

University of Virginia Football Media
Conference
Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2025
Head Coach Tony Elliott
Press Conference

Q: You have such an experienced team that you have not had to use true freshmen much at all this year. Is it more challenging in this era to keep them? those guys engaged when they might not get the opportunities to play that immediately like they would have 10 years ago? And how do you do that?

TONY ELLIOTT: *Yeah, great question. I think it's a challenge to keep them all engaged right now, just because of kind of the landscape we're in. But you have to be intentional. And anytime you have situations that you can point to to say, hey, this is, you know, why you have to be ready. I think about Louisville and Boley goes down. Now you got a redshirt freshman going in there and now he has to play significant snaps, versus a very good football team, on the road and everybody's counting on him.*

So you use those points to illustrate to other guys. You just got to be ready because you never know. And then that's my challenge to the coaches and myself is to you got to force yourself to put those guys in and let them gain some experience because they literally are one or two snaps away from having to play. But I think you got to keep them all engaged and you got to be creative. And then you also have to force yourself when and whenever you possibly can to play as many guys as you can.

And some groups have a little bit more experience and can rotate throughout the course of the game. Some positions, it's a little bit more difficult.

Q: Yeah, your defense against Louisville had the two defensive touchdowns and then last Saturday, obviously, had the game - winning safety and (Ja'son) Prevard's big interception. Did you expect the defense to maybe come

along as the season would go along, given how many new faces, new pieces, and time it might take for chemistry to click on that side of the ball?

TE: *I did, and I think if we go back to the first couple of weeks of the season, I was saying that, A, seven of the DBs, all the DBs didn't get here until after spring ball. It's going to take a little bit of time. They're getting used to each other. We had some injuries during fall camp where, where guys missed some time and now we're starting to get guys back and they're gaining some experience. They're a little bit more comfortable with just everything.*

And so I felt like it was, it was going to take a little bit of time, but I also felt like it could come together. And then the flip side is, is the offense had a little bit of a headstart, And so right out the gate, kind of the chemistry was there and we're going to get back to doing what we do offensively. But I think the way the defense came together was a little bit different and didn't have as much time together in the spring because we added so many new pieces after spring ball.

Q: And then on the offense, I think Chandler (Morris) only had four carries this past Saturday. I think the two previous games it was like 15 combined. Is that a conscious effort to try to keep him upright and healthy on your guys' part as a staff?

TE: *I think every game plan is different. I think if you study Washington State their structure was they weren't going to give you many perimeter runs with your with your quarterback because of the alignments that are linebackers, you know, they were going to force you to try and run between between the tackles and when you look at it kind of how how we're built and what Chandler's skill set, it's not ideal to run him between the tackles. You want to get him out in space on the perimeter. So I think some of it was structurally, they were going to present some*

different opportunities as opposed to other game plans versus different opponents.

Q: With the offense, you mentioned the chemistry is there. You talked a lot about the talent. When you look at what's been off the last two weeks, how much of it is you guys have put yourselves on film and now people can maybe prepare a little more?

TE: Yeah, I think there's a couple things. So when you go back and watch the tape, I felt like the guys were playing hard, but we could have strained just a little bit more. And I think when you strain a little bit more, you capture some of the inches in the game. And I think that's kind of what happened. And in the times where we did strain, we did what we needed to do. We found plays.

So I think also, too, we had a little bit of consistency up front. And then that changed over the last couple weeks. Hopefully getting Brady (Wilson) back is going to kind of calm us down a little bit up front. But yes, now we're getting everybody's best effort. So it's a little bit different. It's not like you're sneaking up on people.

Now everybody knows what this group is capable of. And so then we have to accept the challenge, which I got full confidence in this group that they will. And it's also good sometimes for you to have to kind of go back to the drawing board just a little bit. bit to get to get refocused and recenter not saying that they weren't but it's a great opportunity because offensive football is very rhythmic, right? And then it's also about being explosive. I think if you look at the start of the game, you know, we had a couple plays that if we make those plays.

I think the complexion of the game is completely different. Like we had a big play down the field that if it, just inches, if we if we come down with it, then man, we're rocking and rolling and allows us to play kind of how we're accustomed to playing with a little bit of tempo and

aggressive. And then here we go. And so I think that's that's been the differences with just those those inches. We hadn't captured them. early in the game like we had, you know, the first couple weeks of the season that kind of lit the fire and set us going.

