

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, August 29, 2022

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: We're obviously excited about it being game week. We really look forward to our fans showing up. We all understand Gainesville transforms on game day, and I'm certainly excited about experiencing that for the first time being on this side, right?

So be there early, know that you're a part of the team and that you can contribute and help our team in terms of the game.

We've got a formidable opponent this week. We've got a tremendous amount of respect for Utah and the brand of football that they play on offense, defense, and special teams. Very fundamentally sound group. They play with effort. They're tