

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 20, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



GREG SANKEY: We begin our afternoon with Billy Napier, the head coach at the University of Florida. Billy has been an assistant in the Southeastern Conference previously, but this is his first appearance as a head coach in SEC Football Media Days.

I think you all know prior to moving to Florida, he had been at the University of Louisiana, Southland Conference roots, in-state Louisiana relationships. I kidded Billy I know it as UL Lafayette, but officially the University of Louisiana.

Led them to the 2021 Sunbelt Conference championship. He was a two-time Sunbelt Conference Coach of the Year.

His dad was a hero to him and a big part of why he's now in coaching. Initially his dad, who was a high school coach, was his model. Billy's intent was to coach at the high school level, and among other stops he's been at Clemson, Alabama, Arizona State and the University of Louisiana before the move to Florida.

You may recall, in fact, I will note this one caught my attention. I think it was a halftime interview this past season where he said during that interview, Scared money don't make money. That's about how you call a game and how you play a game. That wasn't about NIL, folks. It was a good halftime comment.

It's my privilege to introduce to you the head coach of the Florida Gators, Billy Napier.

BILLY NAPIER: I grew up about two hours north of here. When I was growing up, my dad, anytime he would drop us off, whether it was at elementary school, middle school, to the church, maybe practice for a baseball, whatever the case may be, he would always ask us what our name was, right? We had to say our last name. And then he would say, Represent.

Well, today is a great day. Very humbled and honored to be here to represent the University of Florida, and all the

Gators throughout the entire world, all across this great country that we live in.

More importantly, our team, right, our players, our staff, our entire organization from top to bottom. One of the great things about the game of football is it requires hundreds of people to have success. Big role, small role, each person has an opportunity to be the difference, to make an impact.

We're thankful for all the people, each one of those people who contribute to our team.

We're seven and a half months into this journey. I've been very impressed with the leadership at the University of Florida. Our president, Dr. Kent Fuchs, on the university and foundation side, and on the UAA side, Scott Stricklin is our athletic director. It's been fun to see their vision, on the inside to see their execution.

We have an elite education at the University of Florida, a top five university. We also have a championship culture amongst all 21 sports. It's great to be a part of this team and work alongside these people.

We're thankful for their belief in our plan. We're very appreciative of the resources they provided as we begin to take on this great challenge.

SEC Media Days is a special day. It means football is right around the corner. When you think of this league, you think about the history, the tradition, the rivalries, the venues, the great players, the great coaches.

It's exciting to be a part of this league. I've been fortunate in my career to be in the ACC, the Pac-12, the Mountain West, the Sunbelt Conference, the MIAC Conference, and I played FCS-level football in the old Southern Conference.

This is the SEC. It is the league. Quality personnel, quality coaching, the footprint, the passion. It is the standard, it sets the bar. There's so much momentum. The credibility and the stability.

One of the greatest slogans of all time is, It just means more, right? I think that explains it very well.



There's a lot of uncertainty about realignment. I think the SEC is in a position of power. I can't compliment Greg Sankey enough for his leadership. It's one thing to be on the outside looking in. It's another thing to be inside and experience. This is a fantastic organization.

He's a special person and an unbelievable leader. The foresight, the wisdom, the integrity, the awareness, right? We're talking about high-level decisions here. I really believe we're going to look back and some of these decisions will be historic.

We're excited about the player representation that we have here today. Veteran offensive lineman Richard Gouraige is from Tampa, Florida. He graduated this spring. He's played over 2,000 snaps for the Gators.

Our quarterback, Anthony Richardson, is from Gainesville, Florida. Veteran linebacker Ventrell Miller is from Lakeland, Florida. He graduates this fall. Played over 1,500 plays in his career.

These players represent our values. They have integrity. They're great teammates. They have discipline in their approach. They give great effort. They're tough. They believe. I think that comes from great preparation.

They not only contribute on the field, but they've done a great job off the field, as well.

This 2022 team that we have is a new team, it's a new year, a new set of challenges and opportunities. I think each year each team is its own entity. They got to start over every year.

This is a first-year staff at a new place with a new roster. We've got a lot of players and a lot of staff that are learning our way, right? A lot of new roles. There's lots of roles to be determined on our team. We've got a core group of veteran players. We have a big portion of our team we think has ability, but it's inexperienced and needs to develop. Then we've brought in some young talent, high school, ju-co and transfer players. About 34 new players overall.

I like this group. I think they've got a chip on their shoulder. They're excited about the opportunity to earn some respect. Reality is in college football, 25 to 30%, every year you're going to have attrition. You're always a work in progress, whether it's year one or it's year ten.

I've been very pleased with the off-season, each phase. It's the first time we've done it at a new place with a new group of people. We're learning together.

We're currently finishing up week eight of a nine-week program in the summer. It's important that we finish strong, and that's the focus. We want to try to create momentum for training camp.

