

UVA Athletics | JC

Welcome to another edition of the Wahoo Central Podcast. I'm Jeff white from virginiasports.com and my guest today in our University Hall studio is J.C. Aragon, who's part of the illustrious fourth year of class on the UVA men's tennis team. J.C., thanks for stopping by.

No. Thank you. It's a pleasure.

So you're an American government major. Where are you with your exams?

I just finished yesterday. So, kind of a relief but it's also kind of a sad time because it's finally over.

It's over.

I know. I wish I could stay here another eight years but at some point, the ride's got to end.

Have you ever gone into the NCAA tournament with class or exams hanging over your head, or are you always been done?

Yeah. Just the way our schedule works is actually pretty neat compared to like some schools. Like I know UCLA, they got finals afterward--

Because their on the quarter system.

Yeah. So it actually works out pretty nice for us because we get to go into NAAs with everything done and a clear mind and kind of focus on one goal. Where there are other schools that are still kind of worried about exams and stuff.

If all goes well, you'll be in Athens, Georgia next weekend at the same time your fellow fourth years at UVA are walking the lawn for graduation. Do you have mixed feeling? I know that kind of goes with the territory for a lot of student athletes here who play spring sports. If they're successful, they're still going graduation weekend.

Yeah. I mean it would be amazing to be able to walk the lawn. I know Thai and Luca, we've all talked about it being an amazing experience. But again, this is something that happens to every class. So we've seen it the last four years.

So it's not so much as-- we've almost prepared for this so we're fine with it. That means we're doing well in the tournament. So hopefully, we won't be here for the graduation.

You will play your final matches in Charlottesville, at least as a college tennis player this weekend. Virginia, which is the two-time defending NCAA champion meets Monmouth in the first round Friday afternoon at one o'clock. The second round match at this regional is scheduled for 1:00 PM on Saturday with the winner advancing to the Sweet

16 in Athens. Will you allow yourself to get nostalgic at all when you're out on the court this weekend? Or do you try to push those thoughts aside about the milestones that you hit playing for the last time, doing this for the last time at UVA?

No. I think I kind of got those jitters out on senior day. I know that was a really tough day for me. Kind of all the emotions hit and stuff. But it's the last time we're going to be playing either at Snyder or Boar's Head. But again, we want to finish on a high note. So we're not really worried about the emotion setting in. We're worried about taking care of business and getting the W.

So when I was googling you to do some research for this interview, I came across a story that ran in the *Orange County Register* in December 2007, with a photo of a young Juan Cruz Aragon. You were something of a prodigy weren't you? And your dad was a pro tennis player.

I think I remember that article. It looks I have a mug shot on there. My dad was kind of the reason why I play tennis. He was really good in Argentina and he kind of got me started. In California has a pretty big tennis community so whenever you have young kind of rising tennis players it's a very popular sport down there.

So you get a lot of limelight and people, they kind of want to reach out and get to know the young players that who knows, might have a future like somehow I did and become an NCAA champion. So that's kind of what they look for. And we get a lot of those down in California, to be honest with you.

At what age did you start focusing on tennis? Did you play other sports when you were young?

Yeah. I was I was huge into soccer. And then at like age 12 I was traveling for both so much my dad was like, look, you got to pick. And thankfully, I picked the right sport.

But yeah, it was a tough decision, for sure, just because I loved both of them. And I really enjoy being on a team sport. So that was something that I kind of missed through my high school career. But I was able to kind of pick back up here in college.

You a Messi fan, as a soccer guy?

Yeah, of course. Who isn't? It's kind of tough not to be.

You were recently the subject of a terrific video done by Ryan Mahanes, that can be found on the virginiasportstv.com website under men's tennis. The video talks at some length about the medical challenges you faced during your tennis career. For listeners who may not have seen the piece, can you summarize your battle with diabetes and kind of how that's affected your career?

Yeah. It was kind of a long battle. It was like two, three years long. It all started, I was with Luca and Thai actually. We were living down at the USTA in Florida. And we were again ready to go to a couple junior tournaments in South America.

And I got sick, just like flu like symptoms. And then I started getting really sick. And my mom flew me back. And I went straight to the emergency care unit and I had an allergic reaction to some medication.

And just from then, things started getting worse. I had kidney failure, liver failure, then the spleen. So once we got that kind of taken care of after like five or six months in the hospital, it took me about a year to get back into tennis and start playing.

