

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Okay, I think the first thing to acknowledge here is that although it's been a short amount of time, National Signing Day is a team effort. There's no question that we've had great cooperation from the administration, a lot of logistics relative to the transition. Heck, I think we played in the conference championship game like 10 days ago or something.

To play in that game, to travel here Sunday, team meeting, press conference, we were able to take advantage of four days of the 14 contact days, and certainly made the most of those. It was an incredible experience.

I think specifically the UAA pilots, man, we've got some of the best in the entire country, and we're very thankful for that.

You know, the university community, so many people contribute when you have a young man and his family on campus. We were able to have one official visit, and certainly a lot of people at the university did a lot to contribute to that. I think the community of Gainesville, as you're out and about, their positive energy can contribute to what you're selling, and certainly your vision for the program, and we're thankful for those people.

A couple people in particular, Bonnie Hooper and Kim Adams, just from a logistical standpoint behind the scenes, I know director of player personnel for high school Jacob LaFrance is thankful for the job that they did. I think that the current recruiting and personnel staff, I think it's important to recognize there were a lot of people here from the previous regime that contributed to some of the things that happened today. I don't think we need to overlook that. The previous staff, right, developed relationships with a lot of these young men that we signed today and put us in position. They sold the University of Florida. These young men had confidence in our vision.

But we're thankful for the previous staff, the recruiting and personnel staff and all the things that they did to position us for today.

I think Lee and Charlie and Shawnee in particular were first class. Kevin Camps in creative media is an absolute all-star. His crew of people behind the scenes and all the things that they do to impact recruiting, Reuel Joaquin and his video staff and so much behind-the-scenes from an evaluation standpoint and the video department and that evaluation process, they contributed in a major way.

You know, the Hilton here in Gainesville was outstanding. Spurrier's Restaurant, Prime and Pearl, Gator, Dockside, Blue Water Bay, heck, we had the best of the best. We're thankful to all those people.

I think when you look at this list of players and you see height and length, you see verified speed, I think you see functional movement, character, high production, competitive spirit. I think this is an intelligent group that comes from really good people, great communicators. I think they're wired right, if that makes sense, and they're team-first people.

I think the evaluation process it's important to separate that from recruitment, and now that they've signed, we can get into the development part of their career, and that's one that we're excited about.

I love evaluating. I love recruiting. I think it's kind of the competition in the off-season, and certainly although we've been going at it here for just a few days, it's been a lot of fun with this jump man and this Gator on my shirt.

We're excited about what's next. I think we've got a little bit of a feel for how we're going to operate here. We're very system oriented, right, so we've got a long way to go to kind of refine our systems here, but we're off to a good start. We'll continue to improve our approach and our process.

We're going to add to this group. We've got a lot of work left to do here with plenty of room. We've got to keep building here, and I think it's important for us to realize this is going to happen one day at a time and one person at a time.

Off to a good start here, but certainly a lot of work left to

do.

Q. I know you're exhausted, so appreciate you coming in here. How did you prioritize? You had this list of guys who committed and lost a number of them. Fans freak out on all this. How did you approach that part of it? How did you approach who you wanted to target? And how involved were you?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think these are tough situations to walk into, right, and they affect lots of people. These are young men and their families. They've been through a very difficult experience, right.

They're hard. These are hard decisions, and certainly in a short amount of time. Very respectful of all these decisions. I mean, I can't be critical of any of these decisions.

We've got a very specific evaluation process, and we certainly applied that to the committed players and a lot of players, I think, in a very short amount of time.

We've got a very detailed plan and approach. We applied the things that we've learned in our careers, and some of the young men fit what we visualize for Florida Gator football, some maybe decided they didn't want to be a part of that. Maybe we needed a little bit more time to make a decision and evaluate the situation in some of these circumstances, but in general I think each one of these is an individual situation. We respect all of them.

It's just part of the transition period. There's no easy way around it. We're thankful for the young people that chose Florida today for sure.

Q. You preached patience at your introductory press conference; how difficult is that on a day like this when you're seeing a bunch of programs you know you're going to be competing with signing a lot more guys and a lot of top guys, and how much ground can you make up here in these seven weeks after today, too?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think not only are we recruiting players to join our team, but we're recruiting coaches to join our staff. Just really -- I think it's the most challenging part of the job, because you're adding one piece of the puzzle at a time, and then the dynamic changes, right. So you've got to reevaluate the situation each time. So you add this person to the team, how does that affect the next move.

I think there's so much that goes into that. I think it's the most important part of what we do as leaders is get the right people in the right positions, and there's a lot that

goes into that, right, the integrity and character of each individual, their competence, their expertise in the job that we're asking them to do, how they fit into our recruiting footprint, and it changes every time you add a person.

