

**University of Virginia Football Media  
Conference  
Monday, March 24, 2025  
Head Coach Tony Elliott  
Press Conference**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, just start by saying congrats to coach Odom I wasn't able to make the press conference because we have practice the other day, but super excited Looking forward to spending some time with coach. I know he's very familiar with the University of Virginia I know he's very been very successful So I'm excited to to build a relationship with him similar to the one that I had with that with coach Bennett So with that I'll open it up for questions.

**Q: In general, in your coaching experience, what has been the biggest hurdle that transfers from FCS have to clear in their transition to FBS?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Great, great question. I think the first is just the different level of resources, just getting adjusted to adapting to the things that they have at their disposal and being able to adapt their mode of operation going from maybe a situation where they might not have as many resources to now having more available and incorporating that into their daily routines.

And with any transfers getting adjusted to the staff, the system, the way that practice Those are the biggest things that I think for FCS guys and for any transfer to be honest.

**Q: You guys held a scrimmage on Saturday. How did it go any big takeaways that you got to learn about some of these new faces?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, so Saturday was a controlled Scrimmage situation it was a kind of a 50-50 practice. So got to see some guys run around coaches off the field. Saw some good things got to see some of the young guys make a couple plays. Got to see the new some of the D-lineman Lyman in action for the for the first

time. They're adapting to the understanding of the system still got some things fundamentally at all positions that we got a got to continue to improve upon. Saw that there's a good competitive spirit amongst those guys. You can see that they elevate the play of those around them, but it was more controlled. So, you know, some of it, you know, you get them out of rhythm a little bit because it is controlled, and so we're gonna have some more open scrimmages where we just put the ball down and play, so we'll have further evaluation. I think they validated what we thought from a talent standpoint on film. Now it's just making the full transition of the fundamentals to go along with the understanding of the scheme.

**Q: There's some O-linemen that are down, like Monroe Mills and Tyshawn Wyatt. What is their status? Any long-term injuries there?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, so just evaluating needs on both of those guys, playing it very precautious and making sure we get all the scans that we need, because those guys have played a ton of football and both of them have had knee injuries in the past so it's more so just being precaution and as we get all the information we'll know the full extent of what's going on with those two.

**Q: You have your entire staff back from last year to this year. What is the biggest benefit of that particularly during a spring where you're incorporating 25 newcomers?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, so you're not having to teach the coaches as well as the players, right? So the continuity with the practice structure, the continuity with the meeting structure, all of that is in place. And so it helps them to be able to focus on helping the newcomers transition as opposed to if they're in there learning, you know, they're trying to figure out, okay, where are all the locations in the building? How does how is coach Elliott in the staff meeting? What's the expectation in practice? How is it structured? You have all of that in place. So it

allows you to be proactive. So you can anticipate some of the things that the newcomers may run into. But really it just helps with keeping the chemistry with the flow of everything that we do.

**Q: Mekhi Buchanan, y'all talked so positively about him before last year, before the injury. What does he look like coming back now? Are y'all still as hopeful as you were back then?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, yes sir, definitely. His body looks really good. So he's taking advantage of the time off. Obviously he missed a lot of football because he missed all of last season. But man you can still see the speed, the quickness, the violence. He's also going to benefit from having those new guys around him. He's got a veteran guy in Mitchell (Melton) to really show him what it looks like.

And so yes, very encouraged with him. Still things he's learning because he missed that time, but very pleased with where his body is and physically, you can see that he took advantage of the time off from a physical standpoint.

**Q: You mentioned all the veteran guys you brought into the portal, the variety of pass rushers and the amount of experience they bring in, what does that do to supercharge your pass rush this year?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** It creates competition first and foremost. It gives you some flexibility, versatility, and depth. The biggest thing is depth. I think with pass rushers, man, the fresher you can keep those guys. And then also when you have versatility, when you can change up speed, power, body type, length, explosiveness on a tackle throughout the course of the game, that makes it very, very difficult.

