

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Cavaliers

Chico Bennett Jr.

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Chico.

Q. Coach mentioned the guys you brought back on the defensive front. What is the expectation internally of how good this defensive line can be this year?

CHICO BENNETT JR.: Playing fast, fast and relentless. Obviously there's some things we left out on the table from a production standpoint, including myself.

I think with the older guys coming back, the presence that we have, especially for the younger guys coming in, man, it's important. It's imperative that we continue to stack off of what we did in the spring, transitioning from summer workouts into fall camp.

It's big. We're excited and we're ready.

Q. How do the close losses last year fuel you going forward?

CHICO BENNETT JR.: Obviously, it's frustrating. I haven't met anybody that's a good loser. Obviously it's a deal where you want to win.

I think we've learned that it doesn't matter what the other team does, it's more so about us. A lot of times it was four to five plays. That's what Coach Elliott has expressed several times, special during team meetings. When you really look at it, a game can be made in those three to four plays, all depending whether it's from special teams, offense or defense. A lot of times he emphasizes that special teams will win or lose a game.

We've had that unfortunately. I think that as we've transitioned into the spring, we understand that. It's helped a lot of guys say, Hey, we're close. Obviously we're tired of being close. Now it's time to turn that next phase, just winning, capitalizing on those mistakes.

Q. You're part of a military family. You lived in seven

states, played at another school before joining Virginia. What is it like for you to be somewhere for three years without having to move anywhere?

CHICO BENNETT JR.: It's been nice. It's funny, I've never been in a place more than two to three years. Afterwards I'm going to be transitioning on.

It's been great to be able to call Virginia home, being two hours away from my parents. It's great. I think just having the camaraderie of my teammates, then from the staff, just overall Virginia as a whole, Charlottesville, it's been nice.

Q. You've had the benefit of working under Chris Slade. Talk about that relationship and what you've learned from him.

CHICO BENNETT JR.: Man, I mean, I've learned that you got to stick to your fundamentals. You don't got to get too cute. Stick to what you know, stick to what you're good at. Obviously it will work in the end. Obviously just continue to be in shape, that's what he likes to emphasize. As long as you can run all day long, you'll be good.

Q. You and Kam are like the old men of the game now. What is your responsibility in coaching up and teaching the younger guys?

CHICO BENNETT JR.: I wouldn't say old, I would say seasoned. I try to say seasoned (smiling).

In terms of helping the younger guys develop, just tell them that, Hey, emphasis on taking care of your bodies, taking care of yourself from a mental and physical standpoint is big. Just making sure to maximize every opportunity that you get, especially from the rep count.

Obviously everybody wants to play, everybody wants to play a lot. Sometimes some other opportunities are presented a little bit earlier than others. But the biggest thing is, man, capitalize. Soak up all the information, be a sponge. Also when somebody is willing to help you with some tough love, Coach Elliott wants to emphasize hear the message not the tone. That's one of the biggest things. That will help progress you forward as a young guy.



You step into our shoes as a seasoned individual, you can basically pass it on to the next.

Q. You talk about that influence. Your family is full of athletes. How have they influenced you?

CHICO BENNETT JR.: They've helped me, obviously, they're gifted from the athlete side. But, I mean, from a mental standpoint helped me with adversity. Ups and downs, ebbs and flows, being able to handle the adversity is big. It's good how something can happen, just like that it can go bad. It's all about how do you handle that, how do you respond, how do you make sure to just take that next step forward, not just sit there in one space. Don't get complacent with success, strive always to continue to be great, yeah.

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