

# University of Virginia Football Media Conference

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## Coach Bronco Mendenhall

### Press Conference



BRONCO MENDENHALL: I'll open with a quick comment. BYU is near and dear to my heart. They gave me an opportunity to be a head coach. 13 years I was at Brigham Young University. My father played there. My brother played there. I lived close by.

Yeah, it's an amazing experience to now be able to return, but it's been six years, and I'm the coach of the University of Virginia and so thankful to be here and to continue to learn and grow and progress. I'll always be thankful for the opportunities I was given, for the institution - I'm talking about BYU - and for the unique set of values that align with my faith and the development of young people.

As you know, I have a son serving a mission currently, another one on his way out January 3rd, so I'll have two out at the same time, and my faith is really important to me, and to have been able to coach at a place where that is paramount, and a mission where you enter to learn and go forth to serve, that's meaningful.

Yeah, I would just to express gratitude for that experience, and that really allowed me to come to the University of Virginia and be ready, capable, and it's been one of the most amazing experiences of my life.

My wife and I, my kids, we love Charlottesville. We love this institution. We love everything about this journey we're on and all the hard work that it's taken to restore and build and return a program to what it once was and hopefully continue to add value in that way. I think that's what all of us want to do is make a difference that lasts, right, that's not specific only to us but that keeps going.

That to me is how you really gauge an effective leader that has a pure motive. There's plenty that are anxious to see a place thrive because they're there and kind of hopefully want it to follow when they're not. That doesn't make any sense to me.

I love the idea of doing the best I can for a place, for an institution, for a community, and it continues to thrive after, and that to me is kind of the most rewarding part.

Really proud of my team and how hard they battled and fought and scratched and clawed in another Coastal Division game, fourth in a row. It kept our home record as dominant, which is a core part of building a program, and the next part as you all know, we have two road wins back-to-back, and that's really important for this program to continue to grow and expand is to be able to travel and play well, regardless of where you go.

So that kind of frames this next test. But really fun being with my team again this morning. I'm so thankful for them, their effort, their allowing themselves to be coached by me, and that's the most long-winded probably start that I've ever had in my time here, that you guys in Charlottesville now.

I thought, man, why don't we just get it all out today on Monday and then you don't have to ask me anything else and there's no more time that'll be given and maybe I just limited question time, too, maybe that was the motive if you're kind of looking behind the scenes.

**Q. You're playing a game -- this will probably be the latest game you've ever played as UVA's coach. It's in a different part of the country where altitude will be a factor. Do you change anything in terms of your planning and your practice this week because of those factors?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: No, and like on the aircraft, you're supposed to put your own mask on first before you help others, so if I come out of the tunnel with a mask on, then you'll know that I need more help breathing.

No, the more you make of it, the more it is something. To be clear, I'm normally in bed at 9:30, so yeah, I'm going to have to work my sleep schedule a little bit this week.

**Q. You've given us hints of you being an emotional guy; what's it going to be like, presumably, you'll get a warm welcome there. Is that going to knock you off your feet a little bit, or is that going to take your focus away a little bit, that emotional part of it?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: No, I've been through all the emotions. I've had six years to go through the emotions. My job is to do the very best that I can for my team and hopefully be an example and teach principles and guidelines that will help these kids in their lives.

I really can't control what kind of welcome I do or don't receive, but what I can express is gratitude. That's what I intend to do, and then do the very best I can to prepare my team so they can have success and continue on the goals that we have for this team and this program this year.

**Q. What kind of indication is it of the progress you guys are making at Virginia that after you win a game, guys are complaining and unhappy with how the ending went?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, it's a great sign, and I didn't hear anyone even talk about being bowl eligible for five times in six years. I remember my second year the fans rushed the field when we got our sixth win. Yeah, it's gratifying.

I have high standards for them. I think it's the greatest gift I can give. There's great research on that, and so many times when things get difficult, it's to lower expectations and to be sympathetic and empathetic, and I actually believe the opposite is you keep asking for more, and that helps people and gives them an occasion to rise to.

