

**University of Virginia Football Media
Conference
Thursday, April 10, 2025
Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference**

TONY ELLIOTT: All right, so just gonna start with the rules and format for the spring game, the blue and white game on Saturday. Would love to see a full stadium, love to see all the faithful diehards show up, 12 o'clock kick.

We'll do, I think about 10:40ish, we'll have our Wahoo Walk, so we have a chance to see the guys enter into the stadium.

But we split the teams up as evenly as possible to compete on Saturday. Split the staff, also have assigned head coaches for each of the teams. So for the blue team will be Coach (Terry) Heffernan. So he'll be the head coach of the blue team going against Coach (Keith) Gaither and the white team. So really, really excited about the opportunity to see our guys compete.

But the first quarter, the first five minutes of the second quarter will be a normal game rules clock and then we'll start a running clock. There'll be some additional stoppages throughout the course of action. But it will have a running clock from the middle of the second quarter on. We will take a little halftime break. If we get into a two-minute situation in the end of half or in the game, we will play that with normal clock rules. We do have some TV timeouts scripted throughout the course of action.

We will work special teams, we'll be full coverage units, except for we'll be thud on our returners. And all of our fair catch rules apply. We'll also go two step tempo on our extra points and then our quarterbacks will be in orange jerseys and our rules just so the fans know, in the pocket nobody can touch the quarterback, reach for him or get near him for his protection. If he's outside of the pocket as a

runner then we tag off. Now if we have a design quarterback run between the tackles our guys know that they can thud him up but they can't take them to the ground. So that's kind of the rules that we got for the game.

And I'm excited to see everybody compete. Scott, what team you on?

Moderator: For all Virginia Coach.

Tony Elliott: For all Virginia? I think we put you on a team now. Okay, we didn't put you on a team. All right, well, about everybody else is split up.

Q: So how did you divide the teams up? Was there a draft by the coaches?

So I allow both sides of the ball and Coach (Keith) Gaither on special teams just to put together a depth chart. So, you know, if you got five starting offensive linemen, then we'll probably have a couple from the second unit in different spots, and then a couple of starters will be on the opposite team. So just try to split it up as evenly as possible.

And then as we got to the end of spring practice, if there was some swing guys, so you may see a guy that has on a white jersey and then he may have to go play for the blue team, so we'll put a blue penny on him. But we just try to split it up as even as possible, so as balanced, so we can get good competition.

Q: I know that typically in the spring, teams don't break out all of their playbook, or necessarily a lot of it. In this era, when you're on TV and a lot of teams are not even playing spring games, do you keep it even more vanilla?

TONY ELLIOTT: We'll treat it like we always have in the spring. Base offense that we've been running, we'll show that. There'll be some new wrinkles that we just gotta get on film because we're continuing to evaluate guys. So I'm not gonna be paranoid, so to speak. I'm

gonna let the guys play. But there are some concepts that we won't break out until fall camp. But for the most part, man, we're gonna let our guys go play.

Q: For your fans, their first chance to get a glimpse of a lot of these newcomers. How much have you talked to your guys about that opportunity, getting to show exactly what they've been working on and embrace the fan base a little bit?

TONY ELLIOTT: Great question, and that's a great point that you bring up. I've talked about it a lot, that this is an opportunity for us to show our faithful, the work that we've been putting in. It's an opportunity for us to compete. The next time we're together is in fall camp, and the next game is going to be a real game. So for us, this is a game.

It's an opportunity for us as coaches to evaluate some of these new guys in a game type environment. The fans get to see all the guys that they've heard about that have come in from the portal, so to speak, and some of these mid-year freshmen. So we've talked about that a lot, that this is where we're at, we're in Scott Stadium, and that's sacred grass. We've got a responsibility to go out and compete and put together a good showing.

On the injury front, what's the situations with both Monroe Mills and Jam Jackson?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so Monroe did all the testing, as I told you before, and it ended up coming back being ACL. So unfortunately, he's had surgery, and finally, his back kind of moving around. Man, I hate that. I hate that for him. And it was more of a non-contact type of issue. I mean, he was braced up. And it was a low-impact drill. Just very unfortunate. But he's in good spirits and excited. And we're going to do everything we can to help him recover fully.

