

**University of Virginia Football Media  
Conference  
Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2025  
Head Coach Tony Elliott  
Press Conference**

**Q: I've heard you multiple times talk to your players about simplifying their lives and kind of focusing on the things that are important, staying off social media. A week like this, a short week with a big name opponent, is that something you bring up again? Is that even more important?**

*TONY ELLIOTT: Most definitely. This week we got to simplify our lives because there's a lot of significance around this game. From the connection to the past and then you got a top ranked team coming in on a Friday night, national TV. So there's a lot of circumstances that you have to make sure that you can block out so you can focus. And then it's a quick work week. So the biggest thing for us is just adjusting to the schedule. Sunday is a huge day in preparation and recovery and we lost our Sunday so to speak and we were right back on the practice field on Sunday for a Monday type practice.*

*So everything's been condensed So it's even more important this week that you simplify your life so you can stay focused*

**Q: You guys have seen Thomas Castellanos the last two years. How do you think he's improved and is there anything you can pull from the game plans the last two years or is the offense that different?**

*TE: Well, he's always been really good, very dynamic player. We learned that firsthand a couple years ago up at up at BC (Boston College) when we got a lead at half and then he just takes over in the second half. So very dynamic, but what you're seeing is a lot of confidence. He's playing with a lot of confidence. He looks very decisive. Seems like he's come grasp the offense and I know there was some connection.*

*maybe to the past, but he looks just really confident, really comfortable. He knows where to go with the ball, decisive on when he needs to pull it down and run it. And then when he's in space, I mean, he just looks like he's playing a video game, to be honest with you. He's making people miss. So the biggest difference is you just see he looks very comfortable and playing with a ton of confidence. And when he's able to do that, he's as good as anybody in the country.*

**Q: What are you seeing overall with their running game? They're averaging like 363 yards on the ground per game.**

*TE: They're big up front. The guys, they're coached very well. They come right at you. The backs they got, I mean, they just keep them coming. I can't even keep straight how many running backs they got. They all look very similar.*

*One cut guys. So it looks like the offensive line is creating a lot of space. The backs understand where the aiming points are. They can find the air. in the in the defense and then they really challenge you with their speed sweeps and Ability to get the ball on the perimeter. They got a lot of decide plays they put different players in conflict so they're just I mean they're doing what Gus (Malzahn) is always done and he makes you defend every inch of the field from sideline to sideline from end zone to end zone and He's got a quarterback that can make all the throws when he needs to.*

*But he's got a big offensive line and a stable of running backs and a quarterback that can make you right in a run game. And that's what they're doing. They're putting a lot of pressure on you. They're just coming right at you. And very similar to what I did in the past because credit, shout out to Gus. What I did offensively was a derivative of what he and Chad (Morris) created back when they were high school coaches working on it.*

*So it's going to be fun to go against their whole team, but Gus in particular.*

**Q: You've been waiting on figuring out what's going on the center Brady Wilson any update on his condition?**

*TE: Yeah, so he's day-to-day and hopefully it's right now. It's just a calf strain But he's day -to -day and as Sparky's (Daniel Sparks) day-to-day We thought we were going to get Sparky back last week with the hip flexor, but it's taking a little bit longer Then and then we anticipated I think though I think we made out of the game pretty clean So Brady's the biggest one, but yeah, but he's day -to -day and so we'll have we'll have to see ready to go, ready to go. I mean, now it's like, it's just musical chairs at times. Next man up, ready to roll, but really proud of, of Drake (Metcalfe) and his ability to slide in at center.*

*And, and if, if Brady's not ready to go, then, you know, Drake will be an option for us at center. And, and then Wiggy and Kevin Wigenton, we know him as Wiggy. Kevin and, and Tyshawn (Wyatt) got to be ready to go at, at guard. And (Ethan) Sipes getting closer. He's more of a day -to -day guy for us now. And Wallace Unamba is now up and running.*