This is for real. One of the officials were close and it was like at the three-minute mark and the team was getting ready to onside that we were just playing, and I'm like, man, I wish the clock could run out so we could all just go home. Little did I know the last three minutes would be like a whole other game.

Yeah, my team learned, I learned, and yeah, it's never over. So I let my guard down for a second. I hope it didn't influence the team, but I'm not perfect, but I'm glad, because they want to play great football, and they want to keep improving, and they want to do it from start to finish.

If there's things they were frustrated about because they didn't play quite the way they wanted to, I'll take it, especially when they win.

**Q. Is teams like every week we talk about a young defender who is making some key moments, some key plays. I saw D'Sean Perry on that last play of the game with some nice pressure on Sims. Can you talk about his development and how far he's come?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Wow. I pointed that out to the team this morning actually when I was doing our film

review, and his journey has not been easy, and he's been what we call on our victory team, just developing and grinding and training early and extra and with no focus or spotlight on himself whatsoever, and he got an opportunity earned, an opportunity to play. He's on one side, and Mike Green, another one-year is on the other, and West Weeks, another first-year, they're all out there at the same time in a critical moment of the game. That's really fun to see the development of young people.

Man, when they're being developed in kind of those crescendo moments where it's just so impactful and they rise to the occasion, those are building blocks for the future. I pointed them out this morning, and he was all smiles.

I also acknowledged as I pointed out to the team, there's been nothing given to him, and it's been really difficult. He sighed and smiled, and we have a pretty simple saying here that playing is more fun than watching, and he validated that hypothesis that actually it is, playing is more fun than watching.

**Q. Kind of building from that, how happy are you that you're seeing this depth at several positions kind of growing as the season goes on?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Well, it's one of the signs that your program is growing, and when you can, especially, man, after week eight or going into week nine, and your special teams hold, meaning there's enough players that continue to rotate through and maybe your sub package is what your specialty package is, if you lose a player as we lost Noah and we lost Mandy in that game for the game, and there's others that need to step up, that they can, and without significant scheme changes.

It's a sign of just program health, and that takes time.

**Q. I know you're not going to give back any of these points that you guys are piling up, but are you a guy who would rather win 13-7 than 45-42, or am I misreading you?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: No, I'd rather win 13-6, actually.

**Q. Two field goals?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, but really, no, to be clear, there are so many things that I've learned over time, and it does take time, and when I was the defensive coordinator and calling plays and doing all that, I was much more tilted that way.



What I know right now is wins are hard to get, and to not stop, pause and celebrate every one that you get and earn and celebrate appropriately would be a giant mistake. I appreciate my team and how hard they work, and sometimes it's not perfect. Most of the time it's not. And in those rare occasions where we might win 7-3 or 7-0 and it's a defensive touchdown that we score on, yeah, I'll relish those moments, but in today's world of college football, those are few and far between.

**Q. Nick Jackson framed it for me well that maybe it's less about defense and more about toughness, that you expect a toughness from the offense, as well. Do you see that in your offense?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Oh, yeah. And man, he's articulated it better than I could. Yeah, I acknowledge the outcome, and it's the way I keep my job. It's a results-oriented business, but that's not where my focus is. I love the every-play effort and finish and willingness of a team to just learn to do something from start to finish.

I spend most of my time in team meetings highlighting and pointing out that wherever I see it, and we see it from receivers downfield, we see it from offensive linemen, we see it from defensive players, see it from our quarterback, see it from our long snapper, and it's one of the best gifts I can help players with is learning grit and resiliency and determination and staying power, because man, those challenges are going to come, and just got to keep going. So I try to coach that through the game of football the best that I can. I think Nick articulated that really well.

**Q. You talked a little bit about staff retention before the beginning of the season. When you go back and you think about asking these coaches but also their families to come with you to Virginia, what were those conversations like?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Wow, man, we're having to go back a long ways. I haven't gone back for a long time, and I guess I will today, but I'm not going to do it again.

I invited 14 families or people, and all 14 accepted, and we have, from the statistics given me, the most stable staff in college football, and at that time we had the most little kids in college football, so it was the giant reverse Lewis and Clark migration. Man, there were some hard transitions. Young moms with little kids and their moms, the moms' moms are still back in Provo, and that's tough because that's the babysitter, and that's a huge thing.

