

Welcome to another edition of the Wahoo Central Podcast, our weekly look inside UVA Athletics. I'm Jeff White from virginiasports.com. And I'm back in the studio after a long break for postseason basketball, ready to talk some football.

Spring football begins Tuesday for Bronco Mendenhall's team. My guest today is wide receiver Andre Levrone. Andre, thanks for stopping by.

No problem, Jeff.

So how did the off-season strength and conditioning program go for you? For the linemen, I know the emphasis this winter was on gaining strength and adding weight. Was it different for the wideouts?

We had a similar goal. For the whole team, Coach Mendenhall stressed to everyone that we were trying to add size and add strength. Last off-season, we focused a lot more on our conditioning and our speed dynamics and things like that.

But being a player that plays outside the box, of course, we still have a lot of stress put on our speed, our technique, and things like that nature. So a lot of our lifting has been powerful. We've spent a lot of time with Randy Bird and our diets, trying to gain weight. But at the same time, we spend a lot of time throughout the week on our speed as well.

Last year, I believe you received the Iron Cavalier Award, right?

Yes, sir.

What did that entail? And how do you go about getting that?

So the Iron Cavalier Award is something that the coaching staff and Coach Wintrich and Coach [? Heiberger ?] and everyone came up with as a way to recognize whichever player, throughout the summer off-season training campaign, on a daily basis, showed the things that they were looking for. We have a five-step criteria that are rated by stars on each day. You can have a one through five-star day. And by achieving five-star days each day, you give yourself a great chance. And then the things that you do extra, such as showing up for afternoon yoga sessions, as far as making trips to the training room, whether it be for rehab or whether it just be for regenerative things, to get your body right-- just showing that you are fully invested in your body and your contributions that you can make for your team for that season.

Does that get awarded at the end of spring ball, or is that a summer thing?

Last year, it was a summer thing. So I'm thinking it's the same thing.

Right. You're a very busy man these days, I know. Among other things, you're doing an internship with the Virginia Athletics Foundation. Tell us about that and how much time you are over there in Bryan Hall each week and what they have you doing.

Yeah, so I've been working with Todd Kersey and Connie Harrison who have been working over there for quite some time. And Mo Covington, who used to be my academic coordinator here, actually is the one who told me about the opportunity and how that would look good for me moving forward. I really wanted to do that because it's difficult to get internships throughout the summer because we're usually here training. And that's something I want to do is be here training.

But just thinking for life after football, something to have on a resume, I felt it was important to have an internship. And working with [? funds ?] and working with the Virginia Athletic Foundation would be a great outlet to be able to use. And while I've been over there, I've been writing profiles on other student athletes, honing my writing skills. I've been working with local vendors, trying to solicit them to extend their benefits to VAF members, and trying to re-secure some of our VAF donors, and things along those lines.

In addition to that, you have football. And you have your regular academic load. You're a media studies major, right?

Correct.

Will you graduate in May?

Yes, I will.

So what will you do at least in the fall?

I'm not certain yet. I've still been talking that over with Miss Fitz-- and Adam Brooks, who's now my academic coordinator. I'm not 100% certain.

I know that I could have graduated last semester. This semester, I only need one more class. And if I'd have took that last semester, I could have graduated. But I knew that I wanted to do an internship this semester. And I knew that it would probably be too hectic doing that with another full course load.

So I'm only in two classes right now. And I spend about eight to 10 to 12 hours a week over at the Virginia Athletic

Foundation, working with them. And that, along with my football training, and coming back in the afternoon to watch film, and things like that, it does get pretty hectic.

You'll be in grad school in some form, though, in the fall?

Yes. Yes, I will.

Have you given much thought to what you will want to do whenever football ends for you and you hang up your cleats?

I want to get into consulting, some form of analytics consulting. I'm not exactly sure which avenue I want to take yet. But I actually, over winter break, was able to shadow some marketing directors at Whiting-Turner Construction Company and Bozzuto Homes, who are two pretty big builders in my area.

Whiting and Turner is a national branch. But it was good to be able to get in there with them. And now having this internship, I'm just trying to build some experience.

You come from a family of military veterans.

Yes, sir.

Your grandfather was in the army, your father in the Marine Corps, a brother in the army.

Yes.

Did you, or do you, have any interest in going down that path?

Kind of a funny story-- I was actually telling my dad over winter break when I was home, when I was younger, I used to feel almost as though I was letting my family down because we have such a lineage of men being in the military. I had an uncle who was also in the Vietnam War. And I felt as though, by me saying, I just want to play football, like that was almost selfish of me because I'm not serving my country. But through a lot of guidance and just conversations with my parents and things, as I matured, they explained to me that there's more ways to serve your country, your people, people in general, to serve God, and your faith, and things like that, outside of just being in the military. And I feel like I have opportunities to do that through football as well.

In your UVA football career, you've caught 24 passes for 390 yards and two touchdowns. And that's with being limited to one game in 2015 because of a back injury. Really, unfortunately, the common thread for your career has been the injuries you've had to deal with.