You combine that with the fact that you're evaluating a million players and then you're trying to -- it's like speed dating; you've got to do it in a hurry. You know, I think sometimes that can be healthy. We were fortunate that we were able to build some relationships pretty quickly, and then we had relationships with some of the kids from the past.

Quite honest here, a lot of these guys just love the University of Florida. They want to play in the Swamp, and it didn't matter who the coach was. It's a combination of all that.

But it's something that we take very seriously, and it's an important part of what we do.

Q. Is it challenging, though, watching other schools signing a bunch of talent and you're taking the approach you are out of the gate?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, we're going to acquire talent, too. Just not as many today as they did. But this is our first class, and we're going to make the best of it. I'll say this: I've got confidence and conviction about each of these players that signed here today. They fit exactly what we're looking for. They've got redeeming qualities, and we've got confidence that they can do a job for our team.

Q. Billy, roster management, everybody is talking about that, how difficult it is. Particularly in your situation you're coming in here with just a few days figuring out who's coming, who's going on your current roster, how many you're going to be able to recruit. Would you talk about that process, because it's got to be the most difficult challenge you had.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think one of the things that we're very fortunate here is that we beat Florida State University and had an opportunity to play in a bowl game. We're going to get a chance -- we had a few practices last weekend. We'll get a chance to do that a little bit more here over the next couple days, and spend time with the players. As we add coaches we're able to develop some relationships.

You can imagine what a nightmare it would be if they weren't in a bowl game in terms of having some time with the players.

We'll begin individual meetings. I'm going to meet with

each individual player starting Sunday. Certainly as we hire coaches and they get here, they can start working on that, but this big algorithm of roster management certainly is very fluid, and it changes each day.

You know, it'll be one of the challenges because you inherit some situations at certain positions that you need to improve. We've got a lot of bright spots on the team, and a lot of it is to be determined. It's part of the transition period here, and we're going to make the best of it.

Q. Also, the transfer portal is a big deal now. It wasn't so much when you first took your first head coaching job, but it is now. How are you factoring that in? Do you have an idea how many positions, how many spots you're going to keep available for transfers? Are you in contact with a lot of them?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's a really good question. I think the approach we've taken with the staff is to secure as many good players as we could today, and then our personnel department will just start the process of compiling all the players that are left over throughout the entire country, and then we've got a college personnel group that will be working on the transfer portal, junior college players, the walk-on roster.

You know, this is what we do. Certainly the transfer portal is a part of college football now, and certainly a lot different dynamic because they can go play immediately. I think you're going to see this is just part of the game now, and certainly what we need to do is build a really good culture here where players want to be as part of our organization and play for the University of Florida, and hopefully we don't have to deal with those issues unless we're wanting to deal with them.

But in the meantime, there's going to be some attrition. I think that's reality. We also -- that creates opportunity, and we'll go to work. It's another way to acquire a player much like NFL free agency. The problem is we don't have a salary cap and we don't have schedule parity, so it's a little bit different dynamic.

Q. You had mentioned the difference between the recruiting and the evaluation process. Without giving away too many of your secrets, you are obviously on a time crunch. What in the evaluation process made you comfortable to take the guys that you brought in?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think they fit the critical factors at each position. We spend -- if you look at the group, there's a lot of height and length. I think there's verified speed, there's functional movement. Certainly we have been through our process from beginning to end. I think we're

about as thorough as we can be.

We love to do it, and I think it's a big part -- you go back to the analogy of growing up watching my dad as a high school coach, right; he didn't get to decide who was on his team. He just had to coach the players in the community. I think it's part of the competition to me is you get to build your roster. You get to hand select the individual players that you want to be a part of your team, not only from a talent perspective but I think all these intangibles that really separate the good player from the great player, and I think that all these young men fit what we're looking for.

Now the real work begins. Now the -- take the stars off, start at the bottom, earn your way, and we'll begin that process. A lot of these guys are mid-year players and they're going to have a chance to show up here on January 4th and contribute to the team.

Q. Some of the coaches that you've hired on that weren't with you at Louisiana, what were some of the things that stood out about them during the hiring process?

BILLY NAPIER: Anyone in particular?

Q. Corey Raymond, Keary Colbert who was announced today.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, you know, I think one of the things that I think as a head coach that it's important that you do is you're always researching every area of your organization. You've got to have a little bit of a plan. You've got to have a contingency plan if that makes sense, and certainly you're always anticipating the next stop, the next move, and certainly these guys are some of the best in the entire country.

Not only the character, the integrity, but the pedigree, the proven track record from a recruiting standpoint, but more importantly a development standpoint. I think they're great teachers. They're going to fit our culture. They're going to fit our vision for what we want this organization to be about, and most important part of this is how they can impact the player as a person, how they prioritize education, and certainly how they teach football, and I think we've got some of the best in the entire country so far.

