

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Patrick Toney

Press Conference



PATRICK TONEY: Appreciate y'all having me. Obviously, really excited to be entering the next phase of this season, training camp. Really excited about the work our team has put in this summer to be in the best physical condition they possibly could be in. I think they've done a really good job of that.

Not only that, doing a good job of mastering their craft, mastering what we're asking them to do at their individual positions on their side of the unit to be best prepared for fall camp, and I think just everyone is anxious to get out there on the field tomorrow and see what we can do.

With that, I'll open it up to any questions.

Q. First question, Trey Dean has always been a guy with tremendous ability, but it just seems that it's never been harnessed. What have you seen from Trey Dean starting in spring practice and then in the development in these months since then?

PATRICK TONEY: The big thing we talk about at the safety position specifically, since that's my group, not only do we want to be the most gifted players on the field, we want to be the most skilled prayers on the field.

That means we have a mental checklist when we line up. We're scanning the formation. We are seeing the down in distance. We are knowing the exact alignments. We are knowing our assignment. We're seeing a specific key to get our on job done.

I think that translates to what you asked with Trey. I think Trey has done a good job on focusing on those areas of his game, the details of becoming the most skilled player on the field. I think you'll see that translate in the season.

Q. Explain a little bit in layman's terms the creeper defense. I know Ron Roberts is famous for that, and you've worked with Ron. What elements of the creeper do you use here? Is it part of the staple of the defensive philosophy here?

PATRICK TONEY: Yeah. I think when you say that word, you really are just talking about simulated pressure.

And really all you're saying is you are blitzing an unknown rusher and dropping a known rusher to replace him, right? It's still a four-man rush. Just a different way to create pressure.

I think you've kind of seen football evolve where early on if you blitzed, it was man, and there was a lot of high-risk/high-reward to that. Then it became zone blitz where you still rushed five, but were able to play with zone integrity and zone eyes.

Then it's kind of come full circle with the advent of spread and really the passing game is becoming more sophisticated where you don't always want to sacrifice coverage, right, to send another rusher, but you can create the same amount of pressure by blitzing a second-level, third-level defender to replace him with a first-level defender.

When you say a creeper, that's really what you are talking about. Still a four-man rush. You haven't sacrificed anything in coverage, and you are just doing something to affect the protection by sending someone they may not be prepared for or asking the running back to have to block in protection rather than the five-down. That's the way I see it.

Q. How would you describe your philosophy on third-down defense?

PATRICK TONEY: Yeah, get off the field. (Laughing). No. Third down is so interesting. Analytics have taken over the game in college, and you're seeing it go to the NFL as well.

Philosophically we want to contest every route. We want to make it hard for the quarterback. We want to affect the quarterback. He is, obviously, the guy with the hardest job. He has to deliver it on third down.

So how can we contest him, make him throw in tight windows. And then with that being said, how can we affect

the quarterback directly, get the ball out of his hand, hopefully not in rhythm?

The other thing we have to do a good job of is anticipating four-down territory in today's game and all those aspects. When is it really third down, and when is it four downs? That's a big part of the game today.

Philosophically, we want to play close and tight to the receivers. Don't want to let them have free access, and then we want to affect the quarterback with our rush or pressure.

Q. We got to visit with Gervon earlier, and he talked about playing more end this year. How do you feel like he fits in there in your scheme and just what he brings with that flexibility on the definitive line?

PATRICK TONEY: I think he is a real flexible player. I know he has played a lot of nose here in the past. He has played some end.

I think the biggest thing he brings is length, obviously, at that position, and that's why you want to put him out there because his length will match up with tackles in this league very well.

His overall versatility, his basketball background, his athleticism, that lends to help him across the front. You'll see him play in a variety of techniques and positions throughout the course of the year.

I think he has done a really good job of embracing that role. And then the thing I respect about him a lot is he spends a lot of extra time. Every great player I've been around has spent a lot of extra time in the film room trying to match their craft on the field, and that's what he has done a really good job of.

Q. Secondly, there's a lot of competition in the secondary for the corner spots and nickel spots. How do you see that playing out in fall camp and just some of the guys there that have kind of -- what they've shown you so far?

PATRICK TONEY: I think we have good depth and a lot of guys eager to develop their role on the team, whether they've been here for a while or they're young players.

I think we're going to play a brand of defense where we utilize the secondary quite a bit. You'll see five defensive backs on the field a good amount for us, on some situations six. We're going to find roles and put them in the position they're most capable of playing.

You may see guys that are featured in certain packages, and you may see every-down starters. A lot of that will be seen here in the coming weeks as we jockey for playing time and really compete on the field.

Excited about the guys we have to work with. I know Coach Raymond and myself are very excited.

Q. On the same note with the younger players, Ventrell said in media days that Devin Moore will actually be a problem pretty soon. What have you seen from him as well as the two others that you had early enroll back in January and have got to spend the entire offseason with the team?

PATRICK TONEY: Devin is the first recruit I talked to when I took this job. He has done a really good job, man. He is extremely mature for his age. He is smart. He picks it up fast, very athletic, has great length. He has just done a tremendous job in spring football, and then continued that throughout the summer program.

So I do think Ventrell was right. I think he will play a factor in our secondary for sure. Been very excited working with him. He is great to work with.

Those other freshmen that enrolled early, same as. Very smart, very mature, eager to learn, great work ethic. Just have got to go out and prove it here in fall camp and compete for playing time.

Q. What's the identity of a Billy Napier team, and he is an offensive guy, we know, but how does that also trickle down to the defensive side of the ball?

PATRICK TONEY: We play complimentary football. When you talk about the identity of the head coach, we play complimentary football, meaning that what we do offensively compliments what we do defensively, and then our special teams will compliment that as well.