*And so we plan to get him back here pretty soon. And then Wallace is now out of the brace and kind of progressing. So we hope in the next couple of weeks that we'll get several of our offensive linemen back. But right now, it's next man up mentality. We gotta roll.*

**Q: You talked a little bit about Tyshawn Wyatt just getting more conditioning and confidence, doesn't he? Where do you think he is in that development?**

*TE: Yeah, I think he's starting to feel really good. He looked good in practice yesterday, moving around, saw some suddenness. So I think he's getting really, really close to kind of feeling like*

*he did in the past when he was playing high - level football.*

**Q: Going into this season, you said you had a good feel for what Chandler (Morris) would be. You liked your receivers, your running backs, your depth on the offensive line. the total package of what the offense looks like right now. Is it what you were envisioning? Have you tweaked it? Where do you think you are with an anticipation of what you thought you had?**

*TE: Truthfully, still kind of figuring them out, right? Each week has been a little bit different, and so each week you learn a little bit more about each of the guys that you have. Credit to Des (Kitchings) and the offensive staff of really just tailoring it to what those guys' skill sets are. Now this week, we're going to learn a lot more about where we are going against this front and secondary and linebackers of Florida State. But we felt like we had a lot of really good ingredients and had to bring it all together.*

*And so again, we're still early in the season, the identity is starting to form. It's not fully there yet, but I'm excited about what the potential is.*

**Q: I think a lot of people would have described the crowd Saturday night as disappointing, the size of the crowd, night game and all that, ACC opener. What are you anticipating for this game, the brand that is Florida State, the fact that they're ranked, the fact that you guys are playing so well?**

*TE: Man, truthfully, every week I'm dreaming and hoping for a full stadium, you know, capacity stadium, packed, loud, man, aggressive, putting pressure on opposing teams. I'm hopeful this week that we'll have, so every time I run out the tunnel, man, I'm expecting to see, you know, a full stadium. And I understand we got to do our part and we're working towards it, but I anticipate there'll be a good crowd. But at the end of the day, we can't focus on that. We got to focus on the product that we put on the field. And I think the guys have done*

*a really good job of just having a workman-like mentality and showing up and going to work regardless of how many people are in the stands.*

*But man, I'm dreaming. And I think what we want. In the end, it's going to take all of us. It's going to take the relationships and everybody doing their part. And a big part of helping a football team maintain its edge and ability to perform at a high level is knowing that you're running out to a full stadium.*

**Q: Pretty sure that Devin Neal has been running with the ones almost from the first day of spring ball. Given his body of work, was that what you expected of him when he transferred here? And what has he added to the defense?**

*TE: Right, so Devin was an All-ACC performer at Louisville. Before going to Baylor and then here. So we anticipated that he would be a guy that would push for first team reps from day one. So he's continuing to get comfortable in our system. It's starting to understand, you know, all the checks and calls and the communication that's required of the safeties. I think for the for the naked eye it seems easy but with the complexity of offenses nowadays and the amount of communication that that has to take place instantly. For secondary guys, it's a little bit challenging but he's become more comfortable and you see him making plays man would love to have seen him and come down with that interception. But he's in position. So you're seeing he's get himself in position and we're going to need him and we're going to need Christian Charles, we're going to need mentor, we're going to need all that, and we're going to need (Antonio) Clary coming back to really, really drive the competition so that we can get the best out of all of our guys.*

*And then also have depth as we progress deeper in the season.*

**Q: You've talked about Kam Robinson's recruitment a lot, but it came down really close**

**between y'all and Florida State. What was that signing day like, waiting to see?**

*TE: It was it was it reminded me of the old days man when you kind of sitting by the fax machine just hoping that that fax comes through because you know you're in a battle all the way all the way till the end. You know a little nervous there at the end but we felt like we had we had done a good job relationship wise and also presenting to him what his potential here as a player as a person and then also what it would mean for his future If he if he decided to stay home, so it was it was a kind of a nerve -wracking But once it everything came through it was man.*

*It was a of celebration.*

**Q: He talked about (Tommy) Castellanos before how useful is it to have (Kam) Robinson back? He's got a game under his belt against an athlete like that at quarterback**

