

University of Virginia Athletics Media Conference

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Carla Williams

Press Conference



JIM DAVES: I'm going to let Carla open with a couple remarks, then we'll go around for questions.

CARLA WILLIAMS: First of all, thanks everyone for being here on this beautiful day. It's an awesome day. I mean, for a lot of reasons. Of course, groundbreaking for the facility. We're extremely excited for that. It's been a long time coming - longer for others than me. But we're really excited about it.

My son, today is his birthday, so he turns 18 today. He graduates from high school tomorrow. And he's coming to UVA. That's another reason why today is really, really special to me.

I am excited about the groundbreaking this afternoon. I'm excited for our coaches. I'm excited for our staff. I'm excited for our players, former players, former coaches, former administrators. Just really excited.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about this year, what has happened, because we've had a great year. It's been a struggle the last couple of years because of everything that's happened.

For swim-dive to win their second national championship in a row was really special. For men's tennis to win a national championship was remarkable. That was a lot of fun. That was a lot of fun. Their fifth in 10 years, which is crazy. But I was very happy for Todd, for Andres, for their staffs, for the student-athletes, for that program, for both programs. Great, great year in the pool, great year on the tennis courts.

For swim-dive, that was a lot of fun, too. A lot of individual national champions, American records, great students. But really across the board. We had a great fall, too. Women's soccer did really well. Field hockey. I think both made it to the Sweet 16.

Being able to finish up the spring strong is really important for us. We obviously have some teams still competing, so we're looking forward to closing out the year with them.

Academically we had a great year as well, which is always really important. Highlight for us is that 150 student-athletes left the university with a degree this year. That's why we're here. So for 150 of our students to walk out of here with a degree this year, it makes my heart warm because that's why I do college athletics. Great year in the classroom. Some great team and individual performances.

Really excited about the momentum finishing up this year strong and the momentum going into next year. Of course, there's a lot happening in college athletics. I'll leave that to your questions.

I'll stop there.

Q. As you mentioned, this day has been a long time coming. Three and a half years since the master plan was approved. How much was your patience tested, including a global pandemic? At what point did you know you would be able to break ground in the spring and have it ready in '24?

CARLA WILLIAMS: So the approval was three and a half years ago, but we started working on it literally day two. My second day here we took a tour of the facilities and saw the need, not just the need for football but the need for our Olympic sports was profound. That's when we started.

I always believed it would happen because that's just kind of the person that I am. I believe that if we had the right people, the right plan, the right vision, that it would happen.

Has it taken longer than I thought? No. I mean, these things take time. So I think we're right on track. A lot of people to thank.

Did I know it was going to happen and finish in 2024? No. But I hope that it will be done as soon as possible, and I think that's where we are.

Q. Did you have a price tag for the facilities? Maybe shed some light on a recovery room for optimal performance. What is in a recovery room?



CARLA WILLIAMS: For you and I, a bed probably to sleep (smiling).

Obviously it's a work in progress, but we're happy to get the construction started here now. It's 90,000 square feet. It's an \$80 million facility. We've done I think an exceptional job during these trying times to have a project of this magnitude, to bring it to a groundbreaking. So we're excited about that.

It is not flashy, but it is exactly what we need to compete for championships. That's what we wanted. You'll have everything that it should have. State-of-the-art sports medicine, which includes everything: strength and conditioning, coaches' offices, nutrition, the technology to help our players and coaches prepare, that's huge nowadays.

As all of you guys know, the technology is a big part of what they do. Having a place that's dedicated to helping our coaches prepare our players to compete, we didn't really have that. It will be really important to have it now.

Q. When you looked at the facilities, what you wanted to be built, did you have an influence on other facilities you toured? How much influence did Tony have, as well?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I've been in this industry for 30 years, and I love touring other facilities and campuses, going to lots of different events. Wherever I go, I tour the facility. I was just at the University of Illinois for men's tennis. I toured their facilities. I just love that because it's good to benchmark and kind of see what's happening across the country.

There wasn't one particular facility that we said our facility needs to be modeled after this. But we did try to take the best of what we thought was a good thing at different facilities.

What was the second part of your question?

Q. Tony.

CARLA WILLIAMS: Coach Elliott. We were not finished when we hired him, so he had a chance to look at the schematic designs and have some influence in that. And he did. There were some small changes, not many, but there were some small changes that we made to accommodate what he thought was really important.

Primarily nutrition is really important to him, so we added some nutrition space and redesigned some things there.