So we're going to get back to it. We're going to go to work, but I thought the guys were playing hard, but we just, you know, we need to do better. a little bit more to capture those inches, which is a good challenge for us to see how these guys respond.

Q: I know too much credit and blame always goes to the quarterback, but with Chandler (Morris) being beat up, with him dealing with that shoulder, with people having more video on him, is he going to be able to play, do you think, at the level we saw in the first half, or is there...

TE: Yes, he will be able to because he's a competitor, right? And again, every plan is different too. And so I know everyone focuses on the quarterback, but every plan is different. And sometimes you gotta lean on different aspects of your offensive personnel. But in terms of is Chandler going to be able to play at a high level, I believe he will.

And hopefully it starts this week, but I believe he'll be able to play at a high level.

Q: You mentioned Brady Wilson, is he expected to be back along with Noah Vaughn and (David) Wohlabough this week?

TE: Yep, so all three of those will be available this week. And X (Xavier Brown), unfortunately, will not. Don't know the extent, still waiting on the scans to come back. I know the X-rays were positive, but you still gotta do the MRI to see exactly with the soft tissue. But I think he and (McKale) Boley. Boley went out with the with the slight ankle, but he'll be he'll be back. So I think the only one that'll be down will be will be X.

Q: And Suderian Harrison, he didn't, is he going to be out?

TE: So Suderian is right now, plans to exercise his red shirt opportunities. He played in four games and trying to manage that to where he can save his year of eligibility, unless, there's a crisis or something that comes up and an emergency for the team. But right now that's the plan.

Q: And this was probably one of the best games for the interior defensive line, I think this week. What did you see from Jason Hammond and his development with that group because of the depth that you guys haven't been able to place?

TE: Right. I experienced it in practice every day for many, many years. When you got a lot of depth, they can wear you down. Because your offensive line, typically there's not a ton of subbing there. You do wanna play guys, but more because of the rhythm offensively, you keep the same guys in there.

But when you can change up body types, speed, length, power, and those guys are fresh. And so when guys are playing, 25 to 30 snaps as opposed to 60 snaps, man, they're a lot fresher and it's a constant change up on the offensive line. And so I think what you saw is in the second half, man, they were able to kind of knock the line back. because they're fresher, right? And we got different body types. And then now the guard who's been playing, you know, 55 snaps, now he's got to deal with the speed of Goldie (Jacob Holmes).

And then here comes (Anthony) Britton with his size and his power. Here comes Hunter (Osborne) with his size and power. Then here goes Jason (Hammond) with his quick feet. So it just, it puts a lot of pressure on the interior in particular. And the same thing on the edge when you can change that up. And Jason, what Jason's been doing is he's really just been focusing on the small things.

He's playing really, really good with his hands. He's activating his feet. And so because his feet are moving, he's able to get off blocks quicker and be disruptive. So he's doing a really good job of just taking the coaching and translating what we're seeing in practice to the game feel.

Q: You guys were 6-9 in one-score games the past three years. After that NC State loss, you guys have won a couple of close ones in a row. What changed?

TE: Yeah, so and I mentioned this to the team yesterday, a lot of games in football are lost as opposed to won.

And what you're seeing is our guys are finding a way to make the play to win the game and eliminating the mistakes to lose the game, right? So when I think about a lot of those close losses, it was more so man, we just didn't quite make the play we needed to make. And I think now the guys understand that. And so they're taking pride in the way we finish practice with having a fourth quarter mentality. So that in the fourth quarter, we can eliminate the mistakes and then we can go make the plays. And if you look at the past game, man, there were some critical mistakes on the other side that allowed us to capitalize.

And so, like, it kind of held true, right? But if we can stay poised and composed in those moments, then we don't make the critical mistake. Because I don't know if y'all saw me, but I was probably, I was animated there at the end of the game because we got him down there on the two-yard line. And man, we want to be aggressive. But we don't wanna hit that quarterback and fall on him and get a 15 yard penalty. We don't wanna be out of control on a deep ball and have a pass interference.