This group has embraced the work. I'm proud of our team. This team is not scared. They're tough, they love to compete. When you put the ball down, they're about it. I'm excited about training camp.

The next 40 days will be critical. We're going to work hard on developing the personality, the identity of this team. The daily approach, right? The self-discipline, the habit, the choices, focus that's required to be an exceptional player and have an exceptional team, and ultimately build habits.

We're excited here as we approach training camp. We're going to move into the Heavener Football Training facility. An \$85 million complex, 140,000 square feet. I think if not one of the best it may be the best in the entire country. It will help us as we move forward building the program.

We've got a very challenging schedule, obviously, in the SEC East to go along with LSU and A&M as the crossover West opponents. Top 10 Pac-12 champ Utah comes to town for the home opener. We're on the road at Florida State on a Friday night. It's a six-day turnaround. Then we play South Florida and Eastern Washington in non-conference play as well.

I want you to know we're very appreciative of the media and all the things that you do to contribute to the game, the great stories you tell about people, about teams. Your pen, your keyboard, your camera, lens, whatever the case may be, this game will teach you a lot if you'll let it, and we're thankful for the stories that you tell about it.

Thank you, guys. Any questions?

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What are some of the changes that you are implementing at Florida to make your impact felt as the new head coach?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think the big thing here is that the game is about the players. We want to create an organization that has life-changing impact on the players, right? We've put together a great infrastructure that's all about serving the players. We're trying to improve the player experience. We firmly believe that better people make better football players. We're committed to improving their character. We're going to prioritize their

education. We're going to teach football at a high level.

I think we inherited the situation that we have. We're excited about the administration, the resources that they provided.

Ultimately the game is about the players. Everything we do is to serve the players, position them for success within the game but also when the game's over one day.

Q. I know Bobby Lamb coached when you were at Furman, was on your staff at Louisiana. What has he meant to you as a mentor? What is it like having him by your side the last few years?

BILLY NAPIER: Coach Lamb, we go way back. Coach Lamb's dad was a legend high school coach in the state. My dad was a high school coach. My dad had players that played at Furman University. I went to the quarterback receiver camp I think five times.

Coach Lamb has always been there for me, right? As a position coach, he transitioned to being the head coach. Certainly it was a pleasure to have him on our staff.

He's a great sounding board. He's got a lot of wisdom, a heck of a football coach, but an even better person.

Q. You said when you got hired that this is a talent acquisition business. After seven and a half months, how would you assess where you are?

BILLY NAPIER: I can't compliment the staff enough. I think we put together a really good group of people. They've worked hard.

Reality is you have four opportunities to add players to your team: December, the winter portal period, February, then the spring portal period. I thought we made the most of our time.

I think we were fortunate we were able to observe bowl practice and address maybe some of the issues that we observed. Did a great job in December. I think the momentum carried over to February. We added a few more players in the spring.

I like the group that we added. We've had a chance to work with those guys, observe them throughout the summer. So far so good.

Q. I noticed in your background you overlapped with Kirby Smart at Alabama. Can you characterize, share an anecdote? Kirby likes to play the no respect card for Stetson Bennett, but this is a guy you recruited.

BILLY NAPIER: Nothing but respect for Kirby. I mean, the guy's an unbelievable football coach, leader. He's a fantastic person. Unbelievable competitor.

I'll tell you, first time I saw him was at our first SEC meeting. I told him, I said, Congratulations. I mean, I know what goes into that, right?

I'm proud of the guy, to be quite honest. He's done it, and he's done it the right way. It's going to be great to compete against him.

I think Stetson, it's pretty awesome to turn the TV on and see that guy playing quarterback for the Dawgs. He's committed to University of Louisiana. Got a chance to go back and play. Had the confidence. You think about his character, his confidence and his abilities. Fantastic player and a great leader. Certainly I can see why Georgia took him.

Q. You've been a part of a lot of great coaching staffs. You brought up the MIAC. What did you learn from coach Buddy Pough at South Carolina State and that atmosphere, what they produced down there?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I always will be indebted to Buddy. Gave me my first full-time job coaching the quarterbacks and calling plays.

To this day, if I get into a tough spot, he's the guy that I can pick up the phone and call. Just tremendous wisdom, right? Not only his experience with Brad Scott and Lou Holtz, but being a high school coach. He's a great leader, got a great pulse for his team. He has the ability to connect.

The guy's a legend if you're been around the guy. I mean, I can see why he's had the success he's had. That experience shaped my career, there's no question it made me better. I'm thankful for it.

Q. Four years in Lafayette, first-time head coach. What were the biggest lessons, biggest takeaways in that four years that you're implementing now?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think the first thing is you get put in these leadership opportunities, you quickly realize how important the people that you surround yourself with are. I think we had success at Louisiana because we had an unbelievable staff and we had a great group of players.

