

UVA Athletics | Tujague

Welcome to another edition of Virginia Athletics weekly podcast. We're about 48 hours away from the opening game of the season at Scott Stadium, so we're talking football today. I'm Jeff White from Virginiasports.com, and my guest today in our University Hall studio is Garrett Tujague, who coaches the Cavaliers' offensive line.

Coach, this is a big week, obviously, so thanks for making time to stop by.

Always appreciate it. Thanks for having me.

So preparation for this season essentially began the minute the Virginia Tech game ended last November. Nine months later, do you have a good read on your group?

Yes, like you said the, preparation for this game, this season started as we were walking off the field at Virginia Tech and saw with a really crystal clear understanding of what it was we needed up front to be competitive in the ACC. And so coaching staff did an amazing job-- diligent, hard working, just tireless effort to make sure that we had the right pieces of the puzzle up front.

At his press conference on Monday, Coach Mendenhall said, he's never sure exactly how his team is going to play until he sees it in a real game even after all that practice. You're the same way?

Yes, I think you prepare your men. You prepare them, make sure that they are getting the looks that they need. They have a crystal clear understanding of what the look is going to be. And then again it-- just that moment that you get to be flying around out there with the live bullets, I think that's when you find out what you've got, the makings of what you have.

What do you expect from William and Mary's-- the line in-- the front seven really-- the guys your linemen will really go up against?

Yes, they are stout. I think they're very, very well coached. They're disciplined players. They play hard. So I don't for one second-- that this is going to be a tough, physical game up front. Linebackers are quick to the ball. They've got some good players. And, again, I think it comes back to who their coaches on defense, the head coach, and the philosophy they have. So they're a solid, solid team.

What is game day like for you as a coach? Are you able to sleep the night before? If you're at home and it's a 3:30 start, will you get up and spend time with the family or do you just off in your own world?

No, it's very important for me-- it's a game-day ritual for home obviously breakfast with my son and my wife. My daughters are away at school, so we get a little FaceTime action. It's actually I have no problem sleeping the night

before a game.

It's after.

It's the night after the game. That's when it's really rough to sleep because you've got to go in and watch the film because you have all these things going on in your head and the way you saw it and stuff like that. But, yes, no, I'm big time on drawing my energy from my family. So I try to spend as much time with them before kick off.

You have said when I've talked to you in the spring that you were not happy with way the line performed overall last year. I know it remains a work in progress, and you're putting new pieces together. But do you think this group has potential to do better than last year's?

Oh, yes. And, again, you love the guys that you work with every day. And I don't know if that could get any worse than it was last year for us upfront and not having healthy bodies, not having enough bodies. But, yes, I think we're way further ahead up front-- better communication from me to them and them to me in a crystal clear understanding of what their expectations are and a year under Bronco's system. I think that makes a huge difference.

Of all the position coaches, I don't think anybody here had to deal with more challenges during training camp than you did. Jack McDonald hurts his knee, has to get arthroscopic surgery. John Montelus turns his ankle. Jack English isn't always available. I think RJ Proctor was banged up for a couple of days, too. Ever been through a camp like that? That was four projected starters for you or four of your top six guys at various times were out.

Yes, and you know what? Good. I think that's great because it gives the next guy the opportunity to step up. That's the beautiful thing about playing the offensive line position is it's a physical, nasty game up front, and you have to be able to have that mentality. I promise you we travel 10, all 10 better be ready to play because they've earned that right to get on the bus to go over to Scott stadium. So I want to get them in there and get them playing and let them experience that success.

When I interviewed you in the spring, you talked about how your experience coaching at the junior college level has helped you build a cohesive unit on the fly because you don't have the luxury of three years with these guys or four years. You added two graduate transfers this summer-- Brandon Pertile from Oklahoma State, John Montelus from Notre Dame. They'll both be in the starting lineup Saturday against William and Mary. You weren't able to start working with them until this summer, which is not ideal. But where-- are they where you'd like them to be going into this opener.