I think we create a practice environment that is conducive for improvement. First and foremost, we're going to play physically. That's what you are going to be known for.

Coach said it the other day. I think anyone that's played on a team coached by Coach Napier, one of the first words they would say is physical. A lot of that has to do with how we practice and the identity of our football team being built up front. That would be the biggest thing.

Then like I said, complimentary football. We want to control the clock. We want to control the critical situations of the game to win the football game.

Q. There's, I guess, new rules with the contact. It's been curtailed even a little bit more, I think. NCAA rules, right? You can't do a day-after-day now two days in a row, something like that?

PATRICK TONEY: Yeah.

Q. What challenges do these kind of rules create and things like tackling, for example, always gets talked about, but this team had some issues with missed tackles the last year or two. How does that all work?

PATRICK TONEY: I think, number one, it's great. Anything we can do for player safety, keep them fresh during fall camp, I think that's great. I think we do a good job with our sports performance department, Coach Hocke and Coach Danos, of monitoring that.

As far as tackling goes, very few college teams, NFL teams tackle to the ground much at all anymore. I think you can improve in tackling every day.

The biggest aspect of missed tackles in my opinion occurs in the approach to tackle. What is my body position? What is my leverage? What is my angle? You can work that on every rep even without going to the ground in attack mode or a thud tempo.

And that's something we're hard on in practice is the finish phase of the play. We want all 11 people to get to the football, have relentless pursuit, and then we want to own our leverage. If I'm coming from the left to the right, I want to own my right shoulder leverage and make sure I tag off or thud off on the appropriate aiming point. That's what helps eliminate tackles.

We work tackling every day against our offense, good-on-good. We never go to the ground. It's all angles, leverage, and approach.

I think that's how you get better at tackling in today's game when you can't go to the ground all the time, and you really don't want to go to the ground. That's when injuries occur.

Missed tackles really occur on the approach and leverage more than anything. That's what we're hard on in every period whether it's seven-on-seven, individual, or team period against our offense.

Q. I wanted to ask about recruiting. I know you can't get into a lot of details or any details on the '23 class. What's your assessment on how you've been doing on the recruiting trail since the traditional signing day?

PATRICK TONEY: I think the class we have put together

here is great. I think we've done a really good job of being meticulous in our evaluation and really looking for people that fit our schemes, our system, and then, most importantly, our culture. I think we've done a really good job of identifying those guys.

Obviously, the competition in recruiting is as heated as it is on the field in this conference and at this level. It's not over until it's over, right?

I think we've laid a great ground work. I think the people in the recruiting department -- Katie, Bri, Sierra, Jacob, the list goes on -- have done an unbelievable job as far as that goes, and I think we're definitely headed in the right direction for sure. I'm happy with where we're at.

Q. There was a rumor that you had played Playstation with Shemar James before signing day. Is that true, and if it is, can you talk about that a little bit?

PATRICK TONEY: We did not, no. Me and Shemar talked a lot before signing day. I don't know how that rumor started. I do have a Playstation, and I will play him and probably beat him, but, no, we hadn't done that.

Q. As far as what you are trying to accomplish identity-wise defensively, what do you think you guys are going to go into the season looking like on that side of the ball?

PATRICK TONEY: I talked about this in the spring. The first thing, and I think we made improvement here, is we want to be a fundamentally and technically sound defense. You will win and lose games because of your technique and fundamentals. That's number one.

We want to be known as a team in this league that plays with physicality and effort in this league. A lot of mistakes can be covered up with effort and physicality. That's the brand, the foundation, of where we need to be defensively. Fundamentals, technique, physicality, and effort.

Then we want to really focus on the critical factors that determine winning and losing. That's run defense. That's limiting explosive plays, which a lot of that has to do with tackling, which goes back to fundamentals and technique.

We want to win the critical downs, which is obviously third down, Red Zone, two-minute, which are critically important in today's game. Most importantly, we need to take the football away, which also goes back to technique and fundamentals.

Q. Coach, I wanted to ask you about Ventrell Miller and Amari Burney coming back for their fifth and sixth

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

years respectively -- or sixth and fifth years and what they've meant to the defense. Then, what improvements you have seen from them coming out of the spring going to this fall season?

PATRICK TONEY: Absolutely. I think he has done a really good job.

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PATRICK TONEY: I think both those guys you could see their veteran leadership on a day-to-day basis. I think Ventrell is one of the more vocal, if not the most vocal leader, on the defense. And then I think Burney does it through example, being a veteran and having done this for such a long time. He really handles himself like a professional.

As far as improvement goes, first and foremost, you definitely know the difference from Ventrell Miller is out there for us on defense. He does a great job of taking charge, making calls, and then playing extremely fast.

I think Burney has really improved. He has always been a very good edge player. Watching past film, he has done a really good job of being a hybrid player. I think he has improved from the spring and going into the summer playing in the box, playing physically, really becoming an every-down linebacker.

I think that's what you'll see this fall. Really happy with both those guys and what they bring to our defense.

Q. Patrick, we spoke with Gervon earlier, and he talked about how much discipline is being instilled within this program. Can you just talk about how much the team has bought into that? Even the little things like wearing the same socks and things of that nature.

PATRICK TONEY: I think the buy-in has been really good. We obviously have some room for improvement for that, but the buy-in has been really good.

The discipline has been a major factor for us. We want to eliminate undisciplined penalties on defense. That will also help us win football games.

I think the buy-in has been really good. Obviously, that starts with the veterans buying in and holding themselves accountable as well as their teammates. I think that's been really good.

I like to use the quote, "How you do anything is how you do everything" with our position group and our defense. That definitely carries true to the discipline.

Q. Have you seen Gervon step up as a leader to help instill that sort of discipline on the team?

