to my guys? I mean, it's happened. I think we also have created a landscape where that's the norm, right?

And unfortunately, we're not in a situation where there's much that can be done about it. So, what I say is if you're going to fuss about it, then turn them in, then don't really fuss about it. Figure out how to navigate. It's unfortunate, but it's what we've created. Until we can get somebody with some true authority to be able to do something about it, I think it's still going to just keep happening.

All you can do is focus on what you what you can do what you can control and the way that I combat it is try to make sure my guys have the best experience possible here at the University

of Virginia, know that they're valued, they're appreciated, they're invested in they're being developed.

Q: How many different combinations are you going to try at offensive line?

As many as it takes. We got to start those guys in a spot in fairness to them, they're coming in learning a brand new brand new system all new terminology so you start them in in a projected spot and then as they absorb the content and we'll be able to cross-train them and put them in some different positions, but we'll go at the pace that they can absorb it. Also knowing too that we got additional combinations that are coming back once we get through spring and into early summer, because all those guys should be good to go early summer.

So we're not anticipating any of those, with maybe the exception of Keke (Adams) and James Jackson might be the only ones that would be a late summer return everybody else will be you know late spring early summer So we'll try to figure out what they can do knowing that we're gonna have to revisit it once all the other guys get back in the mix, too.

Q: Tyshawn Wyatt said he could play either guard or tackle, where did you have him today?

So today he was out there at guard. And again, we'll start there just because you got you got you got Monroe (Mills) and you got Jack Witmer, and then you got Ben York. And then we got (Ethan) Sipe at guard, and so we didn't have it as we, cuz again, we're down some inside guys too, with Grant (Ellinger) being down. And (Drake) Metcalf still not being healthy. (Noah) Hartsoe is back, which gives us some additional depth there. So, but we started them inside today.

Q: How are you planning to distribute the rps to the quarterbacks this spring?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, we're gonna let them compete. That's what we told them, coming in the door. We laid out a plan to say, here's what we wanna do. We wanna go bring in a veteran, experienced guy with one year left, and then bring in an undergrad, and then let everybody compete. So it's not a set deal.

And so today it was kind of 50-50, rotating those guys through with the first group and the second group. So really prioritizing the top three guys right now. With Grady (Brosterhous), kind of getting some reps as well, but really (Gavin) Frakes, Danny (Kaelin), and Chandler (Morris), splitting up those reps to begin with. And then as we get further into spring practice,

And then as we get further into spring practice, if there's some separation, then we'll change it up.