Q. I want to go back to the transfer portal and the early signing day because both those things are fairly new. How much time did you spend thinking about how to approach that especially with the transition class, and is there anyone who's been through it that gave you thoughtful advice?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, several people. I think I made several calls about the transition, hey, what did you learn, what mistakes did you make, what did you do well, and I think patience is the key word. I think much like hiring an individual to work within the organization, I think the players are no different. I think you're basically coming into and understanding that hey, this person fits, this player fits, they can do the job that we're asking them to do.

I think we've got a pretty good understanding of how we're going to play football here and the specific jobs that each one of these individuals is going to do. We've got confidence in the players that we signed.

Q. Some of the off-the-field rules are new to us. There's a director of research and evaluation, that's new this year, and then personnel analyst. What kind of roles do these guys fill and what purpose are they serve to the program?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, so I think that big picture wise, I think we have a personnel department, right, and within that department you've got a high school personnel side, you've got a college personnel side, and then you have underclassmen. There's lots of ways to acquire players, and I think that each part of that personnel department is important. Nick and Joe will be assigned specific responsibilities on that side of the ball. They will work -- they will evaluate all the players on the board, but they will be working with the offensive coaches and the defensive coaches. Jacob will oversee the entire operation with a focus on high school players. Andrew does research year-round on player production. He does research year-round on the evaluation process and has a lot to do with kind of our internal systems and how we operate.

So you know, I think off the field, we have analysts, quality control, interns, kind of different levels of experience, if that makes sense. Ryan and Jamar both have significant experience.

I think the big thing here is we're trying to create quality of life for the 10 assistant coaches, so there's a certain pace to life where they can do a good job at home. I think that's one of the things I learned working for Coach at Alabama. There's several reasons for it, but one of them that I think is at the top of the list for me is the ability to do a good job with your wife, your children, to have a certain pace of life to where you don't run yourself in the ground.

This game will chew you up and spit you out if you let it, and I think it's important that we keep perspective here, and this infrastructure will allow us to do that. I think everybody has got to have the right amount of work to do but not too little and not too much, and that's the big-picture

goal.

Q. You talked about your contract, that a year of your salary wasn't as important as getting the money for the assistants and putting that infrastructure in. Is that kind of what you're talking about, just getting an army, getting a group to help with everything and build things the way you envision?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, yeah, I think we kind of know what it looks like when it's being done well. And then we've put our spin on it, right; we've made it our own.

I think that's the unique thing about the administration at Louisiana. They gave us an opportunity to try to do it at the Group of Five level. Now, we didn't have near the resources that we have here. We had a lot of young 20-year olds running the halls. We had a lot of volunteers, a lot of students, but I think the job description, the workflow, the internal systems, all those things were refined in that four years, and certainly thankful for that.

We've got more to come, and I think the important part is that we get the right people and don't get in a hurry.

Q. If we can dig in on a couple of these guys, obviously Kamari was a big get. How much time did you have to get to know him, and since other schools were chasing him, I don't want to say it's a no-brainer that you go after that kid because not every kid fits, but what did you specifically like about him and how did that process go?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, this is a whole chapter in the book here, but Kamari, first of all, I want to compliment Kamari on his family. I think he's got incredible people around him, his mom and dad, his grandmother, his mentor. Just really good people. Values based. They've raised an exceptional young man who's got a good foundation. He knows right and wrong. He's certainly talented.

I think we all understand that he's a good football player, but he's got great charisma, great personality. He's a leader. He's got great presence about him. I think he'll bring a lot to our team.

I want to compliment his family and the young man that they've raised.

But we had an immediate connection. I think Mark Hocke was with me on the trip, and certainly the relationship with Patrick Toney, Corey Raymond. Corey was a relationship that he had from the past, that certainly helped, and then Jamar Chaney being from Fort Pierce had a good relationship with the family and certainly there was a

history there.

I think Jamar actually was the person that offered Kamari his first scholarship offer, right. We actually were there at IMG, had a good talk. He said, hey, Coach, I think you need to go see my mom, and we quickly made a quick trip over there.

Next thing you know I'm standing in a Sam's talking to Ms. Wilson, and it was really good. So they agreed to take the visit. We had an incredible weekend, and I think Kamari made a life-changing decision.

I think that this fan base, this alumni group, this is the type of guy that you rally around here that chose the University of Florida, decided to stay in this state, and a guy that I think is going to go about it the right way and represent this place the way it should be represented.

Q. About Tony Livingston, I think this time last year he was 280, 290, was definitely on the track to being an offensive tackle. You guys are listing him as a tight end. Is there positional flexibility there?