*TE: Everybody's going to have to play well and everybody's going to have to play one step faster because of his ability.*

**Q: You said the other night that the best teams you've been around have been built around running games. What do you like about your running game this far and how much pressure can you put on your opponent by being outstanding in that class?**

*TE: So what I like is first the chemistry of the guys in the running back room. So I hate that Noah's (Vaughn) been down with the ankle. But he was playing as good as he has since he's been here. So you got versatility. You got community in that room. Those guys are unselfish, which allows us to do different things, put guys in different positions.*

*The offensive line is leading the way and creating some holes. The guys are starting to really get comfortable with the run schemes that we're asking them to do. And when you can run the football and you dictate the pace of the*

*game, it not only makes you better against your opponent, but it makes you better on your own practice field, right? Because now the defense is getting tested with the run game in the course of practice. And football, in my opinion, until it changes, and I don't think it's changing anytime soon, and you got to be able to run the football. That's where it starts.*

*It creates the mindset for your football team. And then it sets up everything else. So then now your play actions are more effective. You can move the pocket, all right? You can protect your quarterback a little bit better. You can get people to step up, and then now you can get some of the bigger, more explosive plays down the field in the passing game when you have a legitimate run game to set it up.*

**Q: Obviously you have confidence in your defense, but Florida State has been scoring a ton of points. You're gearing up for an opponent like that that has a track record of scoring a ton. How does it impact your game management in terms of maybe going for it on a fourth round trying to steal a possession? Keep a drive going. How does that change? Maybe the way you approach a game?**

*TE: Yeah, I mean, I mean first it starts with being confident in the plan. And those guys and myself trust coach Rud (John Rudzinski) and defensive staff to put together a great plan. That's where it starts. And in a game like this, this is one of those games where it's more so you gotta line up and go play and you gotta win your one-on-one in a game like this. But they're up for the challenge, and the guys are excited. This is why you play college football, to play in games like this.*

*I told the guys this week, I asked them how many of them want to play pro ball, and everybody raised their hand. I said, well, this is the closest thing you're going to get to it at this level, when you're playing a team like Florida State. It's pro ball, and it's a game of inches, and you got to win in tight spaces. So I think the*

*guys are excited, and then this is also an opportunity for us to kind of see where we're at, like how much progress have we really made when you're going against a team like Florida State. So the guys will be excited.*

**Q: Game management is you're going to have your plan going in, but then you adjust based off of the flow of the game.**

*TE: So we got to be ready to adapt. And the fourth down calls will be driven a lot by the analytics and what that says, but then also the gut feel on the field. So we're going to be aggressive. We're going to come to play. Our guys will be excited, excited to play and I think it's going to be a good opportunity for us to see how much progress we've made versus a team like Florida State.*

*This is as good a Florida State team as I've seen in a while, and I've seen some really good ones. But they got guys that are potential household names like Tommy Castellanos, he's a household name. And you'll see that by the end of the season, man, they got Deuce Robinson, a guy that's a household name coming from the West Coast. Now we're here to the East Coast and the connection with his dad playing at Florida State, man. I look at big Jackson, Darryl Jackson, man, he reminds me of Dexter Lawrence. I mean, I hadn't seen a guy that size that with that athleticism that can move like that.*

*And Mr. Little, Earl Little Jr., he's a guy that's brings back memories of the Derwin James type of players. And Lamaricus Joyner, those guys that they've had, and there's others. And I know that there's other guys that as the season goes on are going to become household names. And one of the things that they've been able to do too is because of how explosive they are on offense, their ability to run the ball, how they can swarm on defense, they've been able to keep their guys fresh too. So they got some guys sitting in the wings that haven't played as many snaps, that by the end of the season are going to be household names. So man, this is why you*

*come to a place like Virginia, this is why you're playing the ACC, this is why you play college football, to have an opportunity to compete against the best.*

