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Welcome to another edition of our weekly podcast on Virginia Athletics. I'm Jeff White from virginiasports.com, and my guest today in our University Hall studio is Todd DeSorbo, who took over in August as head coach of the UVA swimming and diving programs.

Todd, I'm guessing this will be the first of many appearances for you on this show, so thanks for stopping by. Are you all settled in over at the aquatic and fitness center?

Yeah, definitely. Thanks, Jeff. All settled in at the aquatic center. Still working on getting settled in Charlottesville, but it's going great so far.

The first time we talked was just a couple of days after you were hired back in August. At the time, you had yet to announce whom you'd be working with here, but your staff was finalized not long after our interview.

Why don't we start by, if you will, could you run down your staff for us, maybe starting with Tyler Fenwick, who's your associate head coach.

Yeah. Sure. Tyler was at the University of Tennessee for a good bit of time. He was their associate head coach. He is part of the US National Team coaching staff, has been on a lot of international trips with the US coaching staff more on the distance side and open water. He's got a great reputation around the country and around the world and you know, has a lot of great experience with getting guys and girls qualified for NCAAs, NCAA All-Americans, you know, Olympians, world championship team members. So he brings a really good bit of knowledge and a lot of energy. He's young, energetic, excited. You know, he does-- he's kind of on the cutting edge.

He's a William and Mary graduate.

He is a William and Mary graduate, yup.

He knows the state a little bit.

He does. He does. I know he spent a lot of time at UVA, back when he was at school. He had a lot of friends here. So he's definitely familiar with the area.

So how did-- obviously, you guys must have known each other before this, right? Yeah, we did. Mainly just, you know, in passing, as acquaintances. We talked at NCAA Championship meet. We talked at US National meets in

the summer and Olympic trials. Just got to know each other and build a relationship, and he's definitely somebody that I, you know, had on-- thinking back over the last few years I had a list--

On your list.

Yeah, a list of coaches that I might would want to work with if and when I was ever head coach, and he was definitely on that list.

Blair Bachman, another assistant, and Wes Foltz--

Yep. So Blair is-- spent her-- came from Indiana University, and again, she has a lot of experience. She was you know, at an Ivy League school prior to that and was also a head coach of a smaller school prior that. So she has a lot of experience at a lot of different levels. She's really, you know, great at recruiting. You know, that was one of the reasons why I really liked her and wanted to have her join us. She has-- she got the great experience at Indiana working with Olympic champions, NCAA champions. So she knows big-time elite swimming. She knows, you know, a program that's on the rise, like University, you know, Indiana is. She knows also the Ivy League, you know, the requirements academically of the Ivy Leagues, which obviously pertains well to UVA. And she has that head coaching experience, too, which is obviously helpful being a first-time head coach. You know, I've got a lot of people to lean on, which is good.

What about Wes, who was with you at State, at NC State?

Right. Wes was with me at NC State last season. He was actually at NC State with us as a volunteer for two years.

And then he left, right?

Left and went to Southern Cal for two years and worked with Dave Salo at USC and with Trojan Elite, and then was back at NC State for the last year. So he, you know, he's got a lot of great experience, again, working with you know, Olympic champions, world champions, NCAA champions. And again, you know, Wes is probably one of the best and brightest up-and-coming coaches. He's young. He's got a lot of energy, fits really well with what we're-- you know, the vision we have and what we're trying to do.

Three holdovers in the office from the previous staff-- Jason Glorious is the diving coach, your volunteer assistant, Kate, and your operations assistant, Lizzie. Was it important to you to have some continuity?

Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Were you shooting for that?

Absolutely. You know, I wanted a little bit, and having Jason stay on as our diving coach has been phenomenal, because he knows the area. He knows the university. He knows recruiting, and he knows diving really well. He's done a really good job with that side of things. So I think he was happy to stay, and I was happy to have him. He's helped me transition. It's helped the transition significantly.

Lizzie is phenomenal as our director of ops. She-- was definitely excited for her to stay, you know, because she knows everything about-- internally, administratively, about the university, the athletic department, and, you know, if we didn't have her, you know, it would be a significantly longer learning curve.

