

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



COACH NAPIER: Talking to Rick, 59 days ago we were in the air on the plane and hit the ground right out here. So it's been unbelievable.

Certainly very thankful for the reception. People have been incredible. I think the old Ray Allen quote: The greatest gift that we have in life is opportunity. And I'm extremely thankful for this opportunity. Dr. Fuchs and Scott Stricklin and his staff have been absolute professionals. Everyone within the UAA and all that they do to contribute to recruiting and really the transition and logistics of our entire staff has been great.

I think that we talked to the players a lot about plan our work and work our plan, that's what we try to do. A lot of early mornings, a lot of late nights but it's been really good.

We took on the December national signing day, the contact period there, which was really quick. And what I'm calling the winter portal period, right? A little bit like free agency to some degree.

And then you move the team into phase one, the offseason. And then we just tackled the January contact period in February national signing day.

All the while we're building a staff. We're hiring a lot of people at the same time. I think my job has gotten a lot easier with each addition to the staff. We're thankful for that.

It's probably the most important thing that we do is hire really good people. It takes a team -- operations, personnel, on-campus recruiting, the Gator Made program, the recruiting department, OCR, equipment, university community -- all the professors, all the advisors, the tutors, Jeff [phonetic] and his staff over at the Hawkins Center.

And certainly those UAA pilots. I was thankful for them in the first period but even more thankful in the pride they took in their role in this past month or so.

So I think that there's a lot of people to thank in the

community. Hotel Eleo, we use them the last couple of weekends, and they were exceptional. Spurrier's, Coach Spurrier, Spurrier's Gridiron Grill, and Blue Water Bay, several other places that help us out. That's been great.

I think evaluation and recruitment is kind of a separate entity. Then the players arrive then it's time to develop them, motivate them, improve their lives as people, students and players.

I'm pleased with the progress we've made. I thought we answered a lot of needs. I thought we took advantage of each opportunity to add players to the team. Obviously you've got a list there of guys that have signed so far, just added a few more just a couple minutes ago. We've got more to go today.

So, much like we said before, one day at a time, one person at a time. We've added some really good people since the last time we stood up here with you guys, not only football players but also staff members.

So what questions do we have here?

Q. We'll talk about today's addition, Caleb. I want to say he was the first recruit you offered. What did you see in him early on and what was it like battling trying to get his pledge?

COACH NAPIER: Caleb is a unique athlete. Caleb is a former quarterback who had made the transition to playing receiver as a junior. He was in our footprint, recruiting footprint at Louisiana. We had evaluated him. Had a previous relationship with him. And really felt great about the upside.

You turn the senior tape as you expected a guy who took off and had a great year. I think his best football is ahead of him. He was 6'3", 192 pounds on his official visit. He's really got another gear. Fantastic ball skills and more importantly the guy's really got his act together. Great kid, great student, incredible family.

I think that he's the type of person, the type of athlete that we want at the University of Florida. So it's a big win

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today. Keary Colbert was outstanding in that situation. Had a previous relationship. He was committed to Southern Cal at one point. Keary was there. Very fortunate to get Caleb.

Q. You mentioned you felt like you addressed a lot of needs. What were some of the ones you felt were the biggest priorities you feel like you guys hit?

COACH NAPIER: I think running back, obviously, I think was a critical need. Just to create some depth on our team corner. I think up front on the offensive line, the two transfers and high school players. And then the defensive line.

So, across the board I think it's a pretty diverse group. I don't necessarily -- I'd probably be leaving something out. I think each year you are really trying to develop depth on your team.

But we made good work of each opportunity. I thought in December you get to go on the road for four days. We were able to put together a pretty good group there. And then obviously I thought we did good work in the portal. And today's been a great day. So I think across the board I'm pleased with each position.

Q. So you don't know anything else as a head coach with this early signing period, but how much does it jam up the calendar having that, and then you're getting in the fifth or whatever, you did your introductory? And what does it require from a staff and you yourself to just put all those pieces together with all the pressure?

COACH NAPIER: I'll tell you, I've been a huge fan. Been a big advocate of the early signing period. I just think that's been a great addition in my opinion. I think that's helped the quality of life of the assistant coaches.

