

Welcome to the Wahoo Central Podcast, a weekly look inside UVA athletics. I'm Jeff White from virginiasports.com, and my guest today, at University Hall is Frank Wintrich, Director of Performance for the football team. Frank it's good to have you back on the show.

It's good to be back, thank you.

So the season ended last weekend in Blacksburg, and the last day of final exams is December the 16th. What do you have the returning players doing between now and when they head home for holidays?

So on Monday we started the guys just with a quick evaluation, with their strength and our upper and lower body movements. So we did a squat pattern movement with them on Monday. We did a bench pattern movement with them on Tuesday. And just got an idea of where their strength levels were at the end of the season. 97-- 98% of our team improved their strength numbers over the course of the season, pretty dramatically from what we saw during the course of the end season and from where they were in the summer.

We don't lift for one repetition maximum or for max with our travel squad guys during the season. We do lift heavy, but we don't go for it, so to speak. With those guys we wait till the end of the year, just understanding the stress of the practices and the game on the body. And so we wait until the end of the year to get an idea of exactly where they are. And we were very impressed. Our players worked hard during the course of the season. And man, we're really happy with where they're at.

You've been in college football for awhile now. Have you ever experienced another season like this one?

Yeah unfortunately being a part of a lot of rebuild-type programs, I've seen a lot of this. Dealt with it as a player in college quite a bit. You know I was at Utah State for two years and we struggled a lot there. Was part of a turnaround at the Citadel. Was part of a turnaround at North Texas, where we inherited a similar type of program. And in our third year, took the program to a bowl game. And really a lot of the same types of things-- saw from those experiences with our players and with our opponents.

What are the challenges from your perspective and your job when you come into a program that does not have a kind of a winning foundation in place?

Yeah I think the biggest difference is psychologically. And what the players believe that they're capable of. It's funny because I think back to our season last year at Brigham Young, and you know the first game of the season we played Nebraska at Nebraska. And won that game on a Hail Mary pass, and that was well documented on ESPN. And then the following week we come home and we played Boise and spend most of the game trailing, and

then come from behind and it was another kind of a Hail Mary situation at the end of the game where it was a fourth and long. You know and then we played UCLA at their place really close. Played Coach Ruff's ECU team really close and had to come from behind and win that game. Played Cincinnati, trailed for three and a half quarters, and had to come from behind and win that game.

And so there was a number of times last year where we found ourselves either behind early and needed to make a comeback, or through the resilience of the team were able to pull through and win. And that was at a program that had a lot of experience winning with Coach Mendenhall and the staff. And so they found ways to win.

There was a lot of times this year where we were either winning or we were close going into the half-- you know where a play or two makes a difference. And we just didn't make those plays or something else happened that swung it the other way. And so the resilience and the belief in the guys' abilities, and them not panicking to where they feel like they've got to do something other than exactly what they've been trained to do, I think comes into play in a big way. And the guys need to learn that and that's just learned through intense training, which will be a part of what we're going to be doing in the winter. And then when the coaches get a hold of them in the springtime, it'll be a big part of what we're going to be doing with them then.

As you mentioned you were at BYU with Coach Mendenhall in 2015. BYU plays a different schedule than Virginia does obviously, but what did you see in the ACC this year that was different from what BYU regularly faces? I know BYU just plays-- you mentioned some of the teams they face-- it's a wide range of teams, national teams and regional. Is anything about the ACC stick out to you after going through [INAUDIBLE]

A lot of good players. A lot of really good coaching. There's some really impressive teams. I was really impressed with North Carolina and how their players looked. They do a great job with their player development there. Virginia Tech, you know tip our hat to them. They've got a really good-looking program. And that's where we want and expect to be. And that takes time to develop players to look like that. And then you think about Coach Gentry-- Dr. Mike Gentry is a strength coach at Virginia Tech, been there for over 20 years. Coach Hilgart took over for him. But you know when you have that kind of consistency in a program, you can really work and develop the athletes. And so being able to see what's out there, there's a high level of quality in the players. There's a high level of quality of coaching. But those are all things that we can catch up on with great player development and great off-season development and great coaching and great recruiting. We can balance all that and have a great football program here.

From a strength and conditioning standpoint, what did you see specifically this year and what are you going to highlight going forward?

Our guys need to be bigger and stronger. You know, conditioning was never a factor for us during the course of the season. I don't think movement was a factor for us during the season. We attacked-- in the off-season-- the order of operations that we felt most needed to be addressed. Our players got lean and muscular throughout the course of the season. And we just have to continue to keep them lean and get them bigger and stronger.

We'll spend more time in the weight room this winter, obviously, because we're not preparing for our first ever spring ball-- and that was a major consideration last winter. Typically in the winter we like to put as much mass and strength on our guys as possible. And then utilize the summer to transmute that mass and strength into football-specific skill.