And hopefully, we'll be able to see him out on the field in a Cavalier uniform in the future.

And then with Jam Jackson, Red zone play in a scrimmage situation. Came down wrong. Initially thought hyperextension. They did some scans. They did notice that there may be some ligament damage, but they don't know what extent. So they're going to take another week, let them rehab a little bit and then reassess. So I'll know more probably in about a week and a half, two weeks on Jam.

Q: How do you kind of go about I guess replacing Monroe (Mills)? You guys have had a couple of weeks I guess to figure it out.

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah.

Q: How do you kind of go about it? One of the positives is (McKale) Boley. We get him back. Jack (Witmer) is a guy that's been repping all spring. We got, you know, Tyshawn (Wyatt) a swing guy that can swing, tackle and guard. Ben York has had a really, really good spring, which is another tackle for us. I mean, we'll look to see if there's a possible guy out there in the portal, in this next portal window, just to, because that's the area we got to add a little more depth from that standpoint from any competition and more of a true tackle body type.

We feel like we got some guys in house that will be able to step up and we will explore maybe an opportunity to bring in another guy to compete when we get back together in a fall camp.

Q: And kind of bouncing off of that, the portal does open next Wednesday. What other positions, after looking at the depth that you have, do you feel like you need to add?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so even prior to the start of spring practice, we knew that corner. Even with the situation with Jam (Jackson), we knew we were gonna have to go out and address the corner position, possibly another safety. We're down a number at running back, so we'll explore possibly another running back.

Constantly looking for any other guys that are just dynamic impact players, but the primary position is secondary with corners, mostly corners and a safety, possibly another running back. We will look into offensive tackle because of Monroe (Mills') situation and then assess any attrition that we have. I haven't heard anything yet but man this you know how this thing goes. We will have some tough conversations, transparent conversations with guys just assessing their body of work over spring and just let them know what their projected future is. So there could be some other positions that aren't priority now, but if we have some attrition, we could be looking.

Q: With Jam's injury, Ja'Son Prevard is moving back to corner rather than staying nickel. Do you see any other guys kind of move into that nickel position that you feel like you guys have been able to assess and see their development?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, so at the nickel position, Corey Costner has filled in there and done a good job and we believe that he's going to be the type of freshman that can come in and play for us in the fall regardless of whether it's at the nickel spot or one of the other two safety positions that we have. We get Keke (Adams) back. You know, (Caleb) Hardy would be a guy that we would look at coming back off of injury.

And then that's also a position, too, the safety position, that we'll be looking to see, can we find another guy that can give us some flexibility? And what you like about Prevard is that he gives you that flexibility to play nickel and to play corner.

Because again, it's a tough, physical, violent game. And the more flexibility and versatility you have, the better it makes us from a depth standpoint.

Q: With the judge, I think earlier this week kind of postponing the final decision of the

house settlement. How do you as a program plan when the portal opens on Wednesday?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, so that's a great question. How do you plan? I don't know the exact answer to that, to be honest with you. But the way we're approaching it is we know the immediate needs. So we already are preparing to address the immediate needs. Then we'll be ready to respond and react to any attrition.

And then, hopefully, we'll get some direction within the next week or two and that'll just be because the portal opens but and closes but that doesn't mean that everything is finished at that time. Right? It's a little bit different than maybe your December, January because we got time before summer school. We even got time before fall camp to actually complete your dealings in the transfer portal.

So it's not quite as high sense of urgency as the previous window, but I'm hoping that we get some clarity. But right now, it's let's attack the areas we know we have to address. And then if there is some changes, and it sounds like, and I've tried to stay away from reading too much into it. But it sounds like the judge wants some more information on how to kind of maybe phase out the 105, and I don't know if that necessarily changes your approach in the portal, so to speak.

Q: Even though you see these guys every day in practice and evaluate them on film, is there anything in particular on Saturday that you will personally be looking for that you're curious about?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I wanna see body language, ability to compete, ability to function without the coaches right there kind of hollering what to do. I wanna see guys respond to the ebbs and flows of the game, because that's what you don't know about some of these newer guys that are coming in. Some of these young guys as well, is how they're gonna respond to the adversity, to the success in the

course of the game. I think with 15 practices, we got a good understanding of physically what they can do for the most part.

