

# Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## Virginia Cavaliers

### Coach Tony Elliott

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Coach Elliott.

**Q. Age and experience of your offensive line and defensive line, how does it set you up for more success this year?**

TONY ELLIOTT: Great question.

If you followed the transition when I took over, the offensive line was really, really good prior to me arriving. There was a mass exodus. I think we started with six scholarship guys in that first spring. Trying to beef that up.

When you look at us today, I feel good about where our competitive depth is. We have a lot of competition. I'm excited about that. We were able to add a couple transfers on the offensive line that I think is going to help us down the stretch.

You're going to have a chance to talk to a couple of the veteran guys that decided to come back. On the D-line, we had three young men that had an opportunity to transition on, but they decided to come back. I believe that they came back because they believe in what we're doing, but more importantly they wanted to be a part of us making that transition.

From a competitive depth standpoint, we're much improved. We want to continue to see, can we use that to help us improve on Saturdays.

**Q. Going into year three, what have you accomplished with this program? What do you feel is still up there on the whiteboard to get done?**

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I think to answer that question in terms of what we've accomplished, the first thing for me was to lay a solid foundation. I think that when you look over the last two and a half years, and I say this very humbly, I don't know if there's a college football program that has been challenged more than the University of

Virginia. I think that has helped us to define what our character is and lay that foundation that I believe is going to allow us to build for the future.

Did I want it to happen necessarily the way that it's happened? No. But I understand everything happens for a reason. We were chosen for what we've been through at UVA. I believe that's allowed us to really lay the foundation the way it needed to be laid for the future.

In terms of things that are out there on the whiteboard. The list is long (smiling). I think you have to put it into perspective and be relative to time.

The first thing is, man, I want these guys to experience the fruit of their labor and go out and win some football games. They've been working extremely hard. They've had some adversity that they've had to overcome that they didn't choose. They've persevered, they've chosen to stick with it. Let's go win some football games and see, can we earn ourselves the right to be in the post-season.

We believe in the product that we have. We have an unbelievable academic opportunity. We're building something from a football perspective. We're in earshot from the nation's capital. You can be down at the beach in two hours, in the mountains in 45 minutes, Wine Country. There's all kinds of things that are special about the University of Virginia.

But we have to be present in the schools consistently building relationships and restoring relationships with the coaches. Then when we have the opportunity to have a young man from the state of Virginia come to the University of Virginia, we have to make sure we deliver on the experience that we're selling.

**Q. One of the matchups on your schedule this year is your first return back to Clemson. What would it mean to get a win in Clemson?**

TONY ELLIOTT: I think to get a win, any win, man, we're going to celebrate. We also understand how difficult it is to win football games at the college football level and in the ACC.



To go back to Death Valley, obviously being an alum, there's going to be some emotion prior to the game. Once the ball is kicked off, I have a responsibility to these young men sitting here and the men on the travel squad to make sure I take myself out of it and be the best I can be so these men can be successful and have an opportunity to earn victory on the field.

**Q. Earlier on the radio interview, you were talking about some of the basic fundamentals of what you were trying to accomplish. Apply those thoughts to your opening schedule. Much has been made of those first four or five games, how important they are to your season. Talk about that.**

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, I think the perspective and the mindset that we have to have is every game is the most important game on the schedule. You want to get off to a fast start. We talk about how we want to start each game. We want to get off to a fast start.

We want to make sure that we win the middle eight. That means that, man, we're peaking when we go into halftime, then we come out of halftime, strike first, finish strong in the fourth quarter.

We have an opportunity, we have a four-game stretch, then a break, a four-game stretch, then a break. In essence you have a first, second, third, fourth quarter. We have a chance to get off to a fast start.

There's some analogies that we can use, but every game is the most important game on the schedule. That's what I'm so proud of with these young men is because they're embracing that mentality. I can't wait for you to hear from them. It's one thing for me to say it, the best teams I've been around, I tell them all the time, are the ones led from the locker room up.

They understand in order for us to be successful we have to treat every game like it's a one-game season. We can look big picture and create some benchmarks for us throughout the year.

**Q. You talked about making this program the model for college football.**

TONY ELLIOTT: That's right.

**Q. Can you talk about as of right now where you're at with that vision, with this program, as well as what kind building blocks/hurdles have you had to go through to rebuild this program?**

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so the model program means that we want to set the example in everything that we do. It's college football, so there's two components. There's the academic piece, then there's the football piece.

Also what's not in that name is also there's a social piece, right? These guys got to develop socially so that they're prepared for the real world. Then they got to be developed professionally so they're prepared for the real world. It's a holistic approach to our job and what we do as a program. That's what we're working towards every single day.

To brag on these guys, the last two academic semesters, they set records at the University of Virginia. I want to say that again, they've set records academically at the University of Virginia. When I showed up and I told them that our goal was going to be a 3.0 GPA, people laughed. That hasn't been done here with the football program. Now these guys have consistently done that.

That's confirmation that we're buying into the concept of the model. I believe that's going to translate to success on the field. We've had some other hurdles off the field that we couldn't control, but we've embraced them.

What we've shown as a program is the character of the staff and the players and the commitment. In a situation like that, it would have been easy for a lot of people to jump ship and leave, say I want no parts of building it back up.

All of these young men have made the decision to be a part of that. So we're having success socially, man. Our guys are engaged in the community, right? They're embracing the concept of developing for life after football.

We're working in so many areas. I can't wait for it all to come together on the field because that's going to be the last piece of confirmation that we are heading in the right direction in terms of building the model.

**Q. You wanted to build an identity of running the football first. That identity hasn't come to fruition yet. How important is it to show progress in that regard?**

TONY ELLIOTT: It's critical 'cause in my experience, my personal experience as an offensive guy, the groups that I've been around that were at their best is when they were balanced, when they can run the ball.

What that means is you run the ball when you need to, you run the ball when you have to, right? It doesn't necessarily mean that you're 50/50 or your stats say you're completely balanced.



In order for us to really put stress on defenses, we got to make them respect every aspect of our offense. Hopefully, from the opening question, with some more continuity on the offensive line, some more experience, it will help the run game all the way around. That's also going to improve the passing game. Now you're putting more pressure on the defense as opposed to kind of reacting.

We want to be aggressive. We want to attack. We have to establish the run game. I'm excited about the opportunity we have this year because we're a year older, we're more experienced, have more depth on the offensive line. We've upgraded at tight end just in terms of the personnel that we have there which is important in the run game. But their ability in the pass game puts stress on defenses. You can easily formation to get into some more of your advantageous numbers and the angles from a run game standpoint.

It's imperative that we improve in the run game.

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