It certainly created a little bit more of security. You can kind of move on to the next group. I think a lot of young men, we've seen over time that they've got it figured out. I think with 80 percent of the kids, 85 percent of the kids are signing in December. And I think that's been pretty consistent since they've created that.

So I think the bigger issues now are kind of what I'm calling the winter portal period and the spring portal period. That's the new dynamic. That's what we've got to kind of get our arms around as leaders in this college football dynamic that we have there.

So I think that's where the changes and adjustments probably need to be made, if that makes sense. This was

the first year where that was expected to be an option for the player and then all of a sudden you've got a lot of different dynamics in terms of it's almost like you added two different free agency periods that you haven't planned for. That requires work and that requires planning.

I think that's probably the newest change and the thing we need to make adjustments to, in my opinion.

Q. How close are you to the staff that you envision -- it's gotten pretty big, but how close to completing it and what's the key to building chemistry within this whole group?

COACH NAPIER: It's a great question. I think we're a couple of pieces away there. I think we've got a few spots, graduate assistants, in particular. I think we've got more work to do there to fill those jobs. Couple more off-the-field positions. But for the most part we're close to being done.

In terms of creating chemistry and morale with the group, I think it takes time. I think that this group, some of these people have worked together in the past. I think there's prior relationship, but there's certainly a lot of new faces too.

I'll tell you what, these official-visit weekends present some of those opportunities. I think there's nothing like kind of getting in there and working together as a team. Recruiting presents that opportunity. And we've got a great group, one that I've been very impressed with just the morale overall, the teamwork.

That's what it's going to take. I think when you hire people, you're looking for somebody that will be a great teammate. Somebody that has an authentic care for the players. Someone that's an expert at the job that we're asking them to do, and certainly fit our recruiting footprint or bring a skill set, a personality to the table that can help us in recruiting. So, so far so good. I don't think that's going to be a problem with this group.

Q. We've heard for decades you've got to take care of your backyard in Florida, in the state. Only six guys from the state. Do you feel like that's where you need to make inroads moving forward, or is that just kind of a one-year kind of blip given that you're from Louisiana and whatnot?

COACH NAPIER: No question. I think it's a product of the circumstance. I think we basically just had to go evaluate the players that were available. And we looked all over the country.

I think we're pretty spread out in this class. So I think that's

a product of the circumstances. Those are the players that we felt like fit us from an evaluation standpoint.

And then we had the resources to go get that accomplished. I think that's the one thing to remind ourselves of is that Florida brand is strong. And it's spread out and it was able to do good work.

But our approach is going to be inside/out, there's no question. I think history would indicate that when Florida has a really good football team, it starts right here in our backyard and works out.

So that's the approach that we will take and certainly with the '23 group, which we've already started on, that will be the mentality for sure.

Q. What are the challenges of recruiting a guy like Andrew in Washington and how did he come on your radar?

COACH NAPIER: Andrew is, first of all, an impressive young man. His character, the family that he comes from. Really bright young man who has got a very specific plan, not only for football, but as a student, as a person. The family he comes from, their values, a lot of common ground there. And really excited about him.

I think that much like we just described in the questionnaire, we just spread out and evaluated the players that were available. He did some evaluation work for us. Then he gets here on the official visit, the guy was 6'3", 259 pounds, and really moves well for his size. He's not only heck of an outside linebacker but heck of a tight end as well.

He's going to be an edge player on defense. Big, tall, long, and a lot of growth potential there. I think a really unique athlete for his size. When he walks in the room, you're thinking that's the guy on the tape. So, overall, the type of guy we're looking for.

Q. So much obsession with signal callers. Max Brown, what does he bring was he someone in your sphere before now, what does he bring to your program?

COACH NAPIER: We're very fortunate to add really two good quarterbacks to the team with Jack and Max, and certainly I think Max when you turn the tape on, you can immediately see the baseball background. The off-platform throws. Really a natural thrower. A guy that is projected to be kind of a middle round draft pick in baseball.

He was 6'1" and a half, 200 pounds on his visit. Dad played receiver in the National Football League. Really a good-looking athlete. We think he has upside. He just started playing quarterback two years ago. And a good runner. The guy can make some plays with his feet.

We were able to go out to his school, observe him and was very impressed. So there's some pedigree there. The guy's a winner. I've been impressed with his leadership skills. And I think his best football is in front of him.

