

University of Virginia Football
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Head Coach Tony Elliott Weekly Press
Conference

Q: You got 14 guys on this list, when you started this process, did you have a target size for the class?

TONY ELLIOTT: *Great question. When we started, things were different than they are now. But we knew once we were able to put together the roster that we have right now, that we would possibly have to make some adjustments. And then also, in this new climate, of college football, figuring out what's the right balance. I believe three years ago, I had a picture in my mind of what the breakdown would be between high school and portal guys. And that has been adjusted just because of the nature of how things are moving in college football.*

So I'm really excited about the 14 that we have, with seven of them that'll be here in January. So half of our class will be mid-year enrollees. I think that's the largest number we've had as a staff. But we did lose one last night, so we were anticipating signing an additional individual, but that's kind of where we're headed. You're going to get some of those signing day things that come up, but I'm very excited about the 14 that we got.

Q: Do you have any idea, ballpark figure, of how many guys will be leaving the program?

TE: *Whew! Haven't started that process yet because of where we are in the season. I'm anticipating that we might have a little bit more leverage to get some guys to come back. We're also battling the 105 that we have to work to in the future, but not quite sure yet. And then again, don't know if some guys may come back. decide that they want to pursue another opportunity somewhere else. I think after we get through this week, we'll start having those conversations as to what the roster will look like in January.*

Q: A couple more guys from the state of Virginia. You have a pair of Richmond guys. You have a guy from 757. How much have you seen those relationships in those areas change? And even like this course of this season, how much have you seen those in roads?

TE: *Yeah, the reception is a lot different than maybe day one for the staff back when we took over. And each year, we've just made progress with building those relationships and then also showing the end product. I think that's the biggest thing. You can work as hard as you want building those relationships with the folks at the school, but until you can put the product on the field so that the young men, when they come, they can see it, they can touch it, they can feel it. I think you're seeing now where we got a little bit little bit more to sell than just a vision. It's really coming to life, so I'm excited about the six that we have.*

Seven, if you count the DMV, I want to treat the DMV like it's in-state. Unfortunately, we lost one from the DMV, so we potentially had eight in this class from that kind of in-state area that were that we're recruiting. But I'm pleased with the direction that we're headed. And I'm hopeful that, and we were in on a lot of other guys from the state of Virginia. And I think we made kind of the final cut with some of the top guys from the area. So I feel better about those conversations.

I'm excited about the ones that we do have, the evaluation of the guys. I'm excited about the different areas of the state where the guys are coming from. So you're starting to see that inside out mentality come to fruition.

Q: Alex Dunn, you guys were in on him very early. What kind of stood out about him when you guys started recruiting him?

TE: *Dynamic athlete. Very, very versatile. Great size, good length, fast, can run. A guy that really, that was a live evaluation. So Coach Rud*

(Rudzinski) had a chance to go there. and see him live, see him do some of his workouts and then watch him play and felt like, hey, this is a guy that kind of fits the mold of some of the other players in our previous classes that we've been able to identify as maybe some hidden gems.

And I think he's going to be, once he gets in our weight room with our nutrition and our training, I think we're going to see something out of him in the future.

Q: Last offseason, you added so many offensive linemen through the portal, I think seven in total. This year, you have three in the high school class. Do you still want to build the old line through the high school ranks, or is it going to be a mix?

TE: I think it's going to be a mixed, just being transparent. I would love to have a bunch of high school guys that you're developing. But you're seeing it all across college football. What's happening is, man, your depth really gets challenged, especially late in the season. And we all know that offensive line is the group that takes probably the longest to develop, just because it's such a big transition going from the high school game to the college game, from a size standpoint, speed of game, strength, knowledge, execution, all of that. So we want to continue to identify high school guys and have them developing, but also we're going to have to supplement with the portal.

Q: Big picture, the portal versus high school ranks. You said you've adjusted in what your view of that should be. Do you have what that needs to look like for UVA?

TE: Yeah, so if I'm putting a number on it like I did when I first got here, I don't know if I have the number. I'd say I'm probably now more 50 - 50 with just the philosophy. And I will say that this group of young men have really helped me make the transition, just because at first you were a little bit leery, not about the ability to

increase the numbers. on your roster, but just the chemistry the buy-in being able to create team and this team has been able to show that you can you can do that. However, I think if we look through college football, we can see that You got to get it right and it's not as easy to get it right as people think. So in order and what we learned that the reason that we were able to make the transition as a team is because we had a really, really good nucleus of guys that were fully bought into the program, understood what the core values are, understood how we were going to do things, and they were able to help the new guys make the transition.

So I think in order to do that, you're going to have to have high school guys. And then you may have to take some, some portal guys with multiple years so that they become embedded in your culture to help you make that transition. But I don't know what the, what the mix is. And to be honest with you, it's going to change from year to year, right? It may be a situation where you see that a, the high school route is, is heavy. this year, less portal, and it could be vice versa.