Volunteers, actually, we have made some changes there. We have two new volunteers. Andrew Sheaff, who was an associate head coach at Northwestern, and then Eric Thurston, who came to us from Brandeis up in the Northeast. So it's the two of them now.

How do you get-- what is kind of the role of the volunteers in the program? How do you sell it to someone to be a potential volunteer coach.

Well, you know, fortunately I didn't have to sell it to them. They were just excited about, you know, coming here and being a part of what we're going to do. I think a lot of people in the swimming community, countrywide are excited about the potential for UVA swimming and diving in the future. I think a lot of people are also not happy about it, because we're going to get a lot better, you know, which is exciting. You know, we're to make a lot more competition for a lot of programs out there.

But they were just excited to be a part of the program. They're full time. They're with us at every single practice. They're, you know, just an extra set of hands and eyes. And they're great coaches, so it's good to have the extra coaches on the pool deck.

You've been practicing for a while now. How is practice going? And is your training philosophy significantly different from that of your predecessor, Augie Busch.

Well, I'm not-- one-- I don't know. I don't know what they did in the past, and I really haven't asked them too much about that. I don't want to really dwell on the past. I'm always one that kind of continues to look forward. I'm gathering that it is significantly different. I think that the environment on the pool deck is significantly different. We have a lot of you know, a lot of energy in our coaching staff, a lot of passion. It's a fun, chaotic, interesting, exciting environment every single day, which I think the kids are feeding off of.

I think that my philosophies are probably a lot different than most coaches countrywide. You know, we put a bigger emphasis on what we're doing outside the pool, I think, than a lot of other places do. What we're doing in the weight room, what we're doing in our dry land, nutrition, hydration, recovery. You know, to be an elite athlete,

you need to act like a professional, and your, you know, your body is your-- is your work, so you've got to take care of it. You know, so I think that the intensity, I think, in workouts is significantly different for them. I think that's the biggest difference for the team.

Coaching changes can be challenging for the returning athletes. They can be good. They can be bad. What's the response been, you know from this group? None of whom, you know, you really recruited.

None of them. I didn't recruit any of them. Some of them I did recruit.

You knew, yeah.

Yeah. I knew of, and I had recruited from when I was at NC State. But it's been good, you know. I think that, you know, I walk around the pool deck the last six weeks, and I'm definitely excited about where the team is and what their potential is. They've bought in 100%. You know, they're willing to do whatever we ask them to do. You know, they're still learning what, you know, what our expectations are on a daily basis, and like a typical first-year might, you know? But for us, we've got 50 first-years because everything is new for everybody.

But we've hit the ground running, you know? They're just so excited to have, you know, the change, and you know, the electricity on the pool deck and the excitement and the passion and the energy that, you know, they're willing to do anything, and they're excited for the season and they're working real hard.

The women's team here has been much stronger than the men's in recent years. How wide is the gap between the two programs right now in your estimation?

Well, I mean, you know, if you base it off of last year, you know, the women were second, and the men were sixth in the conference. You know, the women-- you know, I try to look at the fact that they've won 16 or 17 ACC titles in the last 10 years between the two. I don't necessarily think the gap is that big. You know, I think that both teams are significantly better than what they've shown in the last few years, especially the men. And with the men, you know, I've walked around the pool deck and watched them. And you know, I can see that they are able to perform at a much higher level than what they had. So hopefully, we're able to bring that out in them this year and narrow the gap between the two.

The men have an interesting roster, don't they?

Two seniors, is that it?

Two seniors, that's all.

If that presents any challenges for this year, but it bodes well for the future, doesn't it, assuming the core of that is

talented?

Well, 15 out of 17 of the conference team last year were first or second years, freshmen or sophomores. So you know, I think, regardless-- and now we have, you know, a new first-year class has just started with us. So regardless-- even without them, we should get better just from developing the current guys. You know, I think that the challenges that it poses is more so on the recruiting end, because when you only have two graduating--

You don't have a lot of scholarships.