Then I think time. Time is of the essence, right? What you do with your time, how you allocate your time not only with your staff and team but also with your family, right?

Unbelievable experience. I thought we got a little bit better each year. I wouldn't be prepared for this job without that experience. And the people in Lafayette shaped me, made me better. I'm thankful for my time there.

Q. What did you learn from watching your dad's career, how he interacted with his players and staff, specifically how he continued to coach throughout his illness?

BILLY NAPIER: You're trying to get me here today.

Dad showed I think sometimes when adversity strikes, you can choose character or you can choose to compromise, right? Dad did an unbelievable job. Every day he chose character. He relied on his foundation, which was his faith. He was a great example to a lot of people.

Even to this day, it's impacting me and a lot of other people, too. So thanks for the question.

Q. I don't know how I'm going to follow that up. But you're a coach who is not losing your hair, but you embrace the buzz cut. What is the thought process behind that?

BILLY NAPIER: It's simple, it's what I will tell you. It takes no time to get ready in the morning.

I got a lot of other things to worry about besides my hair, I can promise you that.

Q. Florida obviously is a place it's shown you can win national championships, SEC titles. The last three coaches, none of them lasted more than four years even though they had some success. What makes you think you can be like a Steve Spurrier, not end up like these other guys? Would you also talk about Anthony Richardson, what you're seeing from him, what you expect from him this season?

BILLY NAPIER: I think timing is important in every job, right? These are big decisions and a lot goes into the research leading up to those decisions.

I have been impressed with the leadership at Florida in terms of their awareness, what it's required to be competitive at this level, their investment in the Heavener Center, the resources it took to build this new facility. I think is going to help us in recruiting, it's going to help us acquire players, it's going to help our player experience, our efficiency as an organization.

They were committed to our vision and our plan, right? I

think we're 20% bigger as an organization. We've modernized the approach. We have an incredible product. I mean, we have history, we have tradition, we have an elite degree. We have one of the best experiences for scholar athletes in the country. It's been done before, and they're passionate about doing it again, right?

I think they understand maybe why there's a struggle. I think they're working hard to address those things.

But I love a challenge, and this is a challenge. I think we can get caught up in all that or we can see an unbelievable opportunity, and that's exactly what I see.

As far as Anthony Richardson is concerned, I've been impressed. I think he's remained humble. He's got a little bit of an edge. I think he wants to prove himself. He's still relatively an inexperienced player, played 221 plays or something like that, completed 33 passes.

He has tremendous ability. He's working hard to develop, improve as a person, as a leader. He's working hard to increase his football IQ. His skill is developing. I think he's prime to have a phenomenal year.

But we've got a lot of work to do, right? I told him I can still remember in the spring game, I could see he had some urgency about him. I told him, It's important, this energy that you feel right now, you got to bring that and channel that energy between now and the next opportunity in the stadium.

We've seen that. Our routine for the quarterback is vigorous. He's embraced that. He's making great strides. I know he's looking forward to the opportunity.

Q. Could you follow up on your comments about Kirby Smart as you begin to build your program at Florida. Do you see a sizable divide right now between the top and the rest in the conference, or do you see the fact there have been three different national championships won by SEC teams the last three years? Does that provide you encouragement this is more than just a one-team dynasty in the league?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we're all aware if you can win your division, the championship here, you can be a national championship contender. The path, it's been proven.

To go back to what you're talking about, we're consumed with Florida right now. We've got a lot of grass to mow, right? It's our grass, not anybody else's. We've got a lot of work to do.

When you take over an organization, a team, you quickly



get to work on what are the issues, what are the problems, coming up with really good solutions. It's one day at a time, it's one person at a time. I think that's the approach we're taking.

We'll look up at the end and see where we're at. Right now we've got a lot of work to do. It's critical we stay on task and stay focused on what we can do to help the Gators get better each and every day.

Q. I wanted to ask you about a couple of guys that you inherited on your team. Jaydon Hill, who had injuries in high school and at Florida, but looked like he was coming into his own last year as a corner, got hurt early. Princely Umanmielen, he's somebody that I thought in the recruiting process was a great talent. I wanted to know about his development as a Gator.

BILLY NAPIER: Jaydon, had a chance to get to know him a little bit. I admire Jaydon. To go through what he's gone through from an injury perspective, I think it's important when you're trying to overcome an injury to keep perspective. I think it can benefit you if you have the right approach. It can create toughness. It can create resiliency. I think we see that. It shaped his character, and he's better for it, right?

Anytime you get injured, it's a challenge.

Princely has had a really good off-season. I admire the work he's done in changing his body. He was really one of the standouts when we got the DEXA scans back after the nine-week training block in the spring. Really made a ton of progress. Guy did some great things, even today in some of the testing. Princely is primed to have an exceptional year. He's one of those players that doesn't have tremendous experience, but we think has ability and will have an opportunity to impact our team.