Q. How much does the success you guys had in so-called non-revenue sports impact the giving to something like this project?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Well, the master plan includes all our Olympic sports. They are going to be direct beneficiaries. The donors that care about our Olympic sports have an opportunity to give to the master plan, and they have given, and we hope they continue to give because that's a huge part of what's next.

I think the success, having a broad based successful athletics program, helps everyone. The success in Olympic sports creates enthusiasm for folks that give to football. The success in football helps for those donors who want to give to the Olympic sports or to scholarships. I think it all works hand-in-hand.

It's great for the department. Obviously it's been a tough two years for everybody in college athletics. So the success... It's good for me to see our head coaches have so much joy when our other coaches, their colleagues, win championships. That's been fun to watch.

Q. 50 year anniversary, how much do you think Title IX maybe saved some women's sports? A lot of schools had to cut sports for financial reasons. How much do you think Title IX factored into how they made those decisions?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, so with the anniversary coming up, it's important to a lot of us, not just women, in our industry. It's important across the board.

I'm not sitting here but for Title IX. There isn't a scholarship for me to have at the University of Georgia but for Title IX and the generosity of donors. If I don't have that experience, I'm certainly not here.

From a very personal standpoint, I understand the benefits of Title IX. That's really important to me. You can ask anyone on our staff, they will tell you, because leadership starts at the top, is gender equity important? Is Title IX important? It's very important.

I love seeing all of the celebrations, celebrations of the anniversary, across the country. I think it's really important. I've got two daughters and a son. It's just as important that my son see those celebrations as my daughters because that's how we change moving forward.

Q. Do you think it factored into cuts?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I think probably, but that's been true



since the law was enacted. The law is meant to shape decision making and behavior, and it has done that. I think it will continue to do that.

Q. Is there any extra excitement after seeing success that the softball team has had? Opening that new facility, does that add any extra excitement knowing how much facilities matter?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, we talk about it all the time. It's like: build it and they will come.

The recruiting has improved. It was standing room only for a lot of our games at softball. The best year in 12 years. Had an opportunity to go to post-season, which is always valuable when you're building a program.

Joe did a tremendous job in a difficult situation prior to the new facility. Then having the new facility and the location of the new facility, I think it's just as important because we get the synergy from baseball and lacrosse and track.

So, yes, whenever any of our teams do well, whenever any of our coaches have success, all of us celebrate it.

Q. Four years ago, you sat with us and said we have a structural (indiscernible) in football. You meant facilities but also support staff. Where do you think you are in addressing or even solving that structural (indiscernible)?

CARLA WILLIAMS: It's been my focus this last four years. So I feel really good about where we are.

Obviously with the groundbreaking today, that's a huge step. We started an emergency fund not long after I got here for football, and we were able to add positions for strength and conditioning, for recruiting, for nutrition. All of those things are paying dividends now.

The structure is being repaired. We're not there. We still have a long way to go. But we have made great strides in making sure that we have a healthy football program. All of us, we know the benefits of a healthy football program.

Q. Does it add some difficulty funding the facilities when you have such a broad-based program?

CARLA WILLIAMS: So I think it's more difficult and a testament to the people that came before me how well this athletic department has done with so many sports. That's hard to do. It is hard to win championships - not just ACC championships but national championships across multiple sports.

It's a great thing. We just talked about Title IX. We're champions of opportunity, so there are opportunities to be had for all of our student-athletes. They take full advantage of it. They compete hard in the classroom and their sport.

For us, we see it as a strength because our alums, our donors, love a broad-based, successful athletics program. We just have to add football into that equation.

Q. Where do you think stand with fundraising for the Olympic sports center? Do you have a target date for groundbreaking and completion of it? Is there a name for the football center?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Okay, I'll try to remember all those (smiling).

So ideally we will break ground for the Olympic sports complex in spring of '23 with an anticipated completion spring of '25. Ideally that's what we're shooting for, that's what we're working toward.

I think you asked about naming opportunities?

Q. Yes.

CARLA WILLIAMS: Not yet. We've got a lot of potential there, but not yet.

Q. On the website looks like people have reserved some, but you can put your name on a lot of different things. How big a part of fundraising is it for a donor to have something named for them? What is the structure of that?

CARLA WILLIAMS: We try to meet our donors wherever they are, appeal to whatever they want to do. Some of them like naming opportunities and some do not.

We've had a lot of engagement with those naming opportunities, and we'll continue that. It will grow. As we complete design for the Olympic sports complex, there will be other naming opportunities that we'll be able to add to the menu.

It's not a focal point, but it is important. It's a focal point if you name a building, right? But it is very important because it's very meaningful to donors. It's across different levels.

If you can name something for giving what you can give, that's really important.