And now we give them a new set of downs, which could create momentum for them to go. you know, score and kick the field goal. So I think the difference is the guys are truly

understanding what it takes to win games. And then if somebody is going to make a mistake, then we can capitalize where I think in the past we were on the other side. We were making the mistake and other teams were capitalizing.

Q: Coach Bill Belichick has not performed entirely as he would have hoped, but still one of the greatest coaches in NFL history. What are you hoping to learn from going against him on the sidelines?

TE: *Well, first of all, it's year one, right? He's got 70 new guys on his roster. He's making the transition from the NFL to college. Just remember, he is the greatest coach. I mean, he's one at the highest level, right? And he won at a high level, at the highest level.*

And so what I just hope to learn is if he's willing to give me anything pregame, I'll take it. With the handshake, I don't think he's going to give me too many tips right before the game. But what you are seeing is you are seeing his team is getting better. And you watch that team in the second half of the Cal game, it was a totally different team, right? And had an opportunity to win that game. And unfortunately had a costly turnover there at the end.

But what I just hope to learn is, it'll really be after the game. After you play the game, whatever the result is, you evaluate the film, that's when you're going to learn the most. And so that's when I'll be able to learn from just studying his team after we play against him.

Q: Piggybacking on that, in the grand scheme of things, with their backs up against the wall as it is, how dangerous is this game for you guys?

TE: *Yeah, I mean, it's every game now is a dangerous game. I knew that last week was going to be a good challenge for us. First of all, because and I'm going to answer your question. But first of all, Washington State's a good*

football team. And they've gotten better every single week, right?

And they got a ton of confidence and their coach has a championship background. And you're seeing their culture really take root. So I knew it was going to be a challenge for us. Proud of how our guys found a way to win, a ton to learn from. But every game is going to be dangerous. But in particular, I'm not going to use that analogy because I don't want to get in trouble.

But if their back's against the wall, it's fight or flight, right? And I don't think they're going to fight. I think they're going to fight, right? And they're going to fight with everything that they have and they have nothing to lose, right? So that's what makes us. dangerous, okay?

And they're improving, and they're playing at home. And I think that their coaching staff and the players got a ton of pride. So the biggest thing for us where we can't, it's so hard to do but you got to block out the noise and you can't listen to what people say. You can't look at records, you can't look at stats, you got to evaluate the film. And the film says, based off of last week what I saw on tape, that this is a football team that's getting better, that has powerful talent. Right, that is starting to find an identity.

They're starting to get a little bit of a rhythm offensively, defensively, right? They've improved each week, they've been able to stop the run. So you better trust your eyes. And that's what's hard for, especially for young people, is to really trust their eyes when they got the phone and everybody talking about all this other stuff. And it gets them distracted and You got a football team and they want to win. I don't think anybody in that organization doesn't want to win.

And I think they're learning how to win their coach's way. And that was something that we had to do here, right, in the first couple years is learn how to win. So that's where we gotta

hopefully be able to lean on our experience and our time together as a program to see can we get off to a fast start and try not to let them, gain that confidence that I'm seeing build on the film when I watch them versus Cal.

Q: Coming out of the two -minute timeout in the fourth quarter, you got that third and three. If you don't get the first down there, you punt, they got a chance to win the game on a field goal. To be able to run the ball, get the first down with room to spare on a play where Washington State probably knew you wanted to run, is that gratifying considering some of the short yardage problems the first couple years here?

TE: Yeah, I mean, when you look at the positive offensively, the quarterback didn't get sacked. which we've taken a lot of pride in, we didn't turn the ball over and we won that four minute situation and then we found enough plays, right? So that's the positive offensively, but we've also been in a four minute situation first Florida State where we didn't win that situation. So to see us when it mattered the most and we had to have it to be able to find what we needed to find. And I think you saw the demeanor and the heart of the football team on that play, because man, there was a crease and Jamari hit it, right? He wasn't going to be stopped on that play.

And so the challenge for me as a coach is to be able to get those guys to have that mindset every day, every practice, every rep. every game, right? That's the challenge, right? And so that's what we're focusing on, is see, can we create that level of focus, play in and play out? Because that's what it's going to take to make sure that we're prepared to do what we need to do for every game down the stretch.