Now you wanna see how they're going to respond as football players in a game environment. That's what I'll be looking for.

Q: And with so many new faces in the receiving core, new quarterbacks, how have those guys been able to build chemistry in the spring between them?

TONY ELLIOTT: One of the things that you notice that's been a little bit different than years past is the amount of guys that stay after practice and work together. So you see those guys constantly working together as a group of wideouts and then also with the quarterbacks, and that helps a lot with the chemistry. You see a lot of on the field communication in the drill work, where the quarterbacks are talking to the receivers about what they see. That helps to build chemistry. And you see the guys in here in the building early. And they're in here on their own on off days. So you're seeing all those little things that let you know that they're being intentional with building relationship and fostering that chemistry.

Q: One thing I was just curious about when it does come back to the portal opening again, how do you come up with how to evaluate guys in terms of NIL and what they're worth and what you're willing to shell out to get somebody?

TONY ELLIOTT: Great question. So one thing that I've been very grateful for is the resource that we have in Tyler Jones and helping from more of that standpoint, like the evaluation piece of it so that I can focus more on the football fit, the character fit, and it's worked well so far. So the NIL piece of it, I don't get in the weeds of that. I let Tyler and his group work with that.

But we have constant communication about the football fit and the character fit. That's what I focus on. And that'll be a big point of emphasis, too, because we have 15 practices this spring. But we also had five mat drills. And we had seven weeks of off-season training with this entire group. And man, they've been intentional to grow as a team. And the last thing that I wanna do is disrupt that. So it's finding the right guys that wanna come in and be a part of this as we add them.

And the other thing we gotta take into consideration too is the portal's gonna open, coaches are gonna be all over the country on the road recruiting for the next five weeks. So they won't be here every day, right? So we gotta make sure that the ones that we have here are continuing to progress the way that we want. And then when we do get back and those guys come in in the summer, the coaches will be with them for a couple weeks and then it's a vacation time. That's the only time coaches can take time off. So it's not quite like the first portal window when they show up in here in January and then pretty much everybody is back together for the bulk of time. People are gonna be off in different places. And so that's why it's critical that we get the right guys.

And that's what I'll be focusing on is the football fit and then also the character fit, and then trusting Tyler and his group to, and they've done a great job. So I have no reason to question anything that they're doing from that standpoint.

You didn't necessarily ask this, but I'm a volunteer. I was anticipating some conversations, guys coming in my office and wanting to discuss it and I haven't had any of that. Lo (Davis), Cav Futures and Tyler and them, they've done a great job of managing all of that. And that was important to me, too, because once the portal is done and you've made those decisions and you've agreed to what you agreed to, you've got to focus on football. And that's what we've been able to do

this spring. So kudos to Lo and Cav Futures and Tyler and his group of managing that aspect of it the right way so that us coaches can focus more on the football and the fit and the culture and the cohesion and chemistry as we build this team.

Q: When you first arrived here at UVA, you wanted to improve the nutrition aspect of the program. And there was a recent donation that allowed you to kind of stretch out the capacity of that kitchen. How important is it that you're in this next phase of incorporating nutrition into the program?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's critical. Because again, if we're piggybacking off the previous question about the portal, not all these guys are going to come in from, you know, situations where they had unlimited resources from a nutrition standpoint. You're going to get guys from some smaller programs that still have to be developed. Their bodies have to be built.

And then where we're trying to go, we're trying to compete with teams that have established nutrition plans and budgets and resources. And they've been dedicated to that for years. And we just broke practice, and I had (McKale) Boley stand up in front of the team.

To see Boley now, relative to two years ago, he looks like a totally different human being all the way around. And we need him to because he's going to have to go out there and block some guys. We're going to watch the draft here in a couple weeks and there's going to be some ACC defensive ends that are going to get drafted pretty early. And then they're fully developed and grown men.