Q. Does somebody come to you and say, I want the



linebackers' room or do they give a donation and...

CARLA WILLIAMS: Both ways. We have people who have an affinity for strength and conditioning or for positions. So, yeah, they want to give, so they check out the menu and they pick one.

But we also have donors who have just given. We've gone to them and have said to them, You've given this amount, would you like to have this named after you? So it happens both ways.

Q. How far do you feel you lag behind the rest of the conference in facilities? Can you give us an update on how much more money you have to raise to hit the goal?

CARLA WILLIAMS: So we've met our fundraising goal for the football facility, not for the master plan in total, because it's huge. There's a lot to do there.

It was last August that Bronco said we were dead last in the ACC in our facilities. I've kept him abreast of the progress, because he's interested, because he cares.

So we are, with the completion of this facility, having made the enhancements we've already made from a personnel standpoint, which was huge, and that helped. We're in a much, much better place.

I think one of the great things about UVA and one of the things that quite frankly attracted me to UVA is that every sport has the university to sell and recruiting. You can never underestimate the value of a UVA degree, education. All of our coaches use that. I use that.

So the facilities will enhance that. The personnel additions will enhance that. So we're on our way. We've got a lot to do because no one's standing still.

Q. Name, image and likeness, how do you feel things have gone with regards to the development of programs with that? Have you noticed any changes with regards to donations?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, the question about limited dollars, where do donors put those dollars, was a part of the discussion from the very beginning three years ago. We haven't seen it. We haven't seen a problem.

I think the donors are learning a lot about what NIL means and the impact it has on athletics programs. They know the impact that facilities have. They know scholarships are important. We're beginning to talk a lot about operational support.

The great thing about it is they get to pick. We haven't had any issues. It's early in the process, but we haven't had any issues with it.

Q. Once you're past the Olympic sports complex, what is on your radar?

CARLA WILLIAMS: There's maintenance and then there's renovation and then there's new construction. Maintenance is ongoing. We've got a lot of that to do as well, including at Scott Stadium, including at baseball. Even though there's a new expansion, there's a part that's been there for quite a while. The maintenance part of it is really, really important.

Renovation is important. We'll be renovating parts of McCue to benefit all of our student-athletes, every sport, not just the ones that are in the training ground, but basketball, baseball. Everyone will benefit from the renovations in McCue.

We've got several facilities that we know we're going to have to take a close look at. Field hockey, track and field.

So, yes, we've got a list.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, continually because it's so massive. There's always something to fix. But we're also looking ahead at potential revenue opportunities.

Q. Talking about NIL, I asked Coach Elliott towards the end of the spring what he envisioned with NIL here. He said it has to fit the culture. Coming up on a year into it, have y'all kind of learned more in regards to NIL?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, you know, it somehow works itself out. I think that we have the head coaches that we have because they are attracted to who UVA is. We follow that lead.

It's really easy. The guidelines that exist are really easy to follow. We've done that. Thankfully we had a lot of knowledge about where we were headed three years ago, so we began the education process a long time ago. That's always going to be important.

Not every student-athlete is interested in NIL. For those student-athletes who are interested, we've tried to meet them where they are and educate them, make sure they're aware of the opportunities.

I think we've done a lot to partner with external units related to NIL to help the student-athletes. They have benefited from it. It's.

Been fun to watch, quite frankly, to see some of our student-athletes and their entrepreneurial spirit, take the bull by the horns, make something where there was nothing. That's been fun to watch.

Obviously there are problems with the structure and what's happening that we're going to have to work through. So the entire governance structure for college athletics is under review.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: You'd probably be surprised. We didn't spend a whole lot of time talking about it. We did spend some time talking about it. We talked a lot about football schedule.

It's going to have to be something that is resolved from many different levels. We're going to need Congressional help because there needs to be a national standard. State conference, local universities.

We'll have to wait and see what our governance structure looks like. We don't know. I'm not going to try to predict what it's going to look like. I just know it's going to be different and we're all going to have to adjust.

We are focused on providing our student-athletes with maximum opportunities within the rules. Educating our donors, boosters, collectives, anyone interested in participating in NIL, we're just trying to educate and monitor.

Q. As you're building the facility, is anybody displaced? Does everybody stay in their current offices? Is there an opportunity for football to start moving in? When can you start showing something off to recruits?

CARLA WILLIAMS: We've been showing renderings off to recruits.

So today will be a huge step to actually see the groundbreaking, then to see the work get started. It is sequenced. If you go all the way back to the building of the training grounds, we had to build that first before we could move people out so that they can have a place to go to.