There hasn't been anything easy, but wow, has it galvanized our relationships. Myself and my staff were really close before, but not like this, and making this move

together, and then in my faith, right, a local congregation is called a ward, and all but one of my staff members is in the same ward, so we're teaching Sunday school classes to the others' little kids and primary and I'm teaching adults in gospel doctrine, which is the adult thing, and they're the same guys I'm working with and their wives. It is absolutely transformed our relationships in a way that I couldn't ever have imagined.

I'm thankful they all came. I have a pretty simple principle, as you guys know, that I just won't work with anyone I don't like. These are my friends, and I think that's pretty rare in college football, that you get to work with people that you are friends with, and I consider myself lucky.

**Q. To ask you to go back one more time --**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: You just don't stop, will you?

**Q. This is different. It's about Wayne. You offered Wayne, he committed to BYU. What did you see from him that made you believe that he could make the step from BYU to come out with you to Virginia, as well?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, so I love amazing people, and Wayne was from a great high school in Hawai'i, Punahou High School, which is a private school, and reflects education and character and great people as well as good football. Yeah, so I offered Wayne while I was the coach at BYU, and then he's serving a mission in Nicaragua, and while he's doing that, myself and our staff leave to Virginia.

I don't know exactly then the details of when he returned and BYU's status, but he opted and wanted to come to Virginia, which I was so thankful for, and so it was Nicaragua to Charlottesville, and man, has he just been all I hope he would be, and the glue and the anchor that just gives another example of what an amazing young person looks like in the classroom and in the community, on the field and on Sundays.

That impact, rather than being one of many in Provo, it's a different perspective that he's adding here in Charlottesville that I'm really appreciative of, to go with so many others that are so diverse in their beliefs but doing the same thing.

**Q. I was going to ask about that different perspective because like you said, he's one of many out there, but it's pretty unique over here in Charlottesville.**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: It is, and like in the world of my faith and my belief, it's called the mission field, when you're just not surrounded by like beliefs, and wow, has that transformed our families and made us just appreciate

everything so much more. I relish and prefer this stage of my life where we are and what we're doing, and I think Wayne does, as well.

On Sundays he actually attends -- if it's a smaller congregation than a ward it's called a branch. A ward would be like the tree and the branch is part of it, and he actually attends the Spanish branch because he speaks Spanish from his mission. And so every Sunday he's attending services in Spanish and serving there, which is -- wow, it's pretty remarkable. He's doing that -- that's what he chose.

**Q. How long has this game been in the works, and who are some of the people who pushed for it from the beginning?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, I don't know. I do remember when I was announced leaving BYU that I wouldn't play this game. I didn't know how to make it any clearer, but that didn't happen, and I just learned I'm not the one that decides. So I don't know all the workings of it, but that's -- I certainly know now in the world of college football, right, the resources and revenue drives so much of it, entertainment drives so much of it, and whatever happened contractually, I wasn't aware.

I wish I could talk more to it, but I made my stance early on clear, but here we are, and that's okay.

**Q. It sounds like you're comfortable with it now.**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: I am, and it's much better -- as comfortable as I can be, right, but I'm much better now because very few, if any, players are left. Brigham Young University's quarterback Jaren Hall, I recruited him, but there's very few others on the roster that I remember, and that makes it easier. Not easy but easier.

**Q. Along the lines of the best leaders who want the institutions they leave to thrive even after they have left, what have been your observations about this BYU team as you've studied them and the fact that they were 11-1 last year under Coach Sitake and are now headed to a Power Five conference?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: I'm thrilled. I think it's awesome. There's always learnings and uncovering and discoveries like what happened with me here and you kind of get the right staff and you adapt and acclimate, and I think that most likely happened with Kalani as he took over at BYU because you can't know until you're there. To have the year they had through the pandemic, man, that was tough, and to put a schedule together that they did, and then to have success was awesome.

Man, this -- I was probably the most aggressive in the push for the Big 12 in my time, and probably told to tone it down a little at some point, but I thought it would be the exact right fit, the exact right match, an besides planting seeds, I was trying to harvest seeds at the same time.