Q. You referenced the '23 class a minute ago. When you've been out the last couple of weeks, how much focus was on '22 versus how much was on '23?

COACH NAPIER: I think you build your schedule based off the '22s. And then maybe the '23 players in that area. You try to do the best job you can.

I took that approach. Jacob did a great job of mapping that out. And certainly each assistant coach kind of taking the same philosophy. So we're hopeful that we won't be doing this much business in February next year, and we'll be able to be a little bit more strategic about our time on the road relative to the next group. But I think we made the most of it for sure.

Q. I wanted to ask about one of the staff additions. What is a game-changer coordinator? Could you explain that term?

COACH NAPIER: Coach Couch is a special teams coordinator, really special teams analyst and really Coach Couch was with us at the previous stop.

We call our special teams game changers. So when we're trying to create a game changing play, we all know the power of an explosive play on special teams. Kind of our way to create some urgency, some importance to that part of the game.

I think it's the area of your team where you start building culture. It's a combination of offense and defensive players. Oftentimes, young players will get opportunities to contribute to the team first there.

And then your walk-ons can earn a niche on the team there as well. So it requires a lot of coordination, a lot of team effort. Coach Couch will be leading that area as an analyst off the field. And we're trying to change the game on special teams.

Q. Last couple of days Nick Saban and Lane Kiffin weighed in on the NIL (indiscernible) how those benefits have taken place of other factors they think

players should be considering. And they're afraid it's turning into a bidding war and the team with the biggest war chest will win. What kind of impact have you seen in this recruiting cycle of NIL? And given how apparently this is the way the game is played, are you confident that Florida has the program in place to compete in this marketplace?

COACH NAPIER: Yeah, I'm surprised it took that long to ask that question. But I do think that this name, image and likeness concept -- I think that we're all wrapping our arms around it and really wrapping our heads around it, trying to figure out what exactly this entails, where we're headed.

I think the issues are right now there's no parameters. There's really no guidelines outside of the laws within each state. I think each university is trying to solve that problem, come up with the best strategy. It's an area where we've been very aggressive. Certainly thankful for the partnership with Gator Collective, Gator Sports Properties their ability to get it done and worked out.

But the players create a tremendous amount of revenue for these universities. I mean, this college football deal is major entertainment. So there's revenue generated. And they show up to watch the players. They don't show up to watch anybody else.

So I think there's an avenue here where we're moving towards revenue share. We're moving towards the player getting a piece of the pie. And I don't necessarily think that that's a bad thing. I think that it's a good thing. I think that the players are deserving giving supply and demand, like basic economics here.

So I do think we need parameters. We need guidelines. We need consistency across the board relative to what there is to offer.

But I think it's also an opportunity. So for us I think it can be a strength. I think the passion of this fan base, right, the University of Florida alumni, we're 450,000-plus strong. We've got an incredible sale independent of that.

So name, image and likeness, it just becomes another strength at the University of Florida. We're certainly excited about the opportunities that come with that. But I do think that there's going to be some guidelines and parameters that come with this for sure.

Q. Back to the Gator Collective and things, when it comes to the resources, people are throwing out numbers that Texas A&M is 25 million, there's no telling. If it just came down to resources and the program in place, will you be able to compete with

Texas A&M and that type of situation they have there?

COACH NAPIER: I think we've got to realize that this is just a portion -- this is just a part of the decision. I think there's so much that goes into a decision for a young man independent of name, image and likeness. But it's certainly part of the dynamic that we have right now.

I think, much like the questions you're asking, I'm asking myself those same questions every day. So, as we go forward here, people will adjust -- I think the leaders within our profession, within in this market will adjust and there will be things that come with this. I think a lot of this is to be determined.

We're fortunate that we're in the state of Florida. We're fortunate in the relationships that we have. We're going to take full advantage of it while we can.

Q. With you having the early signing period and now the winter portal, what is your comfort level with where you are at based on what you guys have gotten today to add on to what you got the last couple of weeks?

COACH NAPIER: I don't think I've ever batted a thousand with signing day. To tell some of our young people in the building, hey, this is a little more like baseball here. We've got to swing a lot and make contact and at the end of the day we need 25 really good hits.