What we did this past winter was obviously a little bit different, because we had to teach the guys our system of training, which is a little bit different. We're very heavily technique-oriented with our guys. We had to teach them the way that we expected them to work. And there was just a lot of things that were quite a bit different with us coming in from the previous regime. And there was a pretty steep learning curve. To our players' credit, man they did everything that we asked them to do from a training standpoint. And did it really, really well. And the data backs that up as far as the physiological changes that we saw with these guys.

We just need more of that. And we're going to get more of it. In this off-season we've already started out. It's great because now we've got the whole month of December-- so add an extra month of training to what we did last year, with a more intensive focus on strength and size in the weight room. I think that we're going to be just fine going into next year.

For your linemen in particular-- linemen, tight ends, linebackers-- when you're trying to put on the weight and strength, do you have to scale back on the running at all with them? Or can they coexist?

There's got to be a balance with everything. And so last year we erred on the side of doing more conditioning work, because of what spring ball looks like and the way we practice. And we know exactly what practice looks like, because we track it via the Catapult GPS System. And so we knew exactly what we needed to get them ready for. The good thing is now that we've laid a very solid foundation of aerobic and alactic capacity with our players. And so that will be less of a shock to the system-- not only physiologically, but also psychologically.

You know there's a big part of a football practice to where, crap I don't know what this is going to be like. And so it does make it seem harder. When the guys know exactly what's coming-- and they will because they'll have gone through it before for a full season with coach and the staff-- the shock value is much less. And so there's less that we have to prepare them for, from that standpoint.

And so we're allowed eight hours a week with the players. We're going to train them five days a week with the

option of a sixth. We did that all summer, we'll continue to do that. There'll be five mandatory days and they'll have the option to come in on Saturday for some extra training. But there is going to have to be a balance. And our balance will shift more towards lifting this winter-- because again, we're not getting them ready for their first winter, and we've got a good foundation laid. So there will be more emphasis put on the weight room this year.

I know there's an emphasis placed on injury prevention and some of that is out of your control-- there are freak injuries that occur in every game and practice-- but for the most part, you know the coaches were able to put out the players they wanted to put out this year. Were you pleased from that standpoint with how the year went?

Yeah, for the most part. We didn't have any soft tissue injuries and so you know that just continues a trend that we've been running for a long time now. Programs that I've been privileged enough to lead. We didn't lose a player to a hamstring or quad during the course of the season lost playing time. The shoulders are a concern to me. You know and then kind of going back and looking more deeply at it-- guys that are having shoulder surgeries this off-season are guys that have had recurring shoulder problems in the past. And so that makes me feel a little bit better about those things. But just knowing that that's-- with this group of kids-- is going to be an issue, we might-- we're definitely going to put a little bit more of an emphasis on that.

And then the knees. The two knees that we did have during the year were both contact-- you know I consider those football injuries. And then Miles Robinson's toe was I think that was a freak thing. I talked to the doctor that actually did his surgery and just said, hey you know is there anything that you feel like we could do differently? And he said man I've never seen anything like this before and there's really nothing that I think in my professional opinion that can be done differently there.

And so those were the major ones that we saw aside from some of our young guys that we imported that had some existing things. I felt really good about where we were from an injury standpoint. Obviously I always want it to be better and we're working on some things that we can do to make it better.

There will be several first-year recruits entering school in January. There were several last year too. You had your hands full with lots of things when you came here. How big an advantage can that be for those guys who get here and get to go through spring ball and get to lift?

I love it. The school limits us to four and we will have four coming in. Last year, we folded those young guys in with our regular group, because really everybody was starting at square one. And it made sense to do it that way. This year, we're going to have a separate group for those guys-- just like we did for the summertime.

When those guys came in we put them in our white developmental program, with a heavy emphasis on what we called GPP, or general physical preparedness. Increasing their fitness levels, increasing their work capacity.

Cultural development-- teaching them how we work and the way that we work. Teach them discipline-- the instant willingness will be [INAUDIBLE] instruction. Respect for authority and self-reliance.

Those are things that become ingrained in who they are, and it's a part of our culture. And they need to learn that before they get folded in the group. But I love the opportunity. I mean think about if you get a kid in July, we get three weeks with them. If we get them in January, we basically get six months extra with them. And that's tremendous and I love that and I think we definitely need that.

Nine true freshman played this season. Joe Reed, Hasise Dubois, Cole Blackman-- on offense-- Juwan Moyer, Jordan Mack, Matt Terrell, Landon Word, Chris Moore, and Bryce Hall-- on defense. A number of those guys made significant contributions and-- other than Matt, who came in January-- the others arrived here in mid-July as you mentioned. You really didn't have a lot of time, from a non-football standpoint with them, did you?

No.

And what are the upsides for a lot of those guys? I mean look at Jordan Mack. He certainly doesn't look like a linebacker yet, but he still made plays.

Yeah I'll tell you what. Jordan came in as a safety and to his credit, you know he was like a 195-200 pound safety when he got here. You know he's pushing at 215 right now, which considering we had him for three weeks and we're looking at him as a safety and trying to develop him as such, and then when we had a need at that outside backer spot we moved him down. And he got with Randy Bird, our nutritionist, and started to put the weight on. Did a great job. And we think the ceiling is super high for him.