They're going to be able to help each other by creating variety in the different pass rush moves with the different lengths that they have the explosiveness because no two guys are the

same. And you look at what we brought in Fisher (Camac) is extremely long And that's gonna that's gonna be to his benefit, but then also it's gonna benefit Mitchell (Melton) where Mitchell is more of an explosive shifty guy. Then that's gonna help Mekhi (Buchanan) as well because Mekhi is a speed to power kind of guy you know right now and then the same thing with the rest of those guys that were already here so and still waiting on Cazeem (Moore). He's coming off the hamstring and so we're hoping to get him back next week and so we'll be able to really see what he can do but man you look at his body and what you've seen on tape man he's a he's a shifty guy, bendy guy so it's gonna be fun to watch those guys complement and then help each other and create some variety.

I think about the Tennessee game when we played a couple years ago and they had a young freshman and it was a different speed and it created some problems for our tackles when you got a big powerful guy coming off the edge and the next thing you know you got a speed guy. It's hard for that tackle to constantly make those adjustments throughout the course of the game and that's what that I'm hoping the depth is going to do for us next year.

**Q: The injuries to James Jackson and Kam (Robinson) and Stevie (Bracey) left you really thin at linebacker last year. I know some guys are still out, but how big a priority was it to beef up that position going into this year and how do you feel about the depth and the talent there?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So we were excited about the young guys and Landon (Danley) and Miles (Greene) that we brought in but we they were just you know young pups and now they're a little bit older and they're getting a lot of reps. This is gonna give Kam (Robinson) and offseason to really kind of build his body. He played as a true freshman. The blessing for him is that he's gonna have a chance to really get his body healthy build it up. James (Jackson) played

a bunch of football. We knew Stevie was gonna be able to come back and Trey (McDonald) would be back. We needed one more body and that's why we went out and got Maddox (Marcellus). And so I'm anticipating that that's going to be a very healthy room with a ton of competition, with some versatility when those guys get back.

But in the meantime, it's giving Landon (Danley) more reps It's giving Miles (Greene) more reps. It's giving (Stevie) Bracey more reps now that he's back. And it's giving Maddox (Marcellus) more reps. And then we'll throw Trey (McDonald) and James (Jackson) and Kam (Robinson) back into the mix. Now you've got a good seven, eight competitive bodies right there that's going to give you some depth and some versatility.

**Q: For a guy like Maddox (Marcellus), who's new to the school, new to the system, how big a deal do you think it is to get these extra reps?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Oh, it's huge. I mean, it's huge, because development, you only develop by getting reps. And what you've seen with Maddox. He's very, very, very smart. He's a natural football player. He picks up on concepts quickly. He's a violent guy and you're starting to see him play with some freedom because he's able to now equate, okay, this is what we're doing, this is what we call it. I can equate that in my mind, I don't have to think about it and I can go play fast. And then that's helping Landon (Danley) as well because it's helping him make the transition as well. Cause he's got a, even though Maddox isn't a veteran here. He's played a lot of football, right? So it's not like you know Landon's out there by himself. He's got a little bit of a veteran president's presence to kind of guide him since Kam and Trey and James are out.

**Q: Obviously Brian Stevens is no longer here, Brady Wilson has stepped into that role. What have you seen from him and what kind of**

**stood out during the recruiting process of him? He's obviously a different life situation. He's married, he's older. What have you seen from him?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, so what was stood out about him was the production the production and the amount of football experience that he has and What he's what he's brought is a very similar calming presence. He's not a boisterous guy. He's a workman. He comes to work every single day.

He's a very, very smart football player. He's really taken command of what we're doing, and I attribute that to, one, the work he puts in, two, the experience that he has to be able to make that transition. And I think he's also brought us a little bit of a different presence in the outside zone game. He's got a real, real good knack for running that play. And so we're excited about that.

The things that really stood out was the experience and the production. And he's shown that already in just the first eight practices that he's been here. And then also too, I think the lifestyle piece of it brings a lot of leadership too. And we got several of them, man. We got several. And that's part of it, too.