I'm glad that there has been some realignment and that BYU is acknowledged, and I think it's great for the institution. I think it's good for college football, and man, did I want that to happen bad when I was there, and to see it finally come to fruition, yeah, pretty cool.

**Q. I know Cutter went to Uruguay on his mission. Where have your other sons gone?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, this is a trivia question. So my son Raeder was sent to Layton, Utah, so we come this way and he's sent back there. And then Breaker, my next son, just got his call. Pocatello, Idaho. So they're one mission apart. So Holly and I and all of these folks and then Coach Atuaia's son Ty is in the North Salt Lake mission.

We come this way and the church sent all of our kids back to where we came from, which is pretty cool. But yeah, Breaker just got his call, Pocatello, Idaho, so he'll be leaving January 3rd. So yeah, there you go.

By the way, my kids would rather me not ever mention their names in any of this stuff, so the way you'll make them so embarrassed is if you talk about them. My hands are washed of this. I just was answering the question.

**Q. With all the tweaks you've made defensively this year scheme-wise and some of the other things, how much have you maybe had to sacrifice pressure on the quarterback to accomplish some of the other things you were hoping to accomplish with those tweaks?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, it's been acknowledged and it is part of it. That doesn't mean that we didn't want both or don't want both. But there was some yards per play, and there were some points per game, and there was some long-term use of just our current personnel that seemed necessary, and lots of it to me is working according to plan, not as consistently as we all would hope currently, but I like so much of what's happening.

Yeah, I believe it was the right move, but it certainly isn't -- we're not having the effect on the quarterback that we're known for, and so it'll come over time.

**Q. How do you develop that -- is it just a matter of guys continuing to develop and get better?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: It is. There's schematic -- there's getting opponents to 3rd and predictable, right, so you can kind of dial that in, and then there's adjustment just to each opponent and playing within the scheme and working on the mastery that it takes.

Yeah, it's step by step, but I like the trajectory. Again, we're not consistent yet. We will be at some point. But I like the direction.

**Q. Outside of the desire to get out of Scott Stadium a little early on Saturday and get home, all jokes aside, what have you noticed looking back on the film from those onside kicks that Georgia Tech was able to complete and steps that you guys are looking to take to make sure that doesn't happen again?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, really good. So it's all -- I'm responsible for all of that, right, everything that happens on the field, and man, Georgia Tech did a really nice job of executing, and the way they aligned, our alignment didn't match. We got out-leveraged, and we have assignments that are really clear, and a little bit of miscommunication that happened by the same two players back-to-back, and that's all coaching, which is me.

I have to make it clearer, get them aligned more effectively, but really players play as they're prepared, so we just haven't put enough emphasis as to how many onside kicks will you defend, and we've basically practiced it probably in relation to how many we'll defend, and that showed. So I need to put more emphasis on it.

When I do, our players will respond. That's on me, it's not on them, and it's correctable, so we'll get the personnel in the right place. We'll get our leverage and alignment right. We'll get our communication right. I just need to give it more emphasis, which I did not and had not prior to that game.

**Q. Brennan needs, I think, 319 yards to set the single-season passing record at Virginia. How rewarding has it been to have all of his hard work validated with numbers that everyone can see?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, I'm going to go back farther. Kurt Benkert was the quarterback that we started with here at UVA as a transfer, and he set all kinds of passing records and helped us, and he's still in the NFL.

Then we chose Bryce Perkins that not many other people wanted, and then he broke records and takes us to the Orange Bowl and we win the Coastal championship, so he breaks Kurt's records and he's still in the NFL.

Now here comes Brennan. Robert Anae and Jason Beck have done a masterful job with this offense and with quarterback development, and so when you mention "all this work," this is six years' worth of work. Brennan is just the next, and yeah, he's worked really hard, but this is now the third quarterback in a row, and there's a strong string of quarterback development prior to us arriving here, so I'm really lucky with what Robert and Jason are doing, and our players are lucky, and Brennan is -- yeah, he's doing an amazing job.

I don't think there's a better quarterback in our league, and I can't speak to the country because I don't see everybody play, but man, I'm impressed with him.

