

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 17, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

Florida Gators

Graham Mertz

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Graham is here and ready for your questions.

Q. Graham, long time since Thibodaux, right?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, long time.

Q. Who are your threats on the outside that are going to make plays for you. You have a good tight end, is that right?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, yeah, on the outside we have a lot of great young guys coming back, going into their second year. I could talk about the receiver room all day, but we also brought in two transfer receivers, Chimere Dike from Wisconsin and Elijah Badger from Arizona State. Great experienced players, know what it takes to win and great leaders, too. Excited about that room, man.

Q. Billy was just in here and talked about the importance of having the right guys in the room at the time. What he said that stuck with me was everybody on the team now picked us and we picked them. Do you see that cohesion now and everybody pulling in the same direction?

GRAHAM MERTZ: 100 percent. I think you see complete buy-in and as a team that's what you need. You need players leading and you need buy-in, like I just said. This team we have right now, they're passionate, they care about each other and they want to win and they're fully bought into not only the scheme but Coach Napier's vision of what this team could be.

Q. He hasn't been with you for long, but Jason Zandamela came over from USC as a transfer. What have you seen from him?

GRAHAM MERTZ: He's done a great job. He's in a different lift group from me, in the morning, but I'm sure he can throw weight around and I've heard from not only

players but coaches that he's doing a fantastic job of learning the playbook, putting in the extra reps and growing not only as a player but as a person. So he's done a great job.

Q. Graham, looking back a year ago at this time, you come down from Wisconsin. How much have you grown physically, mentally, and what do you think about the SEC after one year and then looking at this coming schedule?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I'm going to start with just the SEC portion of that. I think the cool part about this wonderful league is just across the board the amount of passion the fan bases have, the players have, the coaches have for the university. I think that you go -- anywhere you go and you walk into a facility, or for me a stadium, an opposing team's stadium, you can feel that. You can feel the history and the passion. The only option is to respect it.

What was the first part of that? I missed the first part of your question.

Q. (Away from mic.)

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, man, yeah, I mean, I think that for me, as a person, coming down to Florida and experiencing something new, something different than Wisconsin was big for me, and it kind of pushed me into that area where I had to grow as a person. Whether that's on the field, off the field, in my faith, in my family, all these different areas. You spend a lot more time by yourself when you are the newbie than the older person, so for me it was big-time.

What was the last part of the question? Sorry.

Q. (Away from mic.)

GRAHAM MERTZ: The schedule?

Q. (Away from mic.)

GRAHAM MERTZ: No, you can't. I mean, this game you can -- I always go you can simplify this game, it comes



down to execution. That's all it is. If this team executes better than we do, they're going to win. If we execute better than they do, we're going to win.

Anytime you can simplify this game and realize that I am -- myself and my entire team, these coaches, we're so blessed to put on this uniform, play this game. So every time we have an opportunity to go play it, it's my job to respect that opportunity.

So for me it's -- yeah, people can call it whatever they want, label it whatever they want, but for us, we're just excited for the opportunity.

Q. Graham, how would you rate when you look around the league the level of quarterback play right now in the SEC and as a competitor, do you -- does that kinda help you push yourself?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I spent a weekend with a bunch of 'em at the Manning Camp, and I think not only are they great quarterbacks, but they're great people and I think that's the cool thing that we now have a group chat with every quarterback that was there and we're keeping up with each other, chopping it up. But for me, I think that the entire SEC. Each team has a quarterback that can rip it and that's the kind of game that you want to play in. It will be a fun year.

Q. Graham, to have that graduate patch on your jersey this upcoming season, what does that mean to you and the second part of it, the question is the fact that you have central Florida, Florida State and Miami all within one state, the rivalry with those three schools being in your state?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, for me, transferring and taking a little longer to graduate just because of all the credits and everything, so for me it's a blessing to finally get there and graduate from a place like Florida with a rich history, great school, great education.

Then, yeah, the state of Florida, the thing you see there is -- which has been fun for me getting to be somewhere new and experiencing it, like I said earlier, but the passion and the people in Florida for the university is truly special. The fans do not like each other. I've fully embraced that, fully learned that. But, yeah, it's been fun.

Q. As you've had a couple of years of experience now, how do you feel like your game has developed over these years?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I would say just overall knowledge of the game, and I think you go through phases at

quarterback of your process of learning. It kind of starts with okay I get to college I learn the playbook. After I learn the playbook then I start focusing on defenses, after I learn about defenses, how to attack the defenses, you go back it your playbook. For me, my game has evolved to the point where I've seen a lot of defenses, fronts, coverages, pressures. So I don't feel surprised when I see -- it's almost like a puzzle, like I've seen Ohio State ran that in 2021 in the third quarter. I can remember that because I lived all those experiences.

So for me the cool thing is being able to utilize that and, like, just being able to recall plays and instances that came up where I can help teach guys, like, yeah, they may have ran that coverage but here is another way to run it and show 'em a clip, stuff like that. It's freed me up to teach a little bit more when you are a sixth year senior playing college football.

Q. Talk in the same vein of the SEC, you were at the Manning Passing Academy. How was it interacting with other SEC players?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, it was great. So Quinn and Jackson were playing pool for like five hours every day so they were the pool sharks of the trip, but it was fun to get to know the guys and spend time with them. We had fun, we would work out together and throw it around a little bit and it was a blast learning from Peyton and Eli and Archie, being on the field, working through their drills and guys applying things. It was definitely a fantastic experience.

Q. Graham, Danny was bumping around here today.

GRAHAM MERTZ: My guy.

Q. Your guy, before you were born I'm sure?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh yeah.

Q. 1996. He's a fan of yours, you got three Heisman winners from that school. What's it like to interact with him?

GRAHAM MERTZ: He has been an absolute blessing for me. I think it was my first or second month coming down to Florida, and I got a text and it was like, hey, "When do you want to sit down and talk a little bit -- Danny." And I'm like, I don't know Danny -- oh, I'm connecting the dots here. So from the first time I met him, the most genuine person that truly cared about Florida and me as a person. It's been a fantastic relationship. He's here somewhere right now and I cannot wait to see him, and I'm going to give him a big hug. He's been absolutely amazing.



THE MODERATOR: Graham, great job. Thank you.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Thank you.

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