So nutrition is critical. It's one of the most important things. Because again, at the end of the day, football is a game that you play with your body. And you have to be able to fuel your body, build your body, and have your body in optimal competing condition

so that you can stay healthy and then also recover from injury quickly when it happens.

And Ross (Ferrall) was saying having a chef here preparing those meals and having everything here without any third party food and everything. Have you seen changes already from the current roster in addition to McKale (Boley)?

TONY ELLIOTT: Definitely so man, I mean, provides come in and his body has his body has changed. Just look at Jam Jackson, Jam came in 168 to 170 pounds and now he's in the 190s. Suderian Harrison's body has changed. I've even seen Corey Costner's body changed in the short amount of time that he's here. So with all the stuff in-house, it just gives us more control.

And so we can control and we can educate better. And then we can coordinate better so that we can hit the amount can educate better, and then we can coordinate better so that we can hit the amount of calories at the right time in the right composition based off of how we're training. So we can really, really take advantage of the science.

As Coach Smo (Adam Smotherman) likes to say, you can't out-train a bad diet. So if we have a bad diet, it doesn't matter how much training that we do. But imagine if we can have precision in our training and then we have precision in our diet. Right now, everything is coming together. So it's just a tremendous blessing to have those resources committed to the program so we can continue to grow in that area. And part of what we showed, I showed a video to the program so we can continue to grow in that area. And part of what we showed, I showed a video to the team, and it was just a collection of great champions. You had Muhammad Ali, Mike Tyson, Michael Jordan, LeBron, Kobe, Usain Bolt, some UFC fighters.

And one of the things that they said is you have to be him before you become him, meaning that champions have to become champions

well before they're champions. Well, to get to where we're going as a program, we've got to look the part.

Before we can ever do anything, we've got to look the part. And part of that is building the body the right way so that we can compete with the teams that we really want to go compete with in the future.

Q: We've asked you about a lot of these transfers this spring, but Hunter Osborne is defensive tackle. How has he looked on the interior there? What do you see from him? Because obviously, he didn't have a lot of film.

TONY ELLIOTT: He's big, strong, heavy handed, hard to move. He's a quiet leader. He just works. He shows up every single day. So what I'm seeing is what got him to Alabama in the first place.

And you're just seeing the measurables and he's becoming more comfortable. He moves, he moves well. So we're excited that he's here. But he just, his body looks different than what we've had inside. And now that he's picking up the defense, you're really starting to see him and his ability to make plays.

And he can play both positions for us. He can play three technique and he can play nose for us.

Q: With your two new quarterbacks Chandler (Morris) and Danny (Kaelin), have you kind of figured out what they do really well? What they are not, what are maybe not their strengths? And I guess, do you have a plan kind of moving forward for how you want to gear the offense?

TONY ELLIOTT: So we'll really dive into that now that we got the 14 practices done. But the things that I've talked about in the beginning, you see those things. Obviously, Chandler has great movement skills. What you did get to see

is that Danny moves a lot better than you anticipate.

You're starting to see, I think, the latter part. You can see the touch that Danny has on the deep ball. And then you really got to see the improv skills that Chandler has, his ability to extend plays, not just with his legs, but in the pocket and the savvy. So a lot of the things that we anticipated based off of our evaluation, we confirmed. And then now that we've put them through our system, we'll really be able to go back and evaluate now that we got some downtime the rest of this offseason.

Q: I just wanted to ask, Ryan Odom was obviously out early on in practice. How did it feel to have him out there?

TONY ELLIOTT: No, it was awesome, awesome. And didn't know him personally prior to meeting him today, but I can see why he's the head coach at the University of Virginia. Seems like he's salt of the earth, just an awesome guy, regular guy, about the right things, very familiar with the state, with the area, with the university. So from a Virginia fit, I mean, it just immediately I could see. And you can see he's no ego, right? And that's going to be fun. A lot like Coach (Tony) Bennett.

And I let him know I have no ego either. We're all on the same team. You could tell he's very, very intelligent. But he's also very genuine, passionate about what he does. So it was awesome to have a chance to be able to, I hate that I wasn't able to be at his press conference because we had practice that day. But it was fun to be able to just have a chance to talk to him.