**Q: I won't ask you to do the mental math gymnastics on this, but the ACC moving to the 9 plus 1, with some teams playing 8 plus 2. The (ACC) office has made it pretty clear they don't want Notre Dame to count in the standings. They don't want them to impact the championship. They don't love the fact that they What you guys did with state, conference teams playing non-conference games. What is your take overall on where you're moving on the schedule model?**

*TE: Like all of the stuff that you said that right now, I'm focused on Florida State. But I was in favor of the nine conference games. I have no problem with that. We're doing that now, even though one doesn't count. And I think that there's a benefit. I think us playing NC State early in the season is going to make us better and help us down the stretch.*

*I'm in favor of that and it makes it more competitive. Now the Notre Dame stuff, I'll let the higher ups worry about all of that. But I was in favor of the nine games and the plus one.*

**Q: You guys use Caleb Hardy kind of in like a spur role the other day. What did you see there and what allowed him to make that transition? He's played some safety, some linebacker, and now some spur.**

*TE: Right, so with Kam's (Robinson) injury and then also with Caleb's development and the growth of his body, we felt like the best spot for him is to be at the linebacker position. And then last week with the 12 personnel, 13 personnel, the heavy sets that Stanford you know, uses and they use very frequently. It just made sense to have him as a, like a heavy Sam, like we're built, we're four to five, right? We play with five DBs, uh, with our, with our, our Sam linebacker being a, a nickel body part, body type and provide, but*

*versus those heavy run sets. And we knew we were going to get them. Uh, we needed a heavy Sam.*

*And so the, the best, you know, And the easiest transition was to take Caleb from inside the box and make him a Sam linebacker. And he immediately goes in there and makes play, helps almost get a TFL. So excited about his development. And I think what has allowed it is his understanding of the game and just his football IQ, but also the growth of his body. And I don't think he's done growing, I think he's going to continue to get bigger.*

**Q: And then on the d-line, I think Mitchell (Melton) was saying last week that he's kind of had to adjust to being in every down player for the first time in his career is more of a rotational guy at Ohio State obviously. What have you seen there? He's becoming more active. What do you see?**

*A: Right. I think he's just becoming more comfortable, right? I think before as a as a rotational guy you got to figure out how to get in a groove quickly as a every down player like it's a different workload, right? And so you gotta figure out just how to manage all of that. And so I think now that he's learning how to manage all of that and then practicing to prepare as an every down player. Now he's becoming more comfortable and now he can just go play. And so he's not thinking as much and you're starting to see just his natural athleticism and body control. Can't wait for him to get out that cast though. I think he's got a couple more weeks in that cast where he can really get that hand back.*

**Q: I think we'll see even more special things out of him. Yeah, with (Antonio) Clary you mentioned earlier, yeah, I think you only played one series last week. Where do you kind of see his (Antonio Clary) snap, his limits right now?**

*TE: Right. So it's going to increase. I think we said Last week he was probably a max of about*

*15 to 20 reps and with another week of practice that will go up. So the biggest thing was just to kind of get him introduced to the game to see how the knee was going to be without the brace, how he was going to handle it. And again, he was mad at me all the way up until the game because I had him in a brace. But yesterday I said amen.*

*All right, let's really get after it, took the brace off, let him go full speed and practice. And I look pretty good, so I think you're going to see that snap count increase. And then as we go week to week as his conditioning level, the biggest thing is, what can his body really handle being that he spent so much time just back on the side doing strength and conditioning type activities from a conditioning standpoint, but it's different when you got to get in football shape.*

*So as quick as his body can get to the level that he needs to be, the better it is for us.*

**Q: Are there certain situations you like him (Antonio Clary) more in right now?**

*TE: I like (Antonio) Clary in all situations. it's different because he's played so much football, he's been in the system and he knows all the checks. When he's out there, he's like a quarterback, he's directing traffic, he's telling Persinger what to do at corner from the other side of the field. He recognizes all the sets, so I like him in all situations. But this week here, it's going to be more, okay, what can his body handle?*

*And I anticipate that he'll be ready to go and absorb a greater workload this week based off of what I saw the first two days of this week in practice.*