And then I went to play my last year at 18 Kalamazoo. And I was just very dehydrated, I had a huge headache, just kind of pre-diabetic symptoms. And I went back home. I flew straight home, went to the doctors, and they were like, well, now you got diabetes. So it's kind of like I just gotten over that--

So were the two unrelated though,

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No. They were all from a drug reaction. So I had kind of like lupus-like symptoms, where my immune system was attacking different organs. And the pancreas was the last one to get hit. But that's just two kind of separate battles that went all the way till college, which actually, was on my parents part, was pretty amazing that they let me come here. Because flying all the way across the country, they were so worried.

It was my first year as a diabetic. I didn't really get the hang of it yet. So moving into college it's completely different. It was really kind of a change that I had to make. And thankfully, it's been a positive one.

Were you looking at any west coast schools or LA schools?

Yeah. You get your UCLA and USC. But to be honest, I wanted to get out of California. Again, that was also being kind of had a part to do with the medical stuff. I wanted to do my own thing. My parents had kind of been babying me the last four years because I was so sick that it was time to grow up and move somewhere.

And I fell in love with Virginia. I came to visit and I think immediately after, I told Brian that this is it. I didn't even visit other schools.

So you knew, obviously, Thai-Son and Luca.

Yeah, I knew them really well.

Did you commit in any order?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Who was the first of you to kind of take the plunge?

I don't remember who was the first. But it was just funny, I came here, I think it was October 19. And I'd come for a recruiting trip. And we're all three here, which is very unheard of to have a recruiting visit with three recruits. Usually you have your one recruit come in.

So first, obviously, it's kind of competitive because we all wanted to be here. We all knew each other. We all knew how good we were. So we were like, shoot, who's going to get selected? You got kind of the young boy drama going on.

But luckily, it all worked out. We all three ended up coming here. And it's been a great ride. But it's pretty amazing how transitioning from juniors we were all together to then our college career.

How much did the illness and how much did it set you back in your tennis career? Obviously, you missed a lot of time. Were you able to get back up to speed or does it affect you at all today?

I think it had a pretty positive effect on me just because back in the day, all I was thinking about was pro tennis. So for me, going to college would have been a disappointment. And the fact that I was sick changed my perspective and my goals in life and what I wanted to do.

And it ended up turning to-- when Brian took a chance on me, because really, I hadn't played tennis for about a year and a half. For me, it was amazing. It was something that was life changing.

So it really changed my thought process on my future, and college, and I think it really had a big impact on me positively. Because if it wasn't for that I think I would have come into college with a different mentality. And I wouldn't have been able to have such a positive impact.

Yeah. I think you talked in that video a little bit about your perspective. And others commented on how because you've dealt with bigger issues than this, you're able to keep maybe tennis and winning and losing in perspective. Did you change your personality because of this, do you think?

Yeah. I mean, my personality definitely changed. But it's tough. In a team sport, just because if you lose you're not only losing for yourself but you're letting down seven, eight guys. So to be able to kind of compartmentalize the losses and move on is really big in tennis because let's say, for example, one guy could lose tomorrow against Monmouth and the team still wins. So he has to find a way to mentally recover for the next day because they've

got to go back on the court and do the same thing. It's not like a tennis tournament where you lose you go home. Here, a lot of times you lose and you got to be ready to play the next day.

Your singles record this year is 31 and 8. Those 31 wins are the most of anyone on the team this year. You've played everywhere from number two to number six singles. Has this been your best year as a tennis player in college? And anything different, anything that distinguishes this year from the others?

Yeah. I would say, the best year, the year is obviously not over yet so I'll gauge that in about a week's time. But I just really made it my goal to try and play as much as I could this year. And in the past I've missed a lot of fall tournaments and I've been injured. So just the fact that I was healthy pretty much the whole year has helped a lot and have kind of had a big impact on my tennis because it's like everything, the more you play the kind of the more in rhythm you get and the better you are.

So being able to play 40 matches in a year and 39, it's a lot. So that kind of also goes towards the athletic trainers and being able to keep me healthy. So I think staying healthy has had a big impact on me. And it lets me do what I what I kind of love to do.

Your record in doubles with Colin Altamirano is 18 and 3. You guys have been very successful. I'm guessing, just by virtue of that record, that you complement each other very well on the court. What what's your relationship been like as doubles partners?

Yeah. Well, if you've ever seen Colin play, Colin's a very energetic kind of upbeat guy. And we kind of complement each other well in the sense that he's more of a baseline player. And so I kind of take over more on the net. He's more of a return guy, I'm more of a serve guy.

So yeah, we complement each other well but it's also, again, it's the chemistry. You can have two guys that complement each other great, but if they don't get along that kind of plays a big impact on the team. And me and Colin, we've gotten along great the last three years.