What's interesting about all those guys that you named is every one of those guys was a star in our white developmental and orange developmental program throughout the summer. Those guys they really rose to the top. Joe Reed, Jordan Mack. Early on we were like man look at these guys, really sharp. Juwan Moyer was impressive as a guy with leadership and some maturity and just some confidence that we didn't see with a lot of those young guys. You know Bryce Hall is a really good, young athlete, and he's super into the game. And so those are all great young men. And then there's a whole other group of that class that have been working out really hard in the off-season and made some really impressive gains with their bodies.

What about the guys who didn't play?

Yeah those guys that hadn't played and didn't travel this year, spent a lot of time in the weight room with us. While the other guys were in meetings, those guys were lifting with us and training hard. And there's been some significant physical improvements made with those guys. And they're going to contribute next year. And those will be names that the fans will get a chance to hear and know moving forward.

As far as individual players among maybe the older guys, do you have any special projects this off-season where you want to put 20 pounds on this guy, 30 pounds?

You know the whole team is like that across the board, just because we know really intimately now exactly who our players are and what their capabilities are. We know exactly what the conference is and what the opponent looks like. And so there's no guesswork anymore and we need to be better-- particularly in the physical development area. There's things that we need to do a better job of and we will. And we'll be able to hone those things and you know there's no dipping and dodging the question of the task at hand. We're going to meet at full force.

We like to consider ourselves a tip of the spear and Coach Mendenhall's attack with this team. And I love that. There's nowhere else I'd rather be in the charge with him, than at the front. And I'm excited about the opportunity to spend time with these kids. I love our kids. We've got a phenomenal team. We've got a phenomenal group of young men. They're bought in and they want to be good and they want to work hard and they've done everything we've asked. And now we know, specifically, what needs to be asked of them and that's exciting.

Anyone who's been to a UVA football practice knows that you are right in the middle of things-- calling out, every new period telling the players where to go, the coaches where to go. What's your role during games? Do you like having-- I'm guessing you like having things to do?

Yeah.

So you're not just standing there watching?

I like to stay busy. So on game day, sideline security first and foremost. Making sure the guys stay out of the way of the officials. You know I talk to the officials and they let me know. And some guys are real strict about the sideline. Other guys they understand, they get it. And so it's just kind of a matter of corralling the coaches and making sure the players stay back.

I help Coach Poppinga and Coach Visciglia with the special teams. And when it's time to bring a particular special teams unit, I make sure we've got the guys in.

I'm on the radio with Kelly Pugh and our sports med staff, and if there's injuries I relay that to the staff, so that Kelly and her staff can focus on just making sure that our guys are taken care of. And they've always got to have eyes on the field. And so that they're not trying to run around and find a coach. I'm able to do that and help with that.

And then fourth side of the ball. And that's basically our sideline. We got offense, defense, special teams on our sideline. And getting those guys to be engaged on the sideline and keep the energy high, keep the fans involved and get them cranked up at the crucial points of the game.

And so really it's a mishmash. You know I've expressed to the coaches-- and my staff-- we'll be whatever the coaching staff and the players need us to be on any given day, at any given point. And so those are the things that we've fallen into. Maybe it'll end up being more, maybe it'll end up being less, but that's where we were this past season.

You have a kindred spirit in Mike Curtis, over in JPJ. One team plays its games in the fall, the other plays in the winter. Did the football and basketball strength staffs have an opportunity to interact much? Or does that happen in the spring or when you're out of season?

Yeah I've got so much respect for Coach Curtis and it's really neat. I love going over there and learning from him because he's outstanding. He's very knowledgeable, very well organized, very well thought out. And I seek his guidance because you know there was about eight years ago when he was in a similar situation as we were-- taking over a new program and trying to figure out the right way to do it-- and you know he understands his place very well from having been here for a long time. And so I love going over there.

We've communicated through the season. In the summer we spent more time together. Our staffs met a couple of times and did some networking, which was awesome. There was a couple of times during the season we tried to get together and it just didn't work out. And then it was funny because I actually just texted Mike after they beat Ohio State the other night. And said man awesome win, and just what a testament to the physical conditioning and the mental resilience that's developed in the off-season in his program. With a win like that, coming from behind against the top opponent-- a really good opponent, quality opponent. And you know he wrote me back, he's like yeah I appreciate it and man I'd love to be able to get together with you. I know you're slow now but I'm going full speed, and so obviously any opportunity that I get I want to go over there and visit with Mike and learn from him and his staff. And be around those guys, because they do a phenomenal job and they're inspiration for us.

Well good luck this winter, this month and then in the winter program. And we'll see you out there in the spring.

Great, thanks so much, appreciate it.

Thanks for stopping by.

The fall semester is winding down here. It's a light weekend for UVA athletics in Charlottesville. Hope to see everybody at JPJ on Saturday for the men's basketball game against West Virginia. You can find information on that and much more on virginiasports.com. I'll be back soon with another Wahoos Central Podcast. Until then,

thanks for listening.