Q. I wonder what you picked up from Nick Saban? Early happy birthday.

BILLY NAPIER: Appreciate that.

Coach was great to me. I think, heck, each person that's worked for him will tell you the same thing. He's created opportunities for me because of the things that I learned from him.

Admire Coach's consistency. He was unbelievable in his approach. He set the standard. He set the bar relative to the discipline, the work ethic, the focus, the ability to sustain.

We could sit in here all day and talk about the things you

learn along the way. He was good to me in my career. He hired me twice, gave me an opportunity as an analyst, brought me back as a position coach, and really helped me in a difficult time there when my dad got diagnosed with ALS, really helped me in a lot of different ways.

Coach has been great, man. Admire him for what he's accomplished. He's not slowing down anytime soon, I don't think.

Q. Talking about the Florida-Georgia game, I know you haven't been around long enough in Gainesville to make these decisions. Kirby Smart talked about how he would like to see the game moved to home and home venues. What are your thoughts on that?

BILLY NAPIER: I got asked that question earlier. I think the big thing is I'm probably not -- I want to experience the game first, right? I'd like to see that game in Jacksonville, experience that game before I have an opinion on that.

There's a lot of credibility to both, right? The home and home obviously would be fantastic. But there's also some tradition there. There's a rivalry there.

Time will tell. I agree, that's above my pay grade. But I'm looking forward to the opportunity to participate in the game.

Q. With the players you inherited and the guys you brought in, where do you feel like your talent level is? Do you feel it's realistic you could compete for the East title this year? Talk about how close you and Kirby are, now you're obviously at two programs that don't like each other very much. Does that change y'all's relationship?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I mean, I think a lot of the things that you discussed earlier there are to be determined. I talked about it earlier. I like our football team. I like how they've embraced the work. I think they love to compete. I think they're tough. I think we do have a little bit of an edge. I think there's a sense that there's respect to be earned, if that makes sense.

I just like the look in the eye that I see. We've got some veteran players that I think have done a really good job, and then we've got a lot of work to do as a coaching staff. I do like the group we brought in.

But year one, new staff, new place, new group of players, new roster, I mean, we're a work in progress. I would tell you this: Every team in the country's got its own set of issues and problems, right? We're all working through that. That's exactly where we're at.



But as far as competing with Kirby, heck, man, I've got nothing but respect for Kirby.

Q. Talk about reuniting with Rob Sale after he went away for a year, and also what Jabbar Juluke and Corey Raymond bring to your staff.

BILLY NAPIER: We were very fortunate to bring Rob back. He was with me three years at Louisiana, did an unbelievable job. We were Joe Moore finalists I think three years in a row. We had a handful of players drafted at that position.

Did a really good job connecting with the players, had great rapport. Then a phenomenal teacher. He's one of those guys that had a relationship with before, kind of a foxhole guy, really a guy that I can lean on and have a great relationship with.

Jabbar, very much the same. With us for four years. Proved his ability as a recruiter. Proved his ability as a teacher on the field. His group was one of the best groups that we had.

I think the thing that's impressed me about Jabbar is his ability to mentor not only his group but to have an effect on the entire roster. As a former high school coach, he's got a sincere, authentic care, wants to help people, wants to help the players. Phenomenal.

Corey, obviously first time working with Corey. Just a really savvy veteran. Never hits the panic button. Always focused, always on the task at hand. Very distinguish developer and teacher. You think about the track record, I think he's had 16 defensive backs drafted. Still to this day has great relationships with all those players.

Corey and I go way back. When I was coaching receivers at Alabama, there was a lot of battles in some really big games. I used to watch his group in pregame, you could tell right away the guy is a phenomenal teacher and great coach. He's proved to be the same for the Gators.

Q. The whole nation is looking at the state of Florida in terms of recruiting. What would you be doing to keep those kids home?

BILLY NAPIER: That's a great question.

I do think our philosophy is to take an inside-out approach in recruiting. I think it's critical that you start at home base and work your way out.

The state of Florida has 275 Division I football players each

year on average, right? I think that's a five-year sample. It's critical that we have a great evaluation process. I can't compliment our personnel department enough in their approach.

We do a great job when we do get opportunities on campus to build relationships, to show our product. I think that's one of the things I'm excited about.

We have a phenomenal product. I think as we grow as a staff, we're going to get better at presenting that product and learning more about the University of Florida.

But keeping the best players in the state at home is going to be critical. The good thing is there's a lot of them to go around. We're going to stick to our plan, inside-out, evaluate, recruit, and once they arrive, we're going to work hard on developing them as people, as students and as football players.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this afternoon.

BILLY NAPIER: Thank you.

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