So it requires a little bit of perspective, if that makes sense. And resiliency, I would say. So you've got to have a short memory. You've got to move on to the next one.

Certainly as a competitor maybe some of those things you learned as a competitor you can apply in recruiting for sure. But we fill a lot of needs. I'm confident in each individual player we've added, what they bring to the team, certainly the jobs that we think they can do for our team.

But we're never -- I don't think anybody is ever completely satisfied with what happens. But so far, so good. We've got a few more out there. And then we have to get ready for the spring portal period that's to come.

Q. You've got 17 guys counting your high school kids and your transfers, another five transfers. How many of the kids count back on last year if you can tell us that? And then what does that mean for you going forward, for example, with transfers? Do you have a set number, like another five, another seven that you might add, and maybe another how many high school kids you think you might add?

COACH NAPIER: Sure. Well, the high school players



obviously would be today. I think -- then there's kind of a balance. We get to the spring, we obviously are going to have additional spots remaining where we could add players.

So there's been movement on our roster. We've got plenty of options going forward. There's no cap. I don't necessarily see us hitting a cap when we get to the spring portal period, if that makes sense.

But there's a delicate balance between the number of players we add and also hitting that 85 number. So a little bit of this is to be determined. It's always a big juggling act, a big math problem. You're adding and subtracting today. Certainly as we approach May 1st there will be more attrition.

And really in the transition year, with a new staff and kind of a new culture, I think that there's some things that come with that, both positive and negative.

So I think it's a really good question. But I think a lot of that is to be determined based off the rest of the day and also any movement that we have later on in the semester.

Q. Roster management is everybody's problem, because you have super seniors. Anybody that played during 2020, that year doesn't count, et cetera, like that. How difficult is the juggling act you've got to go through to get your roster and to determine, okay, do we really have 85 or do we have 78 or do we have 95?

COACH NAPIER: You're right. I think especially when you inherit a group. I think there's been great teamwork with Jacob LaFrance, our compliance department, certainly some of the previous staff members in terms of where exactly -- and then each individual is a little bit different. You may talk to one kid and technically he's a junior but in his mind he's a senior.

So I think some clarity with the players, where are they at and how they view themselves. And then you're looking at each individual position. You're trying to hit a certain number.

We've done great research in terms much how many players in each position we'd like to carry, not only with the scholarship players but with the walk-on players.

So great question, and I think it's one of the challenges that comes with the attrition and the addition. So we went from having kind of two times of year to adding two more if that makes sense. That math problem is being done a couple more times a year.

Q. Being here before you probably have a couple more chances to go up against your old boss in Coach Saban. But Jalen Farmer was a guy you identified pretty early on and someone that Alabama came in late for. What was the scout on him and how were you guys able to hold onto him?

COACH NAPIER: Jalen was a previous commit. One of the first players we went to see. We were very impressed with the initial evaluation. This is a big man. He's 6'4" and a half, 330 pounds. I think he may actually be under 330. He plays with effort. He plays with power.

He comes from a really great family. Mom and dad are impressive people. And he's all business. This guy not really all about the glitz and the glamour and recruiting. He's got a plan. And I was very impressed with his maturity, kind of his approach.

And certainly it's a good thing when some of the best programs in the country come in try to recruit some of your commits. But we've got a ton of confidence in Jalen. We believe in him, and we're ecstatic what he's going to bring to our team. So big win today for the Gators for sure.

Q. Do you have the paper in front of you or do you know all these heights and weights? We'll start quizzing you every time you come up here.

COACH NAPIER: Yeah, we've got great people in the personnel department that do a good job keeping me up to speed.

Q. And then I think you were on SEC Network talking about the four things that you guys try to instill in players -- character, opportunity, knowledge. And you said development and talent was kind of under those. Could you tell me more why talent I guess is under the other three things?

COACH NAPIER: Well, I don't want you to misunderstand me here. The evaluation part of what we do is critical. And the recruitment part, we're identifying certain things that we're looking for in each position -- height, length, verified speed -- all these critical factors relative to the jobs that we're going to ask that young man to do.

If we're doing a good job evaluating and we're doing a really good job recruiting then we have the player, the young man, who he is as a person, student and player -- he shows up day one, typically, the talent component is not going to change very much, if that makes sense.