For football, we do have to wait until the facility is complete because they have no place to go. They'll move in in the spring of '25. Once they move in, we can start the

renovation of McCue, because that's where they are, the first and second floors.

But the new construction for the Olympic sports complex, the bulk of the Olympic sports complex, can start in '23.

Does that answer the question?

Q. Yes. What kind of patience, tolerance have you had for four years, needing all the money, wanting to get people to understand how urgent this was, having to let it happen because it takes time?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Incredible patience is needed. But I believe in what we're trying to do. We're trying to do something at UVA that I think is really special and that can be a model for college athletics.

There's no reason why a premier academic institution cannot thrive in football. No reason. It's harder. It takes more work. But we're up for that challenge.

Coach Elliott is, too. That's why he was a successful candidate.

Q. There was horrible news about a softball player. Lots of schools have talked about things they're doing with mental health. A lot of people think it's a lot more smoke and mirrors than doing stuff. What kind of attention have you paid to that? Six kids since March 1st that have killed themselves.

CARLA WILLIAMS: It's heart wrenching.

I do this for three reasons: I love sports, I love education, and I love young people, right? So that's why we are here, is to develop young people.

For Virginia, Virginia has had a sports psychologist in-house for years and years. Added a second. We've got two sports psychologists in-house.

During the last two years we did a lot of meeting with our student-athletes because there was a lot going on, a lot of unrest, just a lot. So we spent more time meeting with them and listening. One of the things they felt like was important was more access to counseling from a mental health perspective.

So with all of our budget cuts, all of our hiring freezes, salary freezes, we prioritized mental health. We've added a third sports psychologist in-house that will start this summer. That's as a direct result of the feedback from our student-athletes, which is what you have to do.

So it's tragic and it's sad, it's heart wrenching, like I said. But what we need to do as administrators, as coaches, is to listen and figure out how to address what we're hearing.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yep, yep. So the award is really important for a lot of reasons. Our goal is to be able to award that to all of our scholarship student-athletes. But it's going to be incremental. We've done men's and women's basketball already. We did them this year. So we're working with the foundation to put a plan in place to just incrementally increase that across our scholarship student-athletes for now.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: So each institution gets to decide the criteria for receiving it. For us here at UVA, ours is tied to our program, our Pathways program, which is an individualized, customized experiential program for our student-athletes.

When they come here as first-years, we do these assessments and we figure out what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, what their challenges are, and we customize a program for them individually.

There are benchmarks they have to hit in there: leadership, personal development, career development, community engagement, academics. It is all inclusive of their total experience. It is not simply being eligible. We're encouraging a total experience for our student-athletes. When they meet those benchmarks, they can access those awards.

Q. You mentioned ACC football schedule being a hot topic lately. What is the timeline around that?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I'm not a fan of changing just to change. Really if it's necessary, we need to change. I think that we all agree that we have opportunities to elevate ACC football, and the scheduling is one day to do that. That's why we've gone through this process to see what might be best for the ACC.

I'm excited about the possibilities.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: Lots of different models. I think it's always beneficial when universities within a conference play each other more. So there are several models that allow for that. I think that's healthy for the players. I think it's healthy for the players, universities, fan base to be able

to play more. I think that's a priority.

Then being able to enhance our post-season opportunities as a league in football, we're taking a hard look at that, too.

Q. What is the process when it comes to scheduling as far as which ACC opponent you face? How do you determine that?

CARLA WILLIAMS: So natural rivalries is really important. Geography is important. There are several factors. Everyone has an opinion (smiling). We have an opinion. We have a definite opinion, just like the rest of our colleagues in the conference.

It's a conversation, which is why being collegial is important. But it's a conversation. It's back and forth. I think it's been really healthy. We've involved the coaches, the head coaches have been involved in the conversation. Commissioner Phillips has been awesome in his leadership of trying to elevate ACC football.

Lots and lots of conversations, but I think it's been really healthy.

Q. Speaking of everyone having an opinion, I'm sure you heard a little bit about the Jimbo Fisher, Nick Saban thing. What is your sense of the reaction? Is it causing the NCAA to take another look at it? What has been the thought process on that?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I know enough to know to stay out of other people's business (laughter).

To say that it's highly charged, it's a highly charged topic, and that's not all bad.

Q. Are you comfortable with the ACC is financially and...

CARLA WILLIAMS: I'm probably perpetually uncomfortable because we want to compete at the highest levels as a football program, as a men's basketball program, as a women's basketball program. Go down the list. We want to compete at the highest levels.

We also want the conference to do well because that helps us. When the ACC does well, Virginia does well. So, no, I mean, we've got work to do. But that's what makes it fun. It's a big challenge, a big challenge.