You got to remember, we're dealing with older young men than we used to in the past. It used to be 18 to 21. Now you're dealing with some 23, 24-year-olds that have been around for a while and figured out that, hey, I think I outkicked my coverage with the young lady that has interest in me. I might need to make the right decision as quick as possible. So he's one of few. You got Jah (Jahmeer Carter), we got some other guys that have recently gotten engaged. And that's a positive too, because I think it brings a different perspective to the locker room. And also to it kind of takes a distraction out of the equation, right? And creates more of a business like approach and mentality to what they do.

**Q: First a quick follow-up question on Stevie Bracey. He was doing some long snap in case of emergency before he got hurt. Is he still working on that?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Yeah, so he's doing more than in case of emergency. He's out there competing. He's really, really taken to that. So obviously with the knee, not able to do as much as he would like, but he was able to work on that and it's showing off. I mean, his snap times have really, really improved.

So it's not so much emergency anymore, like he's in the thick of the competition with Bryce (Robinson) and Hayden (Rollison).

**Q: In terms of transfers, J'Mari Taylor is a running back that came in. What did you like about him and how he looks as he's transitioning up a level?**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** So you saw some explosive traits on film, you saw productivity and you saw durability, right? Those are the things that you liked about him and now that we have him and he's and he's been in practice he's a very he's a natural back he's got very very (good) eye-feet coordination. He's got good body control, he can accelerate through the hole quickly plays with good good pad leverage. He's a worker, he doesn't say a whole lot. I mean, he's eager to learn man. He's like a sponge. He just absorbs information and he's been a real good presence for X (Xavier Brown) right those two have kind of you wouldn't have thought that they just met a couple months ago I mean you would have thought they were long-lost brothers the way they've been able to connect and I think that's important in the running back room right because that's a position where they all want to be the guy. But man, you need a good running mate, right? To be your best, you got to have a good running mate. So they've got a great relationship.

You look at the ones that are doing it at a high level in the NFL, most of them have a good

running mate running with them and they feed off of each other and they make each other better. And that's what I'm starting to see so far with X (Xavier Brown). And I'm excited to see how that's going to transition when Noah (Vaughn) comes back off of his shoulder as well.

**Q: Have you had any separation in the quarterback position yet?**

**Yeah, I wouldn't say that we've had separation just because we had our first control scrimmage on Saturday and we're going to have some more open scrimmages where we'll be able to get off the field and let them go play. So down the stretch here over the next two weeks will really be, you know, a high level of evaluation.**

**Now that we've gotten through the install phases we got as much of the system in that we want to have in, then I think you'll start to see an opportunity for them to truly be evaluated. I think the first couple of practices, I mean, you're just trying to get them accustomed to what we're doing, giving them equal reps. But I think once we get into the live work, even though they won't be live, but they're in the scrimmages, I think you'll have an opportunity to see if somebody's gonna separate.**

**Q: Big picture question for you in the NIL era as a coach, do you feel pressure to give your higher paid players more opportunities as a spring goes along or into fall camp or even when you get closer toward the season**

**TONY ELLIOTT:** Man, we're developmental program and we're not there yet for that even to be a consideration. Man, I'm trying to bring guys in here to compete that wanna compete and see can we put together a team that can go out and compete and win football games.

To be honest, I think that's how you're gonna have to be, to be honest with you. And in the NFL, those guys still gotta compete, man. Even

though they might be high paid and they're on contracts, those contracts aren't guaranteed day to day. They gotta earn it every single day. And I think that's one thing that I learned in my experience coming from Clemson. And I think when you look at the programs that you wanna study, the Alabamas of the world, the Ohio States of the world, man, it's all about competition, right? And you could say that NIL, but even there from a recruiting standpoint, you had high profile guys, man, the best players got to play and that's one thing that I learned and perfect example was Hunter Renfro. He was in a room where there were a lot of five-star guys you know at that position but he was the best player you know at that time and he won he won the job so I'm not even focused on that. I'm trying to one, figure out what I got right build a team man use that competition to help everybody get better and then see can we stay together through this next portal window so that we have a shot to be the best team that when come Saturdays in the fall that we have a shot to be the best team that we can become. No good question though.