So, you have to separate these two entities. I think sometimes we put all these expectations on these guys,

like he was ranked number two in the country at his position. So that's going to translate to this, when in reality that's just a starting point in a really long journey that has a lot of adversity, a lot of great experiences, but a lot of ups and downs.

I think these guys are nowhere close to being who they are, who they're going to be relative to the things that come with this -- this is a critical time in their life and what we try to do is kind of flip the script a little bit. Now that you're here, all right, let's work really hard on your character.

Let's try to increase your knowledge and then let's focus in on your development in all these different areas as a player. So the character component, I think, is the single most important thing to sustaining success.

These guys are gifted athletes. They're going to have some success just as a result of their physical ability, but can they sustain it? Do these things that the game teaches you translate to when you're finished as a player and we want to try to get these guys to use football and don't allow football to use them.

So I think a little bit of that is, hey, look I'm trying to sign the most talented team that we can sign each year. Each one of these guys it's important that we do that. But once they arrive it's not about that anymore. I don't really care how tall you are anymore. I care about can we improve you as a person, student and player.

And those are the things that the player can control. And we try to get them to focus on those things instead of getting caught up in the hype.

I think we've got to alleviate some of those expectations that were put on these guys and get them to focus on each day, all right, let's go to work on our character today. Let's increase our knowledge, whether it's our education at the University of Florida or football IQ, things that we can learn that can help us play faster, anticipate better, be more productive.

And then the development part is how we practice, how we teacher, strength and conditioning, sports science, nutrition, the training room. These are all areas where a guy can maximize the ability that he does have. So there you go.

Q. Anything in the first 59 days in the recruiting game surprise you about this Florida job?

COACH NAPIER: Well, I think first thing I would say is that kids want to come to the University of Florida. I think this is a powerful place. This is a strong brand. This is one of

those iconic places in college football, where there's history, where there's tradition. Where there's been legendary players, legendary coaches. We've got one of the most incredible venues in all of college sports in The Swamp. We have a top five public education to offer.

We've got an incredible classic college town in Gainesville, Florida. And there's passion about this place. And I think that that becomes a reality all of a sudden when you're selling this place. When you're on the road and you're working, you're hustling and in a short period of time I'm pleased with the work we've been able to get done. That's a tribute to all the people in the organization have been working really hard.

So, this is a special place. I mean, this is a real opportunity. One that's very capable. The key here is that we take all this potential and we translate that to performance. So I think that's where we've got to -- one day at a time, right? So there's great opportunity here and we look forward to that.

Q. Hayden Hansen, he was someone that you committed at Louisiana. What have you seen with his games and character that led to you bringing him here?

COACH NAPIER: Haden is an impressive player, 6'6" and a quarter. Weighed 256 on the visit. This guy is a former quarterback and a guy that really blew me away when he came and did a private workout for us at Louisiana.

I thought I was on reality TV or something. It was like this guy doesn't have the opportunities that maybe I would think he would have. So I think a little bit of that is a result of him playing quarterback. A couple games into his junior year they moved him to tight end. He kind of buys into that. The film wasn't great as a junior. He would tell you that.

But he took a big step forward. And he ran a 4.79, 4.81 for us at UL. And a big man with hands and I think his ceiling is really high.

You pair that with the family background, kind of a blue-collar, really bright kid. Lives probably an hour and a half west of Dallas, kind of out in the West Texas. So you've got to kind of -- you've got to be intentional about getting there. So I think there's some things that come with that. I think it's one of the better evaluations in the class, in my opinion.

Q. He mentioned after his visit that you guys had talked a lot about 12 personnel and you guys have a couple of running backs, couple tight ends, whether



they're signees or transfers. When the time comes, is that something that with the numbers you have you feel comfortable installing?

COACH NAPIER: Yeah, no question. We've got a good group on campus. I think we've got a couple of really good additions here in this class. It's pretty well documented the type of system that we ran at the prior stop.

We'll continue with that philosophy. And certainly tight ends will be a big piece of the puzzle in terms of presenting a lot of variables to the defense. So the more versatile those players are, the more variables we can present and the more difficult we can be to defend.

Q. (Inaudible)?

COACH NAPIER: I'm not sure what NFL team he played for. I'm going to guess Cleveland. But that's a good question.

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