Q. How much will the Comcast deal help?

CARLA WILLIAMS: It will help. It will help. But there has to be a demand, viewership. We've got to do better as a



conference. We're all up for the challenge. I think we will.

Q. How much was this facility talked about in the interview process with Tony? How much did it come up? What were you able to tell them was coming? You said 'not flashy but what we need for championships.' I imagine it's going to be nice, there's no (indiscernible).

CARLA WILLIAMS: You said that, I didn't (laughter).

I am going to forget part of your question. But it will have everything we need to compete for championships, everything that we'll need. If you think about 90,000 square feet, you think about what football programs need, we will have all of that.

There isn't anything secretive. Every new facility has the same thing, but just a little bit different, maybe a little bit bigger, maybe a little bit smaller.

What's really special about our facility is I think the efficiency that we are going to create, because everything is right there. You've got the indoor that opens to the natural grass practice fields. Then you'll have the facility with the weight room that opens to the natural grass practice field, next door to the indoor.

Everything that they need will be in one place. I think if you look around the country, that isn't always the case for some facilities.

I think adding the two natural grass practice fields first was huge. We really, really needed to do that. I think that was huge. Then we were able to fill in the gaps around it.

Q. When you were interviewing coaches, what did you talk about, what were you able to promise?

CARLA WILLIAMS: We don't promise, but we did talk about the fact that the new facility was coming. Very transparent about the facilities, I have been since day one, and won't stop with the transparency because I think that's what helps create strong programs, is the transparency and the communication.

But I'll focus on Coach Elliott. For him, the facility is important, obviously coming from where he came from with the beautiful grand facility. But there are so many other things that appealed to him about the University of Virginia. The addition of the facility is a bonus that's going to be very helpful.

But all of the reasons we all chose to be at Virginia are the reasons he chose to be at Virginia. So the candidates

didn't talk a lot about bricks and mortar.

Q. Some people would argue to compete for championships you need flash. Maybe it doesn't fit the vibe of Virginia.

CARLA WILLIAMS: Not to single out any facilities, I won't talk about what I think flash is, or could be considered flashy.

For us a state-of-the-art sports medicine facility within this building is pretty flashy. It's no secret when you look at what we have, and you think about where we're going, it's all flashy, right? But we have tried to focus on the need and meeting the need of our student-athletes.

We think there are so many other things that are also important: making sure we develop the whole person is important, being part of not just the UVA community but the Charlottesville community. So there are lots of things that go along with the facility.

Our players are so appreciative that we are getting this facility. They aren't looking for flash, right? They're looking for a facility that they know can help them compete for championships, and they'll have that.

Q. You used the word 'efficiency' (indiscernible). How much influence did the football coach have?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yeah, I mean, he just left in November, right? So a lot in the schematic design and the conceptual framework for a lot. We were pretty far along. But there were still opportunities for Coach Elliott to give input, which he did, and we made those changes, those adjustments.

Like I said, they weren't major, but they were important to him. Every coach, doesn't matter what sport, they value efficiency. So the more efficient you can make the lives of the coaches and the student-athletes, the better.

Q. Two stories?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Two stories.

Q. (No microphone.)

CARLA WILLIAMS: So how will the facility help us reach our goals of competing for championships as a Power Five program?

Q. Yes.

CARLA WILLIAMS: So in many, many ways. When you

think about -- I'll give you one example. When you think about strength and conditioning, you think about 125, 130 student-athletes, it's important to be able to have a structured strength and conditioning program for the entire team.

If you're in a small facility, you don't have all of the equipment that you need in order to maximize the physical stature of the student-athletes, then that's a disadvantage.

So when you can go from a small weight room to an adequately sized weight room with the appropriate equipment, then you give those student-athletes and their coaches the opportunity to maximize who they are and who they could be physically.

We know that there is obviously a very physical sport, so that's just one example, is strength and conditioning. You can take that and apply it to nutrition, to sports medicine, to film rooms, to meeting spaces.

Every area of what it takes to build a championship program, this facility enhances that for us to give our coaches and student-athletes a chance to compete.

Does that answer it?

Q. What is a Power Five football program?

CARLA WILLIAMS: There are 65 Power Five football programs, 66 with Notre Dame. Notre Dame is an independent. If you take the five major conferences, those are the 65 teams. Those teams are the ones that have the major TV contracts that allow for those conferences to distribute more revenue to those teams, all teams, not just football, all teams, to help with the entire department.

That's a small number when you think about the entire world of NCAA sports. 65, 66 is a pretty small number.

That help?

Q. Yes.

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