And I know you even got hurt your senior year in high school. How frustrating has that been? And when you look

back, were some of those injuries avoidable, or are they all freak, spur-of-the-moment things that happen in games or in training?

It's been frustrating. That's something that definitely I feel as though it would frustrate anyone who works hard and has dreams and aspirations. But, man, I just embrace them, man. It's something that gives you a testimony. And my mom always taught me you have to go through some tests in order to have a testimony.

And I feel like some people look at people and say, oh, man, that kid has been hurt a lot, or things like that. But I just know on a daily basis, when I wake up, what I can control. And I come in every day. And I work hard. I try to be a leader.

I bring fire to the group. I bring competitive nature to the team. And I know a lot of guys feed off of that. And I love to see that in return because it gets me going as well, from other guys on the team. And it's unfortunate having to go through some of those injuries. But I feel like, mentally, it has made me stronger.

Right now, I feel more healthy than I have at any point. My body feels great. And every single time that I have been knocked down with them, I get right back up and I'm ready to go again.

So I'm ready to just attack this spring. And I'm praying to the Lord that I stay healthy. And this will be a great year for me and my teammates.

I know you have worked closely with Kelli Pugh, who is the head athletic trainer for football, and her staff when you've been injured. But do you do work with them on the front end, preventative work? And you talked about regenerative work. Is that a goal, too? Are there things you can do as a player to put yourself in a position to avoid those injuries?

Absolutely. Specifically, I've had some unfortunate things that have just happened, that have sidelined me for brief periods of time. But, realistically, the major injury that I've had since I've been here was when I fractured my vertebrae in the back.

The back injury, yes.

And whenever that did happen, after that, Kelli took a huge role and stepped in, and Keith as well-- Keith Thomson as well, both of them-- just in helping me get back to where I needed to be. There were a lot of exercises, even after I was telling them that I felt great. No, you need to still be in here. There's things that you need to continue to stabilize and build the muscles here, build the muscles there, so that you're not overcompensating in other areas and nothing else becomes injured. So I thank them a lot for that.

Even to this day, I'm always in the training room. It's not because I'm hurt. But I do realize, because of the things that they were telling me, that there's a lot of balance through your body.

If you throw one thing off, then something else might tweak. And you need to just continue to stabilize things and have that balance, as well as just recovering in the NormaTec legs and the cold tub, and things along those nature, seeing the chiropractor, small things. Just taking care of your body can go a long way.

Are you a proponent of yoga? You mentioned that earlier.

I do believe in yoga. When I'm home, there's a yoga trainer that me and some of my friends that I've play high school with, like Stefon Diggs, and even Kendall Fuller, and some-- I know he's a [? hoagie. ?] That's not a good reference at all. But some close friends of mine, there's a yoga trainer that we visit with pretty frequently when I'm home. And we do DDP yoga here with our coaches.

And it's definitely increased a lot of our players' flexibility here. You have to see the big picture, man. And it's an investment. And you just pray that you get a return on your investment at some point.

Another receiver here, Keeon Johnson, showed flashes early in his college career, especially when he was a freshman. But he didn't really break through until last year, when he was a senior. He had 49 catches for nearly 500 yards. So he has shown that you can have struggles, for whatever reason, early in your career, and still break through. Was he at all an inspiration for you, what he did last year?

It was great to see Keeon accomplish what he did, man. Me and Keeon came in together. He's a good friend of mine. We've had a lot of good memories, a lot of laughs, a lot of hard work that we put in together-- blood, sweat, and tears. And to see him go out last year, and just have the mindset like this is my last year, I'm going to attack it, and things go in his favor, as I'm sure he had been praying for previously-- to see those things come to fruition, it was great to see, man.

He put the work in. And he reaped the benefits from it. And it's definitely an inspiring thing. And to see him out there at his Pro Day-- and we've always known Keeon was very athletic-- to see him run what he ran and jumped what he did, and have Chris [? Brautz and ?] catch-- kept every ball off the ground, I was happy for him, man.

I know the offense was not happy with its productivity last season. That was the first year for a new system under Coach [INAUDIBLE] obviously, the first year under Coach Mendenhall. Is there a greater comfort level, at least among the returning players this year, just having been through a full year in that system, and maybe knowing the ins and outs of it a little more?

Definitely. Having Kurt here this spring, that's going to be huge for us as well. Last year, he came in right around

camp time. That's not a lot of time to get chemistry with your quarterback.

And at that time, we didn't know if it was going to be Matt, if it was going to be him. Even Connor Brewer was in the discussion. So we were just saying, let's work with this quarterback, let's work with that quarterback, so we know what everybody's doing.

But to be on the same page, and he had the reins right now, and just even as far as quick at the line audible signals and sight adjustments and things like that, being on the same page and knowing exactly what depth we're going to stop, and where he's going to place the ball-- inside shoulder, outside shoulder, low, high, away, things like that-- it goes the extra mile. And like I said, that's just something that we're able to invest in now that we weren't last year. And I feel as though we are going to get a return on that investment.

