

Welcome to another edition of the Wahoo Central Podcast, our weekly look inside UVA athletics. I'm Jeff White from virginiasports.com. It's still the dead of winter here in Charlottesville, but spring sports are getting started. And my guest today is Luca Corinteli, one of the three fourth years on the men's tennis team. Luca, how's it going?

It's going great. Thanks for having me.

Good. Thanks for stopping by. We will hear plenty from head coach Brian Boland over the next few months. So we thought we'd let one of the team leaders preview the coming season for the team, and Luca is that guy. You are that guy.

Virginia has won back-to-back NCAA team titles and heads into this season ranked number one nationally. I know it's early, but you went through the fall with this group. How does it compare to the first three teams you played on at UVA?

I definitely think it's different. Obviously, last year and the year before that we had a bunch of success. But this year, we probably have the smallest team Brian's ever had in his career here at Virginia. We have nine guys, eight eligible. We've got one that's taking a red shirt year-- Ammar-- who's one of the freshmen. So it's definitely different because it's a smaller group of guys. But I also think that there is an advantage that comes with that just because I feel like this group is really, really close.

There's a lot of things that go on in practice that are a lot more manageable now since there is less guys on the team. It was great in the past years when we had 11 or 12 guys. But this year is unique because we have nine guys that are really, really close. And it's making it a lot more, I think, efficient in practice.

Yeah. I was going to ask you about it. I went back and looked. In your first year, there were 14 players on the roster. Then there were 11 your second year and 11 your third year. I'm sure the dynamic changes a lot, doesn't it, and maybe even the logistics of moving the team from one place to another.

Yeah. It's made it different. And obviously, I think we're lucky enough to still have eight guys that provide great depth. We have eight guys that are capable of playing in a variety of positions. So it's different. But I think it's great at the same time.

Fans of this team are going to recognize most of the names on the roster. One of the new guys-- Carl Soderlund-- comes in probably as heralded a recruit as Brian has had in several years, which is saying something. What have you seen from him so far?

I've been really impressed. I've been just as impressed with him on the court. But I also think that he's a great guy. And that's something that, especially with tennis players since it's an individual sport, when guys are growing up and in the juniors, they have as much success as Carl has had, it's kind of hard for them to adapt into a team environment.

And I think the one thing that stands out with Carl is that he's come into a program that's obviously been so successful, and he's had a great deal of success himself. But he's extremely unselfish. He understands that the team comes first and that he's playing for something that's bigger than himself.

So I'm really interested to see how he adapts to the college environment. I know it's going to be different for him in the beginning. But as a person, I think he's a perfect fit and he's a great teammate.

As far as on the court, obviously, his results speak for themselves. He's had success on the ATP tour level, winning a match in the Sweden Open. And then on the Challenger circuit and the Futures circuit, he's, I think, 390 or something like that, which is obviously so impressive. So I'm excited to have him join us on this journey and excited to see how it's going to play out.

What was that transition like for you? You come into a place and you're in an individual sport and you join a team. I'm sure there are places around the country where they don't compete for national titles. They don't compete for conference titles. So maybe the team portion of it is not as strong as it is here. But it seems to be a driving force in this program.

Yeah. And that's one of the things that I think I'm most proud of. And something that I've really grown into is this whole team aspect has been so great for me just because you start to realize a lot of things about yourself as a human being.

I think tennis players, naturally, are a little bit more selfish. So to join a team, for me, it was great to have that environment and to have guys constantly pushing you and to be able to root for other guys and just join a culture like Brian's developed here. I think it's been one of the things that, looking back on my career here, that I'm most proud of joining.

Brian, obviously, has built something special here in Charlottesville-- I think three NCAA team titles out of the past four seasons. If you had to summarize it, what's the secret to his success? Clearly, he has brought in good players. But there are good players at other programs.

The one thing about Brian that I think stands out the most to me when it comes to all of his success is that his motor is nonstop. This guy can have so much success like he's had in the last 12 to 15 years, and he always finds

new ways to improve. Every single season, we come in whether or not we lost or we won or we ended with a national championship, every single season has a new challenge. And I think that that's something that he embraces.

He's really innovative in terms of opening up college tennis to so many different areas where it can improve. And I think one, obviously, he's so professional. But even in terms of, for example, this year with our schedule being different than it has in the past, he's seeing a way for college tennis to really expand.

And he's putting more professional tournaments on our schedule instead of as many dual matches. And that's something that Brian has really believed in. And obviously with his track record, he has the right to experiment with those things. And he's been right almost every single time.

So I think one thing that's so impressive about his success is that he's always looking to get better. He's always looking to change the game to make it more special than it already is.

Right. He does not get complacent, that's for sure. On the roster, your hometown is listed as Alexandria. Were you born in Virginia?

