

2025 ACC Football Championship Game: Virginia vs. Duke

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Bank of America Stadium

Virginia Cavaliers Coach Tony Elliott

Postgame Press Conference



Duke 27, Virginia 20 (OT)

TONY ELLIOTT: I just want to start by saying, man, super proud of our football team, super proud of the staff. Obviously don't like the outcome, but at the end of the day, our guys fought. They fought all the way till the end. They believed they were going to win the game, and we came up a few plays short.

We've got one more opportunity to finish the right way and celebrate the seniors that have given so much to this program, and that's kind of what our focus is now.

Q. Tony, I'm curious, the drive to tie the game where Chandler finds Eli, what clicked so well? What worked so well? Then on the trick play in overtime, how much did the 15 yards factor into that play call?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so the drive so tie it up, I think it's guys just playing free, playing fast, playing with tempo, taking a little bit of thinking out of it, kind of putting pressure on the defense because you're playing fast.

The 15-yard penalty there that carried over into overtime kind of puts you in that friend zone where you're trying to get a chunk play, and that's where you have most of your plays like that designed in that area, so it kind of puts you back there.

I'm sure that we all want that play back. But their guy made a play, and hats off to Duke for winning the game.

Q. How did Duke's first drive, with how long it was, impact how long it took your offense to get into a flow of the game?

TONY ELLIOTT: Right, I think what they did a really good job -- you could tell strategically their plan was to shorten

the game and minimize the number of possessions for us and they were working the clock.

But it was a critical 4th and 8 where we jump offsides. That extended the drive. That put them in a 4th and 3 in that friend zone where the analytics are going to tell you to go for it, and then we're about a foot away from making the play in our direction.

So that extended the drive, and kind of the reverse of when we played them last time, last time they had the 15-play drive that kind of impacted rhythm.

But I thought that the guys responded. We just had a couple of mistakes that the guys are going to learn and grow from, and we've got to coach better and grow as coaches. That resulted in the first half we're chasing some points when we had some opportunities to get off the field and get the ball back, and then maybe now with more opportunities, you find a rhythm a little bit quicker.

Q. On the consecutive fourth quarter possessions, the 4th and 5, Chandler overthrows Trell in the end zone. What went into going for it all there as opposed to just trying to get the 1st down? Then on the next drive when he throws the interception, was that a miscommunication? Because it looked like Cam went inside and he threw outside.

TONY ELLIOTT: So the 4th and 5 where he goes to the end zone with Trell, you're looking for different coverages, and the play was primarily designed to go underneath but they took that away, and that forces him to go through his progression, and that's his second progression on that particular play.

And then there was a miscommunication on the interception and the coming-out situation that we've got to make sure that we get cleaned up from a staff standpoint.

Q. Obviously so much of the conversation around this game centered around the conference. What do you feel like it would mean for the ACC if their champion is not in the playoff?

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TONY ELLIOTT: I don't know really how to answer that question because I don't pay attention to that as much. I was focused on our guys and preparing for this game.

But what I do know is, man, there's great football in the ACC, some of the best football in the country. I was a benefactor of it for many years, and I believe the league is better now than in the past with the parity that you have in college football.

You've got teams that have won 10 games, and you've got a bunch of teams that have won a bunch of football games.

So it's a very competitive balanced league, and if that's what you're looking for and you want to promote that, then I think the narrative -- all we can control is what we can control and how we play.

But I know there's some really good football in the ACC that's comparable to everywhere in the country that can compete with all the other conferences in the country.

Q. To come back from 10 down with five minutes to go and kind of have that momentum on your side, I just wonder if you can talk about what is your overriding emotion? What was your message to the guys in the locker room?

TONY ELLIOTT: It's just a testament to who they've been all season. It gets frustrating at times because you win close games, you don't win by enough points. You have teams that are balanced and do well in the situations that win football games, and then it's not talked about.

But the approach that we have is we understand how competitive our league is and how competitive we believe college football is going to be going forward. So our approach is to have a one-possession mentality. So all we're looking for is one possession, get it to the fourth quarter, go win the game in the fourth quarter.

My message to the team in the locker room is obviously disappointing. It hurts. There's nothing I can say to take away the pain. But I also told them how much I love them, how proud I am of the football team that was picked 14th out of 17 and earned the right to be here. We came up short tonight. It's unfortunate. But we earned the right to be here.

Man, we've overcome so much adversity three years ago. This program was written off. I don't think anybody would have thought that we'd be here this quickly in this position.