Yes, and, again, I think the opportunity of having that week early starting camp has given us an opportunity to get a little bit more caught up. And there's programs that we have that they were using like tests and quizzes that take

over the summer to make sure that they understood my lingo and I understood-- they understood where I was coming from. So that bridging that gap was a lot easier because of technology. But it's been every single day is just constantly working and tweaking little things and the mechanics of the game, that which is what I love. And so when you have that background of being a junior college guy, your roster changes 40% to 50% every single year. And so being able to get that terminology and those guys speaking the same lingo as quick as possible, I feel like I've got a pretty good beat on that.

Neither of those two guys, Brandon or John, played as much-- has played as much college football to this point as they would have liked. Is there a hunger to them that you see, particularly known for each one of them. This is the last go round. Yes, a totally different perspective I think on both of them. And I hold them to a higher standard. I think if you were to ask them this experience, they had no idea that it was possible to play college football, get your butt coached off, and still have a great time and walk off the field smiling. So I think those guys are having a memorable experience. And I think it's a great story. But, yes, they're hungry. And any chance they can get to be around me, they are. They're constantly texting me. What about this? What about that? And so there's a definite culture that they've brought to the room of a sense of urgency, which I absolutely love.

With Jack English serving a one-game suspension, you'll be starting a true freshman at left tackle on Saturday. What do you like about Dillon Reinkensmeyer?

Dillon is an absolute student of the game. I think he's logged the most hours, not minutes but hours maybe even weeks, on the virtual reality equipment that we have over in the McHugh. And so he uses that every day. He's a total student of the game. His body-- he came in at 255, and now he's 305. He's quick. He's twitchy. Dillon's going to play no matter when Jack comes back. Dillon's going to play a lot for me, whether it be a tackle or center, just as--

I was going to say wasn't he-- didn't you originally think he'd end up being at center?

Yes, he's twitchy enough to play center, strong enough, like I said, intelligent. The center for us is always the one calling the fronts and all that and the protections. And so he's got that IQ, and, again, I think it's going to be a pleasant surprise for everybody on Saturday.

Three of his classmates-- Ryan Nelson, Tyler Fannin, and Chris Glaser-- are in the two deep. I know Ryan Nelson's another guy who's been working hard for you from that true freshman class. What do you think of that group overall? I know a couple of guys are probably going to end up redshirting.

Yes, love them. I think the best part about the whole thing is that being able to have been around them and build that relationship before they got here for a year, some of them a year and a half. So the expectations of what they

were coming into to Bronco's program where there was no surprises. And so they came in ready and strong and in great shape and have done an amazing job through fall camp. So I would love more than anything to get them the opportunity to get their ears wet this year so that when guys leave out of the program the following year, we have playing experience with those men.

For various reasons when you came to Virginia, there was not a lot of depth on the offensive line. And I know fixing that is a little bit like turning an aircraft carrier around. You can't really fast-- you can only fast track it so much. Do you expect to bring in another large class of offensive linemen in next year, and are you likely to look for another grad transfer, too?

Yes, I think that, again, the expectation here at the University of Virginia is stellar. It's monumental at the offensive line position. It's got a tremendous tradition, not just history but tradition at the offensive line position. So the expectations for me and for my room are extremely high regardless of the circumstances that we may have been dealt. And we will push through and fight through that. So for me it's more important to find kids that have a great understanding of the game and how physical it must be in order to be an ACC University of Virginia offensive lineman. I think there's a lot of pride just in saying that. But then you look at it. They also have to be great students, which I love that part of it. And so to me it's finding the right guy. And, yes, we will have another large class next year. And it probably will model the same class that came in this year.

On the two deep, you're projected starters for this weekend are listed at 305 pounds, 325, 315, 315, and 320. That's bigger than last year's group I think. I don't have those numbers in front of me, but I know across the board that has been an emphasis on getting bigger and stronger. And the guys worked hard with Coach Wintrich. Was that a priority particularly for your group?

Yes, it was the whole message behind everything we did in the spring and in the winter. We pushed back spring ball just so we could get them bigger, stronger, and then obviously not lose that speed and twitchiness. So that was a huge part. Again, last year was the foundation and understanding that hard things together will achieve a lot. And so we've still kept that motto obviously. And then being able to have a bigger offensive line I think is going to help us obviously in non-conference but for sure in the ACC.

You've talked about the importance of the center in your system and probably true in any college system. But you got Jake Fielier starting. I know you moved him to center right before spring ball started. What do you expect from him this year? He's one of the more experienced guys on the line as a redshirt junior.