**Q. After the game Jeff Collins was saying how they were trying to throw a lot of different covers at Brennan to kind of mix him up. I'm curious, what did you see in that presentation and how did Brennan respond? Also, one thing that Tech has done really well defensively is create fumbles, strip out balls, and you guys had had some trouble in that area also but you didn't put the ball on the ground once. What can you say about that, and I imagine it was a point of emphasis?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Yeah, so I was impressed with Tech's defense going in, and that was what I shared with our offense is I kind of serve as a defensive analyst for our offense and kind of tell them what I see and help their preparation. I like their scheme. I like their personnel. I like the way they play. Yeah, they gave us a lot.

Brennan was poised. The protection was strong. Our plan was solid. He made great decisions, and as you know, he can make every throw.

Regardless of the number of looks, he just was poised, and our receivers and quarterbacks were adjusting at the same time to do the right thing, and then when our players had the ball in their hands, they secured it well, and I think they did a really nice job. That usually comes through preparation. So I just was really impressed.

**Q. I wanted to ask about the relationships. I know the game itself is obviously the most important thing, but to come out and see all of your -- a couple former players in Preston Hadley and Harvey Unga on the other side, plus all the support staff, guys like Greg and people you worked with for so long. Even though it has been a few years, what do you expect from that?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: You know, I don't have expectations, and I don't think that -- it's a weird space

because we're arriving to play a football game, and I am charged with helping my current team. Everyone is doing the same thing.

Yeah, to expect or want more than that, I don't. I just think that's not a controllable thing. To make more of that or spend more time or energy or effort into that, this is just about two teams trying to play well and to have great seasons, and anything more than that, even though I know that's probably a topic, it just -- I can't say it can't be acknowledged, but any acknowledgment it gives kind of takes away from the other part, and that really is paramount. I'm trying to keep the focus there, and will.

**Q. How is the biking out there? Do I need to make a trip to Charlottesville to go do some biking?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: My staff, so there are mountain bikes in almost every office in mud, which the cleaning crew doesn't like. We actually carry them in, but there's a little residue that lasts. Yeah, it's worth it.

It's different, not so much incline, but the roots here that cross the trails, and man, if it rains, it's slippery. It's kind of treacherous, and it's clay, so it's muddy. Yeah, this is probably the only press conference talking about mountain biking in Power Five football today.

**Q. Of the quarterbacks you had at BYU, who's most similar to Brennan Armstrong?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Hmm. Man, I'd kind of have to qualify it. Max Hall probably in terms of personality and temperament and style. It's never fair, right, because it's in no way a complete and accurate comparison. But since the question was asked, that's probably the closest one. That would be a compliment to both because, man, they're both really good players.

**Q. You sort of addressed it a little bit earlier, but what was maybe the biggest softening factor, if you want to call it that, that kind of puts you more at ease coming back to Provo and playing this game?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: Just time. I can't say that I'm at ease, but once it was clear that the game was going to be played early on, then yeah, it was going to be played. It's six years, and that time is -- it adds perspective, and it also sometimes has your heart grow fonder, but also at times it allows separation. Sometimes it just takes time.

**Q. When you left, you told me that you recommended your successor, who you would like to see to Tom Holmoe. You wouldn't tell me who that was. Will you tell me now?**

BRONCO MENDENHALL: That doesn't sound like me at all, does it, that relationship. No, I won't. But what I will say is that, yeah, it's fun to see Kalani as a first-time head coach as a defensive coordinator promoted. There's a similar path there. So yeah, it's been fun to watch.

I can't say that I watch closely. I haven't seen a BYU game like on TV or another one on film until this week. This is an all-encompassing position that I have, that any of us have, and that's the loyalty and what the job requires.

In answer to your question, no, I won't say, but in terms of -- yeah, BYU has earned their way in after all these years into a Power Five conference. I remember, right, the University of Utah leaving to the Pac-12 and TCU going to the Big 12, and we chose to go independent, and I remember at that time saying, this is not sustainable, and I was kind of doing my own personal lobbying behind the scenes for the Big 12, and again, to see that happen and the qualification happen for that is really fun.

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