Right. You're not dealing with a lot from that perspective. From what's here now though, where we're-- you know, and what we'll do this season, I think it's a really good thing. We're young. You know, I think just on a numbers basis that, you know, most of the majority of our high scorers are going to be in the lower classes, you know, in the second and third years right now. So I think the future is really bright for the next three seasons based on that alone, and then with recruiting, that's just going to help boost us.

On the women's side, the graduation of Leah Smith, obviously left a huge hole, but I know from talking to you before, you think there's talent in the program and that can be overcome.

Yeah.

What have you liked about that group so far?

Well, I think one of the biggest presents that the prior coaching staff left us was the first-year class on the women's side. They're real-- they're very talented. And you know, I think there's a lot of opportunity and potential.

So the first-years now?

The current freshmen, so their last recruiting class is phenomenal, and it's just loaded with women that have the potential to be NCAA All-Americans in their first year here. So you know, I think that, you know, losing Leah, I think any program, when you lose an athlete of that caliber, it's going to hurt, but you know, I think with the depth and, you know, having the new, you know, incoming first years, as well as the returners are going to, you know, be able to offset that. My goal is to have so that we are losing that caliber of athlete every year. You develop them so that every year, your fourth years, your seniors graduating are at that level, and you know, but you're also bringing in talented athletes every year to soften the blow of that.

What is your approach with regards to diving? Do you have-- do you have a lot of knowledge of that, or is that something where you just kind of turn it over as a head coach and trust Jason to run that aspect of the program?

Well, I married a diver, so I know a little bit about it. But yeah, I mean, you know, I definitely couldn't coach it. You know, I rely on our diving coach. You know, I rely on Jason to, you know, develop them and have them perform at a high level, just like I would Tyler with the distance swimmers.

You know, I'm not a micromanager with any of our assistant coaches or our diving coach. I'm going to let them do what they're really good at, allow them the freedom to do what they're really good at. I don't want to handcuff them. I don't want to limit them. I want them to have everything they need. I want them to, you know, just be able to perform at a high level and what's best for them. And the same goes for Jason and the diving. And I trust him 100%. You know, and from a recruiting standpoint, if he tells me he's got a great athlete that's going to help us, you know, on the national level, we'll go after that as well as we would any swimmer.

You are known for coaching and developing sprinters. Where is the program on that front right now? And in the big picture, how critical are sprints for success at the NCAA level?

I mean, I think it's crucially, you know, important.

To relays, right?

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, relays are double points at NAAs, and if you have relays that score and nothing else, you can be top 15 in the country. So you know, sprinting and relays are going to be a focal point for our program. You know, that's what I've always worked under, you know, the philosophy that I've always worked under, and it's worked really well for all the programs I've been involved with in the past. And you have to have a stable of great sprinters in order to have the great relays. So you know, I think we're in a pretty good spot. You know, just like anything on the team, we want to get better. The bread and butter of UVA swimming and diving has been, historically, the distance. Yeah, the IMs, the 200s, the stroke and I fully intend to uphold the integrity.

Can you have both?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, definitely. And we already have one end of it, you know? So now, you know, I don't necessarily say that sprinting is our weakness, but if we had a weakness, that would be what it would be. But I think that's, you know, why, you know, having me focus on that side of things is going to help the program and help, you know, even it out a little bit.

Do you have any kind of timetable for how long you think it will-- to get the overall program where you want it? I know you have lofty aspirations.

Yeah, absolutely. Well, you know, I think there's two keys to it, you know? ACC Championships are great, and I want to win ACC titles but that's not definitely not my priority yet, you know? You know, one of my-- one of my

professional goals is, you know, to be on the pool deck in Tokyo, coaching a number of our athletes. In order to do that, we'd have to put two, three, four, five people on the US Olympic team. You know, also, I think NCAAs and ACCs are a stepping stone to that. So if you're having success at the international level, you're going to have success on the NCAA level, too. So you know, I'm confident that by 2020, both our men and our women can be top-five NCAA teams, and that's what we're-- our coaching staff, every day we wake up with the purpose of getting the program to that level.