BILLY NAPIER: The most he's weighed is 250. He weighed 250 as a 10th grader. Probably played his best football as a 10th grader. I think that Tony is an athlete. I think that certainly we had to do a lot of research, right, in this situation. He's a fantastic basketball player, unique dimensions. This guy is 6'4" and three quarters, he's 225 pounds this weekend, and he's got 11 hand. That's very unique. He's extremely long, and he's got a big frame.

I think Tony is a survivor. When you guys start digging into his story, all the things that he's overcome, he came up unofficially this weekend. We had a chance to spend time with him, and just got a really good feeling from him about the type of person he is. He's got a good heart, and I think he'll be a good player here.

Now, he's a developmental player, right. I think he's got to work really hard this spring and certainly show up, but I think he's a unique athlete.

If you watch the basketball footage, they had ground-level footage of when he came to camp here that we were able to watch. Then he comes in the door, you're digging into his story, we had a gut feeling that he's what we're looking for, and we're extremely excited about his potential.

You know, we listed him as a tight end, and I certainly think that he can play that position for us.

Q. Just number of scholarship quarterbacks you'd like to be at when spring commences?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think all of that's to be determined. Very fluid, right. I think I would probably reserve judgment on any comments on the current players, if that makes sense, and then once we get to that time of the year, we'll be more specific.

Q. You said in your first press conference you wouldn't be surprised if you signed many today. Were you happily surprised with the eight you signed today?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, and I think we have got a few more, but I'm very pleased. I think all of these guys had a chance to meet them individually. Some were on the visit this weekend. Trey Smack is the one player that I haven't met yet, but we all know how dynamic he is, and certainly he's got a bright future in front of him. Had a chance to talk to him on the phone a little bit, and we're certainly excited about him.

Yeah, we're pleased. I think it's not necessarily to me about the volume of players. It's about, okay, they fit who we are, what we're about, and certainly the brand of football we want to play.

Q. You can sell the academics, the athletics, the Swamp, being in the SEC, but not having your full staff, was that a hard sell, and did the "scared money don't make money" phrase come up a lot with these recruits?

BILLY NAPIER: You know, I think that it's part of the transition. There was certainly some battles in here not having a position coach or maybe having position coaches that will be here, but we can't have dialogue about them. I think that definitely was part of the challenge.

I think we're playing the long game here. I think that we're willing to deal with the things that come with that, but I think that's a great point, and certainly it was a little bit of an issue at times.

But some of these guys I think they trusted our staff. I think they obviously have got confidence in the vision and where we're headed.

Q. I want to go back to Kamari. You mentioned going to IMG Academy. I'm not sure if you're aware, but Florida fans are thrilled with you today because they say that you've broken the IMG curse, and if you're not aware, Florida hadn't signed a five-star from IMG in all this time. What do you think about that, and how much is that school and all the players that go there a luxury for you and your staff to have in this state?

BILLY NAPIER: Sure. I think nothing that's happened in the past is going to affect how we're going to operate or do business. I think we're in the relationship business. We're going to be transparent. We're going to be diligent in our approach. We're going to hire good people, let them do what they do. We've got a lot of respect. That is an impressive operation, and I've been there when it started and kind of seen certainly going through and seeing how that thing has evolved and how it continues to grow. It's a very unique opportunity for those guys.

You know, it's right down the road, and certainly we're going to want to do business there in the future, and we're going to make it a priority and try to build relationships with the leadership there but also the individual players there.

There's no reason we can't continue to get players out of there. We're going to work hard at it.

Each one of these situations, they're individual players and their families. I don't think we need to get too caught up in that. Just work hard at it and do our very best.

Q. And then your other addition today, Devin Moore, how did his recruitment go down? He kind of had a situation where he went through some coaching changes with multiple schools that he was looking at. How did you guys get in there quick and kind of build that relationship to make him feel at home?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, he was one of the first players that we evaluated, and man, what an impressive young man. We all know he's a big corner that has length. He's physical. He can play man-to-man coverage. He's certainly a good tackler.

I think the thing that's most impressive about Devin is he's extremely driven. He's a hard worker. He's got an incredible attitude. He's extremely bright. He's just a first-class young man and an incredible family. I think when you meet his mom, his dad, got a chance to meet his brother this weekend, these people, they have priorities. They've raised their family a certain way, and they're very impressive.

Patrick Toney obviously was the first to go in there, and I can remember him calling me after the home visit and just raving about Devin, and then the school visit during the day. This guy has got a presence about him, and just seeing him interact in that school with his teachers, the administrators, the students, this is the type of player and more importantly the type of person that we want on our team.

Q. Of the eight guys you signed, how many of them

did you have a relationship with before Thanksgiving?

BILLY NAPIER: Christian Williams would be the only one.

Q. Anthony Richardson on the current team, what's his status for the bowl game?

BILLY NAPIER: You know, I don't know that it's time to comment on injuries. I think we'll do that as we approach the game. This is about signing day here.

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