

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Tony Bennett

Taine Murray

Isaac McKneely

Men's Press Conference



Q. In today's current collegiate climate, I know that you're all about development with this program. Can you build, grow, and develop the way that you have for so long? Can you do that in this NIL, transfer portal world right now?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah. Well, I think, first, it's a time that is unprecedented in college athletics. No one is going to deny that. But there does need to be some regulations in place. I don't know if that's coming in three, four, five years.

You know, when I played in the NBA, you had the collective bargaining agreement. You had the owners, obviously, and you had the players come together and say, here's some guidelines for salary pool, for transfer regulations, for tampering, for involvement of agents and lawyers, all those kinds of things.

Until that happens, it's unforeseeable. It's kind of, people use the term, Wild Wild West. When we get some stability, and I think there are steps taken towards that, then I think there will be a level playing field.

The question you asked, can you build? I think you have to look at your model and adjust it a little bit. The way we're thinking with this team, you know, kind of in two-year increments. You probably can't say we're going to redshirt and build guys for the next -- have them for three, four, five years, but in two years.

For example, this team this year -- sorry, Taine, on this one, he's one of our only guys, and I think we have a chance to have a really nice team. Taine and Jalen Warley are two seniors or in their fourth year. Everyone else on the team is going to be back, and they're going to be together for two or three years. That's kind of how we put this team together in a two-year block.

Of course, at the end of the year, could guys be disgruntled? Could a guy or two leave? Perhaps. But I think if you can keep a core together for at least two years and look at it that way and then they develop, and the COVID year finally goes away. Let's be real. It's time.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Tony Bennett, please.

Q. Recently, in the month of August, you added Kyle Guy to your coaching staff, former 2019 standout for that championship team. What has he brought to the table in terms of coaching?

TONY BENNETT: Well, obviously he was in his prime really playing-wise. One of his desires, when we had an opening on our staff, was, you know, he and I kind of talked, and I said, You can make a ton of money. You can play. He said, No, first, I want to get my degree. He left after his third year, which is about the right stuff. He said, I really feel like my gift or where I'm at my best version of myself and when I'm mentoring.

You just look at even he was part of pro-ams and the stuff he did in his off-seasons playing. He said, I just would love a chance to come back and try to help the program that has helped me and obviously that he did wonderful things with and help these guys. We get him in practice, just ask these guys. When he gets going in practice, you remember, wow, he's so nice, he's so pleasant, and then all of a sudden you can just see something switch.

He helps us competition-wise, but he is doing a ton of stuff with skill development. Even for Taine and Isaac and the other guys, just for a guy who has been in that space who understands it, who has dealt with the ups and downs of college athletics, I think it's terrific.

Really cool to see him back. We have Isaiah Wilkins as well who played for me, Chase Coleman, three recent players that are part of our staff. They can relate with these younger guys better than an old guy like me, so it all works.



So this is the last year we will see guys that are in their seventh, sixth year, all that stuff. It's going to be mostly four-year players.

When you have a team that has continuity and are juniors and seniors, I think that's a way. Obviously you have to get it right with, in this climate, the character of your players, but put it together.

I think all those things will be how you build a program. But, everyone, that's the beauty of college sports, college basketball. You get to choose how you build your program, the style you play, the system you run, all those kinds of things. I think it starts for us in that regard.

Q. Just kind of putting both the questions together. Having former players on your staff and including all the new transfers and the turnover, do you think those former players drawing from their experience and your system helps get these younger guys caught up to speed quickly?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, without a doubt. I think those do, and I think our current players, Isaac and Taine who have been in the program now, Taine for four years, Isaac for three years. Then you talk about those players that are part of our staff that have been players in it for at least -- Kyle Guy, three years; Isaiah, four; Chase, five, or he's been there four years. That is significant. All that together with the new guys.

We try to really recruit the right kind of guys that will buy in and are excited about trying to continue to uplift this program. All that stuff comes together.

I think where it really is valuable -- and we can sit here and talk about being excited, but when you go through adversity, every season you're going to go through ups and downs. You're going to have losses. The truth serum is when you lose or adversity strikes, then will the new guy -- will they still stay together and be about us and not just about me?

It's right to have your own personal dreams and goals, but that's where your program gets tested. Every program. Whether you are fighting for a national championship run or just trying to make a tournament or be respectable. That's the test.

I think the newness of it is always a challenge. So I think you rely, like you said, on your guys who have been through it and speak to their hearts and their minds.

Q. I don't know how much you looked at your

schedule in its entirety. With expansion, obviously, it looks a lot different than it has before. I wanted to ask about your trip to the West in January. You're gone for a week. How much goes into that planning, and can it be a team bonding with just you guys out there for seven days playing Cal and Stanford?

TONY BENNETT: I joked with a few people. I know you guys have been here three days with the expansion. We've just added ten more teams to the league, so you will be here another five days. That's all right. I'm sure you're not tired of doing these interviews and this stuff.

Yeah, no, going out to the west, we're one of the teams -- I don't know how many are doing it, but having coached at Washington State and obviously played, coached at Cal and Stanford, it'll be good. We'll go out there and figure out a way. We come back, I think we have -- I don't even know the schedule. But we have -- SMU.

We have a challenging early season schedule that will help us reveal a lot of stuff. Traveling, these guys, the way we travel is obviously good, but it is a challenge with school.