So what I told them is being a champion really is a state of mind and a condition of your heart, and that's what I told

them.

So in my mind, and I know this may sound crazy in this situation, but I believe I've got the right to call somebody a champion, right, with my background. They've got a heart of a champion.

The football team that lost tonight, came up a touchdown short, they've got the heart of a champion or they wouldn't be in the situation that they're in. But also, when you're trying to climb that mountain and get to the top, the air is thin and the margin for error is very, very, very, very small.

We've got one more game. We've got an opportunity to go win 11. That's what I told them. I want that 11th. I think everybody in that locker room wants that 11th. We'll learn from tonight. We'll grow.

We're not going to point any fingers except for when you're looking in the mirror you point to yourself on what you can do better, and we're going to grow and we're going to bounce back.

I believe three years ago, I believed there was going to be triumph out of tragedy, and I believe tonight this is an opportunity for us to set our eyes forward, learn from our mistakes, and go back to work.

Q. You guys broke multiple program attendance records this year. You had a big crowd here tonight. What's your message to your supporters?

TONY ELLIOTT: Just extremely grateful. We're not in this position without them. I've said that from day one, that it's a program, and everybody is a part of the program.

Not just the folks that are in the Hardy Center every single day. We need the support of the fan base, and you can tell the guys really, really feed off of it. The energy picked up there in the fourth quarter, that really helped the guys to be able to make that push down the stretch.

Thankful, grateful. I know that they're disappointed in tonight. But I believe that they can see the potential of what the future can be, and I believe we all desire to be one of the top programs in college football. But we've all got to be invested and committed, and they showed their part.

We're going to go back to work to continue to prove that we're worthy of them showing up and just grateful, and we'll be back.

Q. Chandler was really pressured at Durham last month. Tonight he looked uncomfortable a lot. Duke

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seemed to bring more pressure and get him off his spot. Was it Boley's ankle that was compromising him or was Duke doing things differently up front?

TONY ELLIOTT: That's a championship football game, right? First of all, McKale Boley played with a high ankle sprain off of basically two days' rest, and he fought through it. I told him that that's the heart of a champion because normally it's a couple weeks, and he battled through and he found a way to get back.

But it's a championship football game, and Duke has got one of the highest pressure rates of anybody in the country with their front four, okay. Man, it was just a battle. It was a battle, and I won't know the exact answer until I watch the film every play-by-play to see exactly what it was.

But we knew that coming in that they were going to correct some of the things from the previous game, just as we were going to try and tweak some of the things from the previous game, and it was going to be a battle.

I think I can answer that question better when I fully evaluate the film, but I'm not going to put it on Boley's ankle. I'm definitely not going to do that because that young man laid it on the line for this football team, just like every other player in that locker room.

It wasn't a lack of effort and desire to play. We just made a few critical mistakes at some critical times that cost us, and that's what happens when you're playing championship-level football. Those one or two plays can really change the course of the game.

Q. Coach, watching you rebuild this program, the tragedy and everything that happened, not a lot of coaches are given three or four years to rebuild. What do you think that says about you and what you've done for this program and the trust that Carla and them have in you?

TONY ELLIOTT: I think it's more about Carla's belief in this staff than it is me. I'm only one man. It took everybody to be able to continue to show up every single day. That's what I'm most proud of, of these players and this staff, that they just showed up every single day.

I'm sure that they probably have heard some things that tells them otherwise, but they showed up every single day.

It's not about me. It's about the folks that are hurting in that locker room, that believe even when they can't see it, that show up every single day, that sacrifice, that didn't run from a difficult situation but chose to stay and fight. That's why the program has been able to kind of continue to press

forward.

But I am very grateful to Dr. Williams and the administration for believing in the staff, to give us the time and the resources to be able to lay a solid foundation, which we believe is the foundation that's going to carry us forward in the future and help us to be sustainable.

Q. Tony, Eli Wood has not been statistically the most productive guy but he's had some big moments, obviously tonight the biggest. What has been his arc in your program and contribution?

TONY ELLIOTT: Yeah, so he's the glue in that receiver room. I'll tell you that. He's the guy that just keeps everybody together, and he does it because he shows up and he works extremely hard every single day. Man, he's a great teammate and a great friend to all of his teammates. He's a great competitor.

He understands his role, and he's willing to do his role at any time, anywhere, without any praise, without any credit. He's Virginia all the way through. He just keeps finding a way.

When Trell goes down, the offense has to keep moving forward, and he finds a huge play for us to give us a shot to even get it to the overtime.

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