**Q: You're so familiar with Gus (Malzahn). How much do you expect him to try to test you deep this week? And do you have any concerns with your secondary?**

*TE: Yeah, absolutely. Expect him to test us deep. I mean, they tested Alabama over the top, and everybody else that they played. And that's just a part of what the system is all about. You want to run it right at you between the tackles, and then throw it over the top to test your concerns.*

*I don't have concerns from an ability standpoint, we just got to be cleaner with our eyes. And that's what we got to coach better as coaches to help these guys not see so much, right? That's really the challenges that we have is learning the system. And we also got to remind ourselves that all the guys that are playing in the secondary, with the exception of mentor, and Neil weren't here in the spring, right? So they're all kind of growing up and learning on the fly with what we do. So biggest thing is we just got to help them be clean with our eyes and understand that's part of the strategy to win a game like this.*

*Don't let them get behind you. So we got to keep them in front. And that's going to be a big challenge because they got speed all over the place that can really test you deep. So we have to be clean with our eyes, but I anticipate the guys will be ready to accept the challenge.*

*They owned the couple of plays that we gave up last week and we're going back to work and I'm excited to just see them go out and accept the challenge versus this bunch that's coming in here.*

**Q: (Daniel) Rickert is on the coaches show with you tonight. In his transition to FBS, did you feel like a game was coming like he had against Stanford? What did you think when you found out he had an engineering degree?**

*TE: Yeah, so obviously it made conversation really easy in the recruiting process because of the similarities in background. But I anticipated that there was going to come a point based off of what we saw in practice in fall camp. I mean, first of all, he's an outstanding young man. He's*

*extremely competitive. He only knows one speed.*

*He's one of those guys that you got to take his helmet from him to slow him down. I mean, he's going to work extremely hard. He's done a great job of understanding who he is, what his strengths are, areas to improve, and he tries to play to his strengths.*

*And we're going to need him to play to his strengths this week to try and find a way to somehow get close to their quarterback.*

**Q: McKale Boley was a guy that you guys said needed to step up this year in order for the O-line to get better. On Saturday probably had one of his best games for UVA. What changed for him? Is it just this finally playing healthy consistently or what have you seen that changed?**

*TE: I think I think his body has a lot to do with it. He's finally in a place where he feels healthy and his body looks good. So he's had a good offseason and I think sometimes it happens earlier in some guy's career, but I think he realizes, man, I'm getting close to the end, and I really want to play at the next level. And so this is what it's going to take. This is the last part of my growth and maturity that has to happen.*

*And that's really the leadership piece of it, because it's never been a talent issue or problem with Boley. He's been the most talented guy we've had from the day that he showed up here, right, from just his ability standpoint. He got thrown in the fire early as a freshman, probably wasn't ready. to play as a freshman, but he had to go in there and grow up. And so he took a lot of lumps early on, which you got to persevere through and learn from. Then he had injury.*

*And now I think he's kind of at that point where he understands if I want to have a shot to play beyond, then I got to figure out the next evolution. And that's all the questions that the*

*scouts come in is like, okay, how much does he love it? Is he a leader? And I shared that information with him and said, hey, look, if you want to play at the next level, then leadership, because leadership is going to bring consistency. Because when you lead, then you know people are watching. And it forces you to do those things that you might not feel like doing.*

*But when you have to lead and people are watching you, it pushes you to do those things. And I'm excited. I told him congratulations. I congratulate all the guys that got ACC (Player of the Week awards). They had a bunch of awards this week. I think we had three guys on the ACC players of the week.*

*And then Chandler (Morris), he got, I don't know, But Chandler got a bunch of recognition, and so I can't even remember. So we all put all that up. But I told Boley, man, I've been waiting on this. Because I believe that he has a chance to be one of the premier guys in our league at his position. And I'm excited for him, because now I think he really wants it, right? I think before it was a question of, okay, do I want it?*

*I think I want it. Now you're starting to see that he's living and breathing and thinking, I want it.*