I think our NCAA record and indoor record, I don't think we've lost yet. So it really shows that in big moments we both kind of have the same mentality and same mindset. And we can find a way. If one guy's down we push the other guy up and do it for the team. So I think we complement each other great.

You talked a little bit about how you have to learn to deal with defeat in college tennis. You've experienced a lot more success than failure on the court. What does it feel like to clinch a championship for your team, as you did in February at the ITA National Team Indoors at the Boar's Head?

For me, it's a new experience just because if you've watched me play, I play very quick. So usually, I'm either--

One of the first guys off.

Yeah. Even if I lose, I'm either one of the first guys on or off when I win or lose so I've never really been in that situation. And that whole match at Indoors, there was a lot of emotions.

I remember the first set, I lost like five or six no add game. So you've got that mentally thinking, if I would've won one more point you win this in straight sets. But I'm actually glad that I was able to get that experience and clinch it last second because that gave me a lot more belief going into ACCs. And when I kind of started looking over at Carl and he was losing, and I figured, OK, this might come down to me. Just being able to know that I've been there before it, for sure, is a reassurance.

When the senior class bows out this month, your head coach will do the same at Virginia. Brian Boland is leaving Virginia to become the head of men's player development for the USTA. What has it been like playing for Brian and what do you think you'll remember most about your time with him here at UVA?

Well, a lot of people think Brian's a very complicated guy, very complex. I would disagree with them. I think Brian's a very simple guy. Everyone talks about Brian's culture. And in my opinion, Brian's culture is fairly simple.

His culture is basically, you got a culture of love, culture of relationships, culture discipline, and a culture communication. And those are the four things that you basically need to be able to touch on to be a successful team. And if you're missing one of those then you're not going to get it done.

Because at the end of the year, the team that loves each other most is going to win, the team is the most disciplined, team that learns to communicate, and the team that builds a relationship. That's what his life is really about. He wants to impact as many people as he can. Maybe he's been here for 16 years, or something like that, so he's felt like he's probably touched on as many people as he can here.

And being head of men's tennis, you can't really find a more impactful role. So for him, I understand the move just because I understand his goals and I understand where he's coming from. But again, regardless of what he does, like I said, he is very simple. He has those four pillars that he kind of follows. And regardless of what job, what he ends up doing, he can implement those into pretty much anything.

So that's kind of what I take from him, is find something you love and then build your life around that. He has his four pillars of culture, and he can literally turn that, transition that into anything. Whether he's a football coach, a tennis coach, president, that's something that he can really rely on and use. And that's why I think he's so successful.

Your UVA tennis career will end sometime in the next month. What is on tap for you after that?

Well again, the thing about Brian is that he's had such an impact on not just me but everyone here. We all believe in him so much that we're all planning on following him. I know Dustin is going to follow him. I know I'm going down to Florida, Thai's going down to Florida, and Luca's going down to Florida.

So this is just the beginning. I'm sure the guys like Henrik next year are going to come as well. So it really shows that you don't see this very often. You don't see a college coach leaving and their players rushing to wherever he is. Yeah.

First of all, it shows just how amazing he is and how great this program has been to everybody. But it also shows how close the team is. This isn't a four-year program. I'm going to be living with the same guys that I've spent four years here. So that's something that doesn't happen often.

And you've spent some of high school with them, too.

Yeah. So really, this is more of like a lifetime contract.

Whenever your professional playing career is over, do you see yourself staying in tennis in some capacity. Or are there are other things maybe at UVA that have interested you that you'd kind of get back to afterward? Or is it too early to tell?

I love tennis. I would love to be playing tennis for eight, nine years. But obviously, you can't play tennis more than till you're 35, 36, even if you have the most successful career. So there's going to be other things after tennis.

I really like finance. I did an internship last summer. And I really enjoyed it. So I could see myself coming back for business school or doing something in the finance world. But I don't necessarily see myself straight out of tennis going into coaching.

I'm for sure going to pursue other things. Maybe you see the world in a different light. So who knows? I might end up falling in love with it.

Well listen, thanks again for making time for this interview. Congratulations on a fantastic four years at UVA that are not quite done. And good luck the rest of the way.

Awesome. Thank you so much.

2016-17 is winding down for UVA athletics. But a number of our teams are still competing. Two of them are in town this weekend. You can catch baseball against ACC rival Miami at Davenport Field. And J.C. And his

teammates will be playing at the Snyder Tennis Center or, if the weather is bad, at the Boar's Head.

For information and schedules check viriniasports.com. I'll be back next week with another Wahoo Central Podcast. Until then, thanks for tuning in.