Yes, I'm expecting huge things. It was going to be tough to replace Jackson Matteo. Jackson is a stud, did a phenomenal job for me last year. And it's fun for me to sit back in that competitive environment and watch Jake have the same characteristics as Jackson. It's also very helpful that Jackson's here. I know Jackson acts as a

mentor to him. Jake and I have spent countless hours together in the summer of working that culture. I love Jake. He's got that mean, nasty in mentality. And you know he'll fight anybody anywhere for what he believes in. That's UVA football.

It feels like RJ Proctor's been here an awful long time, but he's only a redshirt sophomore. He got some good work last season. Is he ready to make a significant contribution do you think?

I think his body is probably the most ready. He's one of the strongest guys I have. He's twitchy. He's quick. I'm expecting huge, huge things out of RJ. And then again, any time you have-- Jack McDonald's backing him up right now, so you're like, wait a minute. Jack's been a however many game starter. And how's that work? And so I think any time there's competition like that, you're going to have a great right guard spot.

If your players stay healthy, how many guys would you like to use in a typical game. I'm not talking about the end where it could be a blowout one way or another. But in a close competitive game, in a perfect world, how many offensive linemen do you think you'd use?

If you dress, you play. That's the mentality. If you dress, you play. If you dress and you've earned a number and you're on the bus or the plane, you play 10. I play all 10 of them just because you don't want to come without experience. Could you imagine right now if we were with RJ or Jake, who didn't have any experience last year because I just rode and died with those five guys, then now we would be missing that experience. So I think that experience is pivotal.

You were head coach for six seasons at College of the Canyons before you joined Coach Mendenhall's staff at BYU in 2013. Are you a better assistant for having been a head coach? And how did that experience shape you in what you're doing now?

There is no question I'm a way better assistant coach because I've been a head coach. You understand the role of the head coach. And this is just-- it's funny because we're just talking about this, but now I make suggestions for Coach Mendenhall, and he makes decisions. So it's awesome. I love it. Coach Mendenhall did an amazing job of letting me be part of him and his staff and embrace. It's fun because I've been a head coach, and he knows that I may have some answers for him that he might have in other staff or assistants. But it's a great-- it's been a great transition.

You played at BYU for the great LaVell Edwards, and now you're working here with his grandson, Matthew, who's an offensive analyst. There's definitely a physical resemblance. What do you see in Matthew as a coach?

It's crazy. I think he's brilliant. I think he's smart. He sees things. He is a very, very good football coach. And his

bloodline does help. But it's funny because we'll be sitting there in staff meetings and his grandfather used to have the same characteristic, would roll his tongue in his cheek. And it was just a LaVell trait. And he has the exact same trait. It freaks me out sometimes. But it's been awesome adding Matt and his family to our staff. Great kid and he's got a very bright future.

Are there similar-- coaching similarities between Bronco and LaVell Edwards?

To some degree, yes. I think the calm, cool, stoic part of it absolutely. I would agree with that.

So you have been here 20 months, give or take a few days. How do you and your family like Charlottesville?

Man, it is-- this place is amazing. You hear about it. And, again, we've had really good family friends that have made the transition 20 years ago, and they would always talk about it, how great it was. And when we came out here and played Virginia, it was-- the environment, the game--

The rain.

The game day and the rain. But I'll tell you, man, this place is absolutely amazing. The people here are genuine, nice. Again, I'm not taking a shot at the west coast, but everybody's down with their nose in their cell phone walking across their campus. On grounds here, people are hello. There's more interactive. The feeling of this place is amazing. My daughters, they love it-- they absolutely love it here. My son can't wait to go to Western Albemarle. It's just been an awesome, awesome place for the Tujague family.

Well, great. Well, good luck this weekend and this season. Thanks for stopping by.

Appreciate it. Any time.

The 2017-18 athletic year is in full swing at UVA. Tonight there's a soccer doubleheader at Klockner Stadium. This weekend, you can catch field hockey and cross country and more soccer in town. And, of course, there's the season starting football game Saturday at Scott Stadium. Hope to see everybody there. For schedules and information on all our teams, check Virginiasports.com. I'll be back next week with another podcast. Until then, thanks for listening.