Q: Jamari (Taylor) and Xavier (Brown) have run the ball so well that Harrison (Waylee) has not had a ton of opportunities this year. Noah's (Vaughn) been hurt. What's your confidence level in those two guys with Xavier out now?

TE: Right, biggest run we had in the game was Harrison and he popped that run. Now he's got to take care of the ball and he knows that but when we've given him opportunities and he's produced, so I'm really confident. And Noah was playing at a high level prior to, I think he had like 100 yards, nine carries, and he was on fire the last time out. So I'm confident that those guys will step in and And they care a lot about X, that's their brother, nobody wanted to see X go down.

I mean, he's probably one of the most liked guys on the team because of the way that he works. I'm certain that those guys will carry that extra load and do it well, just because they care about their brother, and they'd love to see him out there. So I don't have any concerns. The biggest thing is we gotta do a great job from a coaching perspective of each week having a good sound plan in the run game to try and find numbers and angles for our guys. But I think those guys are going to tilt the rock and do their part.

Q: Kam Robinson's been a beast. Just what kind of a difference maker is he? And being a former offensive coordinator, is he the kind of guy that you've always got to know where he is on the field? You do.

TE: And I think the numbers and the recognition, all of that speaks for itself. But he's a guy that can do it all, right? He can run sideline to sideline. He can cover just about anybody on the field and man coverage if you need him to. He can rush the passer. He can fit the gap.

I mean, there's really not many things that he can't do athletically. So he is a guy that you need to know and have a plan for in all those different aspects when you're putting together your concepts to go attack him. So just happy for him, because I know last year, man, he battled, gave us everything he had, played through injury. So it's good to see him out there healthy, running around, able to make plays for us. And I think he's going to continue to get

better. And so I don't think he's hit his ceiling yet.

I think there's still a good amount of room before he taps out. And just excited to have him on our team.

Q: One of the things you guys did so well early in the year was time of possession, third down conversions. You're 11 for 30 on your last 30 third down conversions. Is it the same answer that you gave about the offense or is there something specific you're seeing on third down?

TE: Yeah, I mean, the third down, you got to stay ahead of the chains. So you stay out of the long yardage. The North Carolina State game was an anomaly. You don't ever convert that many third and longs in a game. But if we're efficient on first down, more efficient, right, which is the inches that I'm talking about. Your third downs are more manageable as opposed to third and long.

And then establishing that rhythm, staying ahead of the chains, right? It allows you to be a little bit more aggressive, maybe takes the aggression out of the defense and the calls that they're calling. But if you get in the third and long, then now you got seven up on the line of scrimmage versus zero coverage, man. It's hard to defeat that. I think it's just going back to playing our brand of ball, staying ahead of the chains, being aggressive, playmakers making plays. So we're going to get back to that and I think that'll kind of improve those areas that you just asked about.

Q: And last week, when you were here, you told us you wanted to get back to some of the big plays and special teams being outstanding there. I think Cam's (Ross) first return had some good spark to it. What did you see, and did the guys answer that challenge?

TE: Yeah, I thought the special teams kind of looked like it. It looked early in the season. 30 -

yard return on the first kickoff return and we were close and that that's one where is that's kind of that's kind of like offensive football, right? It's all 11 and it's a game of inches. So we were close there. We ended up on the backside, man We just we strain a little bit longer.

We don't lose a block. We don't have to lose our off returner that gets thing's going for a while. Then we were able to create a chance for him to, you know, catch the point and get us 10 yards, which is an additional first down for the offense, which is, which is big. So we felt like we because they had a really good return or two that was averaging like 11.2 yards. And so we were able to win that matchup from that standpoint.

Then we won the matchup on the, on the kickoff return. And then Sparky (Daniel Sparks), man, he kicked the heck out of the ball. So I felt like, and then (Will) Betridge, I mean, Betridge field goals have been huge here and that's so proud of him cause he's responded, right? He missed one or a couple early and now he's, man, he's, tying his career long and hitting some big ones for us down the stretch. So I felt like the special teams kind of really came back to you. Look at our number three (on the key to win chart to his left), be special on special teams.

That's our goal each week. And we track the hidden yardage. So we won the hidden yardage in that game, which I think made the difference. So it came down to special teams, field position, and turnovers is really, in my opinion, what kind of changed that game.