So I don't want to pigeonhole myself. That's what I've learned. Don't put myself in a corner from that standpoint. But I will say that this team and the group of guys that we brought in have helped me to say, you know what? OK, it can be done. But they've also kind of showed me what it looks like and what you've got to have in place in order to have a chance to make it work with so many new guys coming in the door.

Q: Who are the seven guys who are coming in January?

TE: Eli (Hamrick) will be here in January. Jae'Oyn (Williams) on, January. I think Dylan Cope, Dylan Biehl, Mikey Gildea, Dallas Brannan, and I believe Jayden Covil will be the guys that will be here this (January).

I believe that's correct.

Q: There's another signing period still, the traditional one in February. Are there guys you're still looking at, or do you think this will be the high school component?

TE: To be determined. Once we get through the season, evaluate the retention on the roster, we'll see what the numbers looks like. We'll also evaluate which guys with, I imagine with all the coaching changes, there'll be a bunch of guys that don't sign early. So we'll see what's available and see if there's a need, a fit before. So I don't know exactly. So it's not ruled out, but I won't know until we do the, the evaluation of our roster.

Q: You bring one quarterback into this class and Eli (Hamrick), what does the planning look like at that position? And is Chandler (Morris) looking at getting another year?

TE: Yeah, there's been some talks with Chandler of possibly, still that's to be determined. So not going to say if that's going to happen or not. So we're planning as if it's not. So we want to continue to bring in guys. I think the quarterback position, you're going to have to recruit that position every single year. Because you only play one guys are gonna want opportunity very difficult to sit in a long line. But really excited about Eli, you know, he was the first guy that committed in his class He was also the first one to get his his paperwork in one second after 7 a.m. J

ust kind of tells you what what kind of guy he is and still playing He's a finalist for Mr. Football in the state of North Carolina, super excited about his potential and his opportunity and what he what he can bring his skill set. And then also, we signed Jae (Jae'Oyn Williams) on as an athlete that'll start at quarterback and then see kind of kind of where that where that goes. But you got to recruit the quarterback position and then obviously with Chandler transitioning on you got Danny (Kaelin) that's here and then you brought in a to last year from the from the high school ranks and and excited about all those guys in

the future. And then you add Eli to the mix, you add Jae'Oyn to the mix, and kind of go from there.

Q: Obviously this season, a lot of success. Are you starting to see kind of the fruits of those labors as you look into future recruiting classes?

TE: I believe so. I'm very hopeful and optimistic that we'll be able to get in a conversation with some guys that maybe in the past when you said Virginia, it's like, okay, good academic school, but I'm focusing on bigger football. I think now with what we've experienced this season, in Scott Stadium with with the fans filling up the seats and creating an unbelievable environment to play in the success on the field man. You're in conversation for the postseason. So I think it's going to get us to the table and we started to see that before like you look at some of the top players in the state, that are leaving the state.

It wasn't that we weren't in a conversation. It just wasn't the right fit for them at the right time. So you started to see it before, and I'm hopeful that now it'll get you into some more conversations, and then maybe you're able to look outside the footprint a little bit for the right kind of guys that fit. That's what I'm hopeful for with this next recruiting class.

Q: You signed 19 high school seniors last year. I think that was right. Of that group, Corey Costner has played the most this season. Are there other guys in that group that you expect to kind of take that step forward next season in their second years?

TE: Oh, definitely. Corey being, was here mid - year. And I'm excited about all of them. And you're starting to see that now, especially where we are in the season with depth. We got some guys that are next in line.

Montino (Williams) is the first one that comes to mind. He's really starting to come on. All three

of the receivers (Dillon Newton-Short, Isaiah Robinson & Josiah Abdullah) have played at some point this season. And then you might see Josiah this week. We managed his redshirt situation, didn't want to burn it, but now he's back available, but he's played some snaps for us.

I'm excited about the young lineman. Jon Adair's next man up, right? He could be in the game very quickly. Even this weekend, if something were to happen, we could see him out there playing. Grayson Reid's gonna be just fine. So excited about him, excited about Cole (Geer), excited about Bjorn (Jurgensen).

Xay Davis has played a little bit and you're starting to see him. He's getting better every single week. Sichan (John) got to play this past weekend and it was more situation with the depth of D tackle We wanted to manage his redshirt year the right way, but he's gonna be he's gonna be he's gonna be really good in the future just don't want to leave anybody out, but You know Josiah Persinger is another one. That's that's right there Next man in line to go in the game and he's earned that even with the depth at the at the corner position (Lukas) Sanker gonna be Could be just fine. It was another situation.

Wanted to manage his redshirt. So some of these young guys, it was more trying to do right by them because the situation allowed where we didn't have to burn their redshirt year. But I'm excited about those guys and the future. And then you add these 14, and we'll see kind of what we need to supplement with.