Your 2017-18 schedule was finalized last week. Your first meet is less than 10 days away, October 14 at Penn State. Later in the season, on January 19, NC State comes to Charlottesville, will that be awkward for you?

I don't know. I think it, you know, it might be a little. It will be interesting. You know, I relate it to, you know, when Braden Holloway, who's the head coach at NC State, came, he was the associate coach at Virginia Tech. Came to NC State, so he had to go through the same thing, and I'm sure it was a little awkward for him.

You know, I think it will be a little bit awkward, but you know, I'm great friends with all the coaches there, have great relationships with all the athletes. I'm sure that there will be a heightened awareness of a little bit of a rivalry that will pop up, and I'm sure they're going to want to beat us bad, and our kids are going to want to, you know, give them everything they've got as well. So you know, I think it might be initially awkward, but when the first race goes off, I think all that's going to go out.

You and your assistants are active on social media. Anybody who follows you on Twitter knows you're fired up about the way recruiting has been going. NCAA rules don't allow us to discuss specific prospects before they sign their letters of intent, but in general, how has that gone? And given the timing of your hire, did you have to play a lot of catch up with this class, the class that will come in, enter school next year?

Absolutely. Yeah, we definitely played catch up. You know, because we're already having conversations with the class of 2019. You know, we're allowed to text message them, email them. They're allowed to call us. So we're already having a lot of those conversations. So you know, if you look at that, we're a year ahead, you know, for the 2019s than we were with the 2018s. So the conversations that I was able to start having with the class of 2018s happened, you know, August, you know, 10, 14, or whenever it was that I started here. So we had the last six weeks to build those relationships, whereas we have a year to build them with 2019. So definitely playing a lot of catch up.

But one of the questions I was asked on my interviews here was, is recruiting a concern with it's going to be a late start, you know, with the way things just worked out from a timing perspective? So I said, no, it's not, you know? I think the University of Virginia draws, you know, talented student athletes regardless, because the first and foremost, they're looking at the University of Virginia as an academic institution. It's one of the best in the country

as far as public schools go. So I wasn't worried that we were going to get some, you know, some great looks from some good athletes, and a lot of great athletes were waiting to see who UVA hired so that they could move forward. So it's gone, like pretty much everything since I've been here, significantly better than I would have hoped for.

The state of Virginia plus DC and Maryland have been traditionally strong in producing swimmers. Can UVA do better in those areas recruiting than it has, and is that a priority for you?

Oh, yeah. I definitely think we can do better, and it is one of our main priorities. You know, there's no reason that anybody from the state of Virginia should have to leave. You've got one of the best educational institutions in the country right here. You know, from a cost perspective, it's significantly cheaper than going out of state. And you're right, Virginia has-- the state of Virginia, club swimming and high school swimming is phenomenal. The base, the depth is great. You know, our goal is to win the state every year, have the top, you know, three to five recruits out of the state of Virginia come to-- you know, stay and come to UVA.

You sampled-- on your first day in town, you sampled Wayside Chicken, and liked it, I believe. There's no shortage of good food in Charlottesville. Have you found-- Have you found enough good restaurants?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You know, and I've been to-- and I'm still going to places that, you know, a new place every time, you know? And I've been hanging out with, you know, Brian, the head track coach, a good bit, and we probably go out to dinner every couple of weeks, and he takes me to a new place. Yeah, there's a lot of great-- I mean, Charlottesville is just fantastic. And I'm trying to limit it a little bit and waiting for my family to get here, so I can do a lot of that with them, because my wife is jealous a little bit of that right now. But yeah.

It's hard. It's tempting.

Yeah. Yeah. And I've been back to Wayside. It's good.

Yeah. Well, listen, I know you've got a busy day, a busy schedule, so I appreciate you making time for this. Best of luck.

This is Thursday, and there will be a multitude of UVA athletic events in Charlottesville over the next few days, starting tonight. Women's soccer and men's soccer at Klockner Stadium, field hockey at the U-Hall Turf Field, volleyball at Mem Gym, and of course, football at Scott Stadium on Saturday.

For information, schedules, and much more, visit virginiasports.com. I'll be back next week with another podcast. Until then, thanks for listening.

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