I was born in New York. I was born in Long Island, New York. Lived in Queens up until I was eight years old. And then I moved to Alexandria from nine years old. I lived there until I moved by myself to Florida when I was 13.

I was going to say, so you were at the USTA training center in Boca Raton, right?

Yeah.

How many years were you there?

I was there for 3 and 1/2 years.

So for people who are not familiar with that set up, you're playing tennis and you're going to school down there. How many of your peers are with you at the same time?

So actually, one of my teammates and my roommate, Thai Kwiatkowski-- I've lived with him now for 8 and 1/2 years straight. It's been really cool to see us grow together. I've been lucky enough to have him as sort of like a brother just because we all left home kind of at an early age. Our upbringing and our high school and middle school experience was a little bit different.

It was definitely different. You do school online. But in a classroom, at least at the USTA, that's how it was. And your life basically revolves around tennis. So there were a lot of things that I missed out in the regular traditional

high school. But at the same time, growing up before the age of 17, I traveled to almost 20 countries playing tennis. So those experiences obviously meant a lot to my experiences growing up.

So had you been to Thai-Son's home in Charlotte, and had he been to Alexandria to meet your family before you guys got to Virginia?

Oh, yeah. Our families have known each other. His parents and my parents are extremely close. I've never been to his place in Charlotte, but he's been to my place in Alexandria. We were spending 30 weeks, 35 weeks a year traveling all over the place. So I know him kind of like I know somebody a part of my family.

He has, obviously, had a tremendous career here and keeps getting better. Early in his career, it seemed like his emotions could get the best of him on the court. Have you seen his demeanor change on the court?

For sure. He's probably one of the most matured guys in the program. Obviously, as a freshman, he came in-- like I was speaking about earlier-- he had a great deal of success in the juniors. It's a difficult journey to really adapt to the college environment. But he's a senior now, and he's one of the leaders of this group.

Obviously, he's always going to be an emotional guy, and we love him for it because he has so much passion for the game. But he's been able to manage those emotions and really mature. And it's helped the team out so much.

Like Thai-Son and most of your teammates, if not all of them, you had a fantastic junior career. You come to a program like Virginia-- all your teammates are kind of coming from the same place. Is it humbling to come in and have to battle for a single spot and find out that you're good, but others are good as well?

Yeah. And that's why I think-- I've said this to so many people in the past-- that I don't think necessarily-- this program isn't for everybody. And the way Brian runs it, it's a really hostile environment in terms of trying to come in and compete for a spot. But I think that there are special individuals that kind of embrace that.

And looking back on my career, yeah, I could have gone to a different program and played a bigger role in singles. I think I've played a big role in doubles here. But I think that it's something that can help me moving forward after my four years because life after tennis, eventually the ball stops bouncing.

So having the experience under my belt, being in this kind of environment, and having guys push you nonstop because if one guy thinks that he has a spot locked up or whatever it is, there's always somebody working. So it keeps you on your toes.

I think that for the special people that are ready to embrace this program and the challenges that come with it, I think that there is no better way to prepare for life after the ball stops bouncing.

The competition level in practice must be incredible.

It's high. It's a lot higher, actually, than you see--

--in a lot of your matches, right? I'm sure there are exceptions but some of the ones that are over real quickly.

Yeah, of course. In practice, obviously, you're going to get even higher level than you'll see when we play in the dual matches because obviously the stress levels are down. And there's a lot of special players that are in this program. And some practices are at extremely high levels.

You're a two-time All American in doubles. You played a lot with Ryan Shane, who has moved onto the pro circuit. Has Brian settled on your doubles partner for this season? What's your role in determining that? Do you have a say in the matter?

I listen to Brian just because-- I don't want to give him too much credit, but I think he's right most of the time.

Let's keep him humble here.

Whoever they want me to play with-- right now, it's so early in the season and we have some moving parts. We have an idea of what we want to do with doubles.

The good thing about our program is that we have so many good doubles players and so many accomplished doubles players. So I think whenever we do find that match, I think that we'll be OK with it. As of right now, we have a couple of ideas early in the season that we're going to go forward with and hopefully see that they are working. But it's not set in stone right now.

In each of the past two NCAA finals, you and Ryan won your doubles match against Oklahoma, and Virginia went on to win the doubles point. I think you clinched the point last year. I know you'd feel excited about the championship no matter what had happened in doubles. Does that make it even more special knowing that, hey, we played a tangible role in this on this day?

Yeah. Of course it feels good to feel like you had some, regardless-- even for the guys that didn't even play in that match, I think everybody has a role in this program. And Brian's made that really clear. Of course, naturally, I'm going to get excited to feel like I contributed and I put a point on the board, and me and Ryan put a point on the board. So that's felt great in the last two seasons.

But a lot more had to be done and, obviously, the credit goes out to my teammates for being able to take us past the finish line. But Brian always stresses how every single guy has a role in this program regardless if they're on the court or not. So just to be able to play my role and do it and execute my plan fully was obviously a great

feeling.