And so excited about both of these last two classes.

Q: The last couple of years, you've had some freshman wide receivers contribute. You signed three guys this year. Can you talk a little bit about those guys? And do you think there's a chance any of those guys might be able to contribute?

TE: *Yeah, the receiver position, because you're 11 personnel, you're typically playing three at a time. They run a lot, so you need to have a lot of guys available and ready to go. We travel 10 every regular season. and then we dress 10 to 12 for home games. I anticipate that you'll see these young receivers.*

Dillon Cope is smooth, comes from a great high school program down there in the state of Alabama. Very developed for his age. I anticipate you'll see him pretty quickly. Damari Carter is a guy that I had my eye on for a long time. Started out watching him play basketball and saw just the leaping ability, the above the rim type of skills, and now you're starting to see that. And he's still playing. His team's still playing, competing for a state championship, coming from one of the best programs in the state of Virginia.

So I definitely think there. And then Jack Rhodes is a guy that kind of I think is a little bit under the radar, but came to camp, showed his skill set, coming from a really good program down there in the state of Georgia. I anticipate that he'll probably end up in a role like Eli (Wood), where he'll be a putty guy that can play all the positions and be ready to play early just because of his high football IQ and the background that he's coming from. So receiver is a position that I believe you'll see over the years across all rosters, where young guys are playing a little bit earlier. And then the development has changed too.

You do so much seven-on-seven, man they are constantly throwing the ball. The game is, I wouldn't say moving down, but you're seeing more high schools use a lot of the college principals and even some of the pro principals. So these guys are developed a lot earlier than maybe some of the other positions.

And it's not as big of a physical transition for these guys because they're playing out in space as opposed to when you get in the trenches, it's a little bit different inside the trenches.

Q: Derek Uran, the high rated guy, I think is your top rated guy in this class. What kind of stood out for him? I think it was, I can't remember if it was Rud (John Rudzinski) who went over to Cincinnati to watch him.

TE: What popped up in the film when you first saw him? Fast, violent, and plays everywhere. And he's a football player. He's a heat-seeking missile. He's got a skill set where he can play your field safety, right? But he's also got the toughness and the pedigree to play in the box if you need him to.

So he was just a very versatile athlete that when you saw him on film, it just popped. It's like, whoa, this kid plays fast and he's violent. And then you get a chance to meet him and you can see, man, he's a football player. He loves the game. He'll do whatever we ask him to do. Coming from a really, really good program that had a really, really good season.

So that's what stood out about Derek.

Q: You've had a lot of success with early enrollees, then coming in and having big roles later on the fall, Ethan Minter, Corey Cosner. When you look at those early enrollees, who's someone that you could kind of stand out that could possibly get that leap?

TE: I'm excited to see (Jayden) Covil when he gets here. He's a guy that I believe from a skill set standpoint is different than what we've been able to recruit in the last couple of cycles in that like he is a true, pure corner, right? I mean, everything that he does just says corner, right? Probably not the biggest guy, but man, he's physical. Very, very good feet, great instincts.

I'm excited to see him come in and compete. His team's still playing, chasing a state championship. So he knows what it takes at a high level. So I think he could be one. Don't wanna put that pressure on anybody, but he would be the one that I'm excited to see. Just

because, man, I think his skill set and gonna challenge the other guys in a good way, right?

Because he can do some things that is very naturally at that corner position.

Q: (JaySean) Richardson is the only D lineman in the class. What stood out about him? I guess, does he live up to the nickname, too, the bull?

TE: Oh, yeah. He does. I was out. I got a chance to go to one game this year, and it was to watch him play in Damari (Carter). And he was in the backfield all night.

But what stood out is he's a no-nonsense kind of guy. He's a team guy. He's all about the team. He's a loyal guy, been committed for a long time, didn't waver at all. You go watch him play, man, he's strong, but he's got good lateral quickness. He can get off of blocks and make plays.

So I'm excited to see when he gets here, because I think he'll have enough of the development strength wise to be able to go in there and mix it up early on. He's a competitor. He likes to compete coming from a really really good program in the state of Virginia. So I'm excited but the biggest thing was just how powerful he was and then in addition to the power the lateral quickness and the ability to change direction and go make some plays and

Q: Whenever I talked to some high school coaches in the Richmond area, they always mentioned Keith Gaither and Kevin Downing are around quite a bit. What how have those guys done in building relationships there and getting in the in the door there?

TE: Yeah, I think I think you see Just the impact of the guys from the Richmond area that already we talked about mentor Isaiah (Robinson). Then you got Dillon (Newton-Short), you got Montino (Williams), then you got two more coming from the Richmond area.

So they've done an outstanding job and I think it's what you mentioned, just the presence and being consistent and being able to articulate message of what the program's all about and being consistent.