There has always been a sizable crew of former Good Counsel players in the program throughout your career here. I guess right now you have you, Myles Robinson, Kirk Garner?

Yes, sir.

Has that been something of a support system? Has it been cool to see guys who went through the same thing you did in high school played for the same coaches, had some of the same experiences, even if you're not in the same classes here?

It has. Me and Kirk have been friends since he transferred to the Counsel in 10th grade. So it's been a while, man. Me and Kirk spent the night at each other's houses. Families are close with one another.

I call his uncle my uncle, Uncle Keith. He's a good dude. But yeah, man. He calls my mom Mom. We're like family. Miles is like our little brother. It's tight-knit because when you're in a culture like we were, and we were winning and things like that, we built a bond-- and bringing that here and just trying to get those things going here.

I think we have got DJ Pratt coming next year. He's a speedster. I'm looking forward to him being under our wing.

And then you've got Vince Croce in the weight room now. And he's gone from player to coach or assistant strength coach. What's that been like with him? He's out there sweating with you one day. Then he's the one giving some of the orders the next.

Vince is a good dude, man. He's a leader. I respect him. I respect the work that he put in while he was here. So he takes a personal investment in the groups that he's working with out on the field on a daily basis.

And I appreciate him and his efforts. And I see him on a daily basis, of course. And every now and then, I always give him a Falcons fly high because Good Counsel Falcons.

You came here in 2013. There have been a lot of changes in the program since then. A lot of players have come and gone and graduated.

One of the constants for you has been your position coach, Marques Hagans. How has your relationship changed with him over your time at UVA? And what's his role in your life?

Just the maturation process, man. From being a young guy, and hearing the things that he would say, and just being like, oh, wow, that's big. Oh, wow-- but now actually being able to apply those things on a daily basis. And I feel like I've gained a deeper understanding of the things that he was teaching me then now-- so just how to take care of your body, the techniques at the top of your routes, from stance and start, getting off the ball, to getting on the defensive back's toes before you make a move, giving subtle head and shoulder movements, turning the hips and things like that to drop the DB's foot in the bucket, and just being able to transfer your energy out of your-- things like that, man. Route-running is way more intuitive than a lot of people would think.

Right.

And it's very precise. And just being able to have someone who has been through it at the highest level and has had success himself, it is beneficial because there is a lot of position coaches who can say things but they've never done it. And for him to still at a young age, be able to be on the field and visually show us, sometimes outdo us, it's definitely a benefit.

You strike me as a guy who came here and you were determined to not just define yourself as a football player, but take advantage of what the university has to offer. What has your UVA experience been like if you take football out of the equation?

It's been good, man. Four years here, it's been good. I feel as though-- I was just talking about the maturation process in football-- and I feel as though I've definitely matured as a man-- to be able to see what is real and what isn't, to decipher those things and be able to set them apart.

I'm a social guy. But I don't really go out much. I like to converse with people and just talk about things, and feed-- and see what other people's opinions are and have conversations about that.

But it's been good to expand my horizons, meet new people, build networks, things like that. Even in my classes, just media studies is based off a lot of group projects. And I've met a lot of people-- maybe do business with them one day. Who knows?

Right.

UVA is a huge network, as far as alumni goes as well. I've done workshops, student athlete workshops with alumni, and things like that. And I've had a lot of opportunities, career fairs, all those type things, man, to just set myself up for success in the future, and to see my peers do the same.

It has been exciting, man. It's crazy. Me and Kirk were actually talking yesterday while we were eating dinner just about how fast four years flies by. We thought high school was quick, man. This is crazy.

Do you try to impress upon your younger teammates the importance of doing that? And don't just hang at the McCue's Center and JPJ. And get to know other people outside of the athletic realm?

Yeah, man. When I first got here-- my family knows me. I'm football 24/7. I go home, I watch highlight tapes. I stay here, I watch film. I love the McCue Center. That's my second home.

But yeah, I explain to them somewhat of what I was receiving when I first got here, like relax a little bit. Of course, don't step off the gas pedal. When it's time to work, it's time to work. Make extra time to work. But at the same time, enjoy yourself.

You have to get away from football at times. You have to be able to open your mind up. You don't want to be bogged down with just the stress and the strenuous nature of the game. You have to be able to socialize, smile, have fun, and then refocus. And being able to do that makes you-- prepares you to be a better father, a better husband, things like that because you have to compartmentalize and take the stress from one place, and get rid of it, and enjoy your relationships in other realms.

Well, listen. It's great that you're healthy. Stay healthy. We'll be rooting for you in spring ball, summer ball, and obviously in the fall. And thanks again for stopping by.

Absolutely. My pleasure, Jeff.

This will be another busy weekend for Virginia Athletics. A couple of our teams will be competing in town. For schedules, information, features, and news, check viriniasports.com and viriniasportstv.com. I'll be back next week with another Wahoo Central Podcast. Until then, thanks for listening.