So the NCAA singles and doubles tournaments start the day after the team championship is decided. Is it tough to shift gears and shift your focus after you celebrate this incredible team victory and then, all of sudden, you're back to the grind? A lot of time, you see high-seeded singles and doubles players from the championship team go out early.

Yeah, it's difficult. I'm not going to lie. I think the individual tournament has so many great players. You have the best college players in the country. But at least in my case, I've played the individual tournament now twice in a row, and we've been lucky enough to win two national championships.

I'm not going to sit here and say that it's the easiest thing in the world. You put your heart and soul into the team-- anything it takes to get the job done. The very next day, you're back out, and it's kind of like you're alone again. You don't have eight, nine guys.

And you're going against a rested opponent probably, unless it's somebody from the other team.

Exactly. So a lot of times, you have teams that have been off for two weeks at that point, or at least a week. And they've had a chance to gather their thoughts and really become extra motivated again. So it's difficult.

If I had an ideal world, I wish the ITA and NCAA would maybe look into rescheduling that or just finding a way to manage it better, because you see so many great players that just can't find that extra motivation, just because it's so hard to dial back into it right after the team event.

On a personal level, are the NCAA doubles championships one of your goals this season in addition to the team? This is your last chance to make a deep run.

Yeah, of course. Especially as an American, it's something that is roaming in my mind. My main concern is being there for the team and whatever it takes during the team event. And then, obviously, it would be a cherry on top to be able to play the individual event and go far. It's a goal of mine, but it's not nearly as high on the priority ladder as team championship.

On the pro circuit, doubles does not get the attention that singles does. But you can do very well for yourself if you're good in doubles. There are a couple of Virginia graduates, Dom and Treat, who have done well in doubles. Is that in your future? Do you see that?

As of right now, yeah, that's what I'm looking to do. Obviously, those guys, like Dom and Treat and other guys that have gone through the program, have had a great deal of success on the professional circuit, and they're doing

really well for themselves.

It's difficult in the beginning just because, like you were saying, it doesn't get as much exposure. And the money isn't as great for the first year and a half or two years until you really break through, and then the money gets better, obviously. So as of right now, that's what I'm looking to do. I really want to do whatever I can for the team for the next three or four months. And then after that, my focus is going to obviously be on pursuing a career on the doubles [INAUDIBLE].

How do you go about finding your partner?

I think in the beginning, you really kind of have to just play it week by week, because let's say you win one of the lower level tournaments and you're still making \$500, \$600. It's kind of hard, so you have to do whatever it takes and play with whoever you can get into the tournaments first off.

You've got to put food on the table, so whatever works out for that particular week. And obviously, I think if you find a good match and you can build some momentum, you take it that way and maybe go with one partner. But it's hard in the beginning just because you want to be able to make a living. And you might not be able to do that with one partner.

That's an element that the singles guys don't have to deal with as much. You're a foreign affairs major. When the ball stops bouncing, as you said, is foreign affairs something you could see yourself pursuing, something related to that?

I haven't thought about it as much just because I've been pretty set on pursuing a career playing tennis. But I've enjoyed learning so much about politics and foreign affairs. So down the road if there's an opportunity that comes up, I definitely would consider it. I haven't basically taken it off my list. I've enjoyed taking these classes at Virginia, and I feel like I've gained so much information, so definitely a possibility in the future.

I know you have a lot of friends on other teams here at Virginia. Your schedule takes up a lot of your time. Are you able to get out and see other UVA athletic teams compete?

Yeah. I have a lot of guys on the football team that I came into school with in the transition program my first summer that I'm going to have relationships with for the rest of my life. So I go to every single football game, all the home games. I watch all the away games whenever they're on TV. So I try to get out and support UVA athletics as much as I can, especially with the basketball. I lived with two soccer players last year.

Who did you live with?

I lived with Nicko Corriveau and Riggs Lennon-- me, Thai, and those two guys. We get to make it out as much as we can. Obviously, the program is demanding with time. But whenever I can, I love to support other UVA athletics programs.

Great. Good luck this season and down the road and thanks for stopping by today.

Thanks for having me.

Men's tennis opens the season Friday against Vanderbilt in Nashville. Then they play at Kentucky on Saturday and Louisville on super Sunday. So you'll be watching the Super Bowl--

Unfortunately, I will be watching the Super Bowl on the bus.

--on the bus coming back. The home opener for the team is Saturday, February 11, against Florida, indoors at the Boar's Head Sports Club, which is also the site of the ITA National Team Indoor Championships, which Virginia will host from February 17 to the 20th.

For the entire men's tennis schedule and information on all our teams, visit virginiasports.com. I'll be back next week with another Wahoo Central Podcast. Until then, thanks for listening.