And they've done a good job, too, of evaluating and making sure that we get the right fit for the guys that we need in the program.

Q: You mentioned Jae (Jae'Oyn) Williams on earlier starting at quarterback. How do you kind of balance that when you're recruiting him first on like what positions you want to see him at and then?

TE: When he gets here, how long do you kind of see how long a guy can? Yeah, it's it's up to him and and really what what what stood out is is we knew we were gonna take a running back and he came to camp and he worked out at quarterback and then he also worked out at running back in but showed enough to say, you know what, hey, you can compete at quarterback. And that's where we'll start, knowing that we didn't have an additional number at quarterback from a scholarship standpoint. So I made a decision to say, you know what, hey, I'll take that running back scholarship. And if it doesn't work, we know we can transition to running back. But it's really going to be up to him.

And so that's why it's important he gets here in January, so he can get a good start in that room. If he's the guy, then we'll figure it out. We'll go find us another person at running back. And if not, we'll transition him there and kind of see how he develops at that position. But he's such a dynamic athlete that you know that he'll be able to play somewhere.

And that's really what was our approach with him.

Q: Just going off that, how do you view the running back room right now, I guess, going forward?

TE: Yeah. X (Xavier Brown) with the possibility of being able to come back. You got Noah (Vaughn), and Noah was playing as good as anybody prior to injury. Really pleased with the progress that Xay (Davis) has made, and we know we're gonna have to supplement the room. And I think the guys know that, and we were able to do that this past season with the two that we had. in that balanced us out.

So that'll be the approach. And then you add potentially Jae on, but really thinking about the three that we got and then try to find an additional guy or two in the portal to balance that room out. But I think we all know what X is capable of, probably one of the most dynamic playmakers we had prior to injury and really saw the growth and development of Noah Vaughn.

So I think we're in good shape going forward, just need to finish it out between now and the time we start back in January. When you're talking about each player, one of the themes is this guy's still playing for postseason play, this guy's playing for postseason play.

Q: When you're recruiting personalities and when you're looking at high schools, how important is it to get guys who have that championship mentality or coming from high school programs, they already have that built in so you don't have to teach them when they get here?

TE: It's extremely important. It's part of the fit. That's what you're looking for. When you start talking about where we want to ultimately go as a program, you're talking about being consistent for postseason play. And it's a mindset.

And it's important to be able to get guys, and I think I counted it up, 10 of the 14 had eight or

more wins. And I think seven of those 10 were 10 plus wins within the high school ranks. And so that just tells you they know what it takes. They know what it looks like. They're gonna come in with high expectations of their own. They're probably gonna be more susceptible to wanting to be coached, to be challenged.

They're not gonna be afraid of competition.

It's just some of those things you can't teach and you also sometimes don't have as much time to teach.

And so that's why it's important that you get guys that wanna be around that environment. I think that's one of the biggest things. Where we've been able to change as a staff and as a program and even in the locker room is guys just transitioning that mindset and that shift into walking, talking, acting, eating, thinking, brushing teeth, everything like a winner, like a champion. And so it's important to recruit guys. And that's not to say that there's not guys that have that that are not on.

Teams that are playing in the postseason and so you evaluate each situation differently but I think it does make a difference if you're able to get guys that like I said five of our guys are still going to be playing four of them, chasing a state championship and then one playing for a national championship. That just brings something a little bit different to your locker room.

Q: How was balancing signing day and prepping for Saturday?

TE: *You know, we were talking about that in the staff meeting this morning. It's different just overall with signing day because it has changed with where college football is and so much emphasis on the portal. I think it's taking away a little bit from the signing day. It's a little bit better for coaches because you're not sitting there like sweating it out in front of a fax machine. And then coach coach (Carroll)*

McCrae will reminded me that it used to be where they were sitting outside somebody's house with three other cars parked out there waiting for the lights to come on to see who could be the first one to the door. Now I'm not I'm not advocating for that at all, but it's changed a little bit and I'm hopeful for all of our signees and I shot him a message last night, hopefully on their end, it's full of excitement. It's full of joy.

But now things have become so streamlined, guys are committed for so long, right? On our end, it's kind of another day of operation, excited in the morning, but usually by like eight o'clock, everybody's in and then you're kind of focused on the next. So hopefully for all of our signees out there, just man, I'm grateful for you. Thank you for believing in us and I hope this day is filled with joy and I reminded them that they've been working their whole life for this day. But for us, it's a little bit different just because there's so much more going on.

And then this week, I'd like to be in this situation every year where we're handling signing day and prepping for a game. But in terms of prep for the game, the staff, it's pretty status quo. The recruiting folks have been busy the last couple of weeks in preparation for this. There'll be some stuff that'll go out in celebration of this day, but it's a little bit different than years past. But it's kind of the new era that we're in.