Q: You guys have been picking up some notable recruits recently. What's your message to those guys as the team keeps ascending?

TE: Guys, we're just getting started. This is what we envisioned as a staff when we came to UVA of being able to win football games. And now we're just getting started and they have an opportunity to continue to elevate this program to where we believe it can ultimately get.

Q: Yeah, on Cam Ross, is he good after taking that hit?

TE: Yeah. Yeah. So he's back in practice. He was back in practice yesterday.

Q: All the things you guys do pre snap with him (Cam Ross) all the different motions. How much does that impact when you don't when you don't have them out there?

TE: Well, that just means Kam Courtney now has to be has to be ready to go. And so so we multiple guys to be able to do that. Because you move guys around to play with the eyes of the defense, to put you in position to have additional numbers or better angles.

You do it to soften up coverage.

So there's intentionality with, it's not just, okay, let's just do it for the sake of doing it. There's a purpose behind why we do that.

Q: And then Jahmal (Edrine) kind of had a breakout performance on Saturday. What did you see from him?

TE: Just just his consistency throughout throughout that game, right?

It was good It was good to see him go up and play above the rim which which which I knew he was capable of. He was he was putting himself in position to to be able to make plays and I think he's just going to continue to to improve and so it was good to see him and and that's the thing You never know what's going to be available or what the defense is going to give you just have to take it and so that's why all of them have to be ready to go and then they have to be ready at any play throughout the course of the game, because you never know which play it's going to be that's going to make the big difference in the game.

Q: Coach, what are you most focused on as you prepare for UNC?

TE: Really just getting the guys to block out the noise and see the film for what it really is. I mean, that's contrary to what reports may be saying in the media. I mean that's a football team. That's that's getting better that has some some good personnel That's close to winning a game last week. So that's what I want the guys to focus on to just trust your eyes and and focus on your preparation.

Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter who we play. From here on out, it doesn't matter who we line up against. It's all about our preparation and how we approach the game so that we can be in the best physical, mental, and emotional state to perform at the end of the day. the highest level. And really challenging our guys to go chase our best game. Because that's really what it's about.

Each week, you're trying to play your best. And week after week.

And every game is going to have different circumstances and situations associated with it.

But still, at the end of the day, you're trying to get all three phases to be clicking at the same time so you can play your best game.

Q: Coach, it was obvious to me that your quarterback and tailback both got dinged up during the game. What are you doing this week to try to help them recover so that you can go down to (North) Carolina and win a big game?

TE: Yeah, so both of them banged up a little bit, but they were both out there in practice. We don't let the quarterbacks get hit in practice. We will probably modify Jamari's (Taylor) contact level, which we would do with anybody that's banged up. We might put them in a different color jersey and let them practice, but make sure that they don't take the contact.

And using every resource that we have downstairs in the training room to help these guys recover. But the biggest thing is, man, this is a warrior mentality sport, and your body's never going to feel good. The best your body feels is July 30th, before the first practice. And then after that, your body just, it feels bad. And you trick yourself in your mind and say, well, it don't feel too bad.

It don't feel that bad. I can figure it out. But the bye week helped a little bit with that. So hopefully they'll be able to bounce back because they had a little bit of time to recover prior to the game. But man, it's that time of the year. It's October, right?

And it's game number eight. and this is a physical... Gladiator sport where man you're going to have bumps and bruises. You're going to have to play with a little bit a little bit of pain But we'll be smart with with the amount of contact that those guys have and then we'll use all the resources that we have downstairs to help them, you know get to a place to where they feel as they as good as they possibly can.

Last week I showed him a clip of a of Dan Campbell talking to his team and you know, he basically said the same thing He's like boys a probably the best you're going to feel throughout the course of the season is around 85%. Very rarely will you ever feel 100 % at this point in the season, right? But you learn how to win at 85%. And it's kind of ironic too, because our winning grades is 85%. So we don't expect the guys to grade 100, right?

Like that's impossible. But we got to have 85% for us to be considered, for it to be considered a winning performance. And we're getting that out of a lot of guys. And then each Monday we talk about how can we get the collective team to where the team is at 85%, right, or better. And then we do that, then we have a chance to accomplish that best game that we're chasing.