It still is, last I checked, student-athlete, the education stuff matters, at least for now. That's the challenge. I think about that for other ones. Finding a way to keep these guys sharp. I mean, Taine is going to get his degree at the McIntire school of business, one of the best business schools in the world. That takes commitment. So we have to balance that.

You have to go out there, and we have an opportunity to play. You know, get back and challenge yourself that way. I think San Francisco is a beautiful city. It will be cool to see stuff, but you're out there, and it's obviously to play the games. Then you get back, and you just grind away.

Not ideal, the travel, but again, the way the conference aligned, it's what you have to do. There's a rotation what teams will go out there.

This year we're playing all three away.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. You can switch spots with Taine now. Questions for Taine, please.

Q. Taine, you've been a part of the program a long time now. What's it like to have to help assimilate all these new players? By my count I see four new guards, four new forwards, and maybe there's a walk-on or two that I'm not aware of. What's that like? Then, also, while you're doing that, how is the process of adjusting to the new up-tempo offense?



TAINÉ MURRAY: Yeah, it's been awesome to have so many new faces join our team. I think that we've added so many key pieces and lots of different varieties.

Yeah, it's been awesome to be able to help them, similar problems and struggles that I went through when I first came to the program.

Yeah, in terms of the second part of your question, yeah, it's been really exciting. Obviously changing pieces on offense, but also being cool to keep the foundation of what the program is built on, especially around the defense, taking good shots, and taking care of the ball.

Q. Coach talked about the fact that you're one of just a couple that are going into your fourth year here being a senior at Virginia. What makes you stay with this program, and what makes the leadership of Tony Bennett -- why does that stick out to you, and why do you feel like he's going to get the best out of you collegiately?

TAINÉ MURRAY: I've been super fortunate to be a part of this program. Super grateful that Coach Bennett gave me the opportunity to come and play for Virginia.

Obviously, I believe in everything that this program stands for in terms of off the court and on the court the way we play. Yeah, just really excited for this upcoming season, and hopefully will be able to use some of my experiences that I've had throughout the years in different positions to help not only myself but also my teammates to get better.

Q. One of the things Virginia preaches is academics first. You've been at the top with educational prowess. Can you talk about how important that is to you and why UVA fits that narrative so well?

TAINÉ MURRAY: Yeah. I would say it's important. Both my parents are in education, so it's something that played a factor in my decision.

Virginia has been an unreal experience in terms of my education as well. I've been super fortunate to receive the education that I have from the professors and the classmates that I go to school with each day.

Yeah, that's been a super rewarding process to go through as well off the court with basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Taine, thank you. You can switch spots with Isaac. Questions for Isaac.

Q. Coach was talking about Kyle Guy getting going in practice. Can you give us an insight into what it's like

watching him and as a three-point shooter yourself?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: It's been super special having Kyle back. I always watched him playing when I was getting recruited and all that, watched highlights of the national championship run. It's kind of surreal to have him back.

Like you said, he gets going in practice. We'll trash talk him a little bit just to try to get him going. Then he gets super competitive.

It's been really good for me and Taine's development just getting to go against him in practice and the individual workouts outside of practice. It's been really good. I'm thankful to have him back.

He's just an even better person. Aside from basketball, he's just a guy you can hang out with and talk to. He's been here, done that, so it's a good resource to have for sure.

Q. Now that Reece Beekman is no longer running down the court either dribbling or breaking open for a pass, what's it like now to be the returning star to lead this new team?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: Obviously we're going to miss Reece and Ryan and those other guys. Reece did so much for us on the defensive end as well as making plays on the offensive end. That's going to hurt for sure.

Me and Taine have kind of stepped into that leadership role, and that's what the coaches wanted us to do. We got good transfers as well. We have Jalen Warley, who is kind of like a Reece kind of player. Taller defender. One of the best passers I have ever played with.

It's just going to take a team effort. I don't think we're a one-star-studded team. I think we're a team of guys that can all contribute in some ways. I think we'll be a really good deep team. I think it's going to be a team effort to try and replace how good Reece was for sure.

Q. For you, who have been some of those mentors, the guys that you lean on either right now within this team itself or from before that you really feel like you can pull back to when you're growing as a leader this season?

ISAAC MCKNEELY: Yeah, I always was thankful my first year I had Reece and Kihei, the two guards my first year. I was doing everything I could to learn from them and hang out with them, just pick their brains. I was thankful for that.

Just guys like Taine, he is a year older than me and my



roommate now. Just someone I can talk to if times get rough or whatever. We have a lot of good really old veteran guys on this team. Him and Jalen have both played a lot of college basketball. I played a lot of college basketball.

Then the coaches, they're all business on the court, but off the court, if you need to talk, they're there for you. We have a lot of resources here at UVA, and I'm super thankful for all of them.

THE MODERATOR: UVA has an ACC-leading 96 wins in league home games over the last 11 years. What's it like defending the JPJ?

ISAAC McKNEELY: Yeah, JPJ, one of our coaches, Coach Williford, before every home game he comes in and says, It's our house. We don't lose at our house. That just pumps us up. The JPJ crowd is second to none. About 14,000, 15,000 in there every game. It gets us excited to play. When we get shot clock violation or hit a big shot, the crowd goes wild. We don't like to lose at home, so hopefully we can continue that in this upcoming season.

THE MODERATOR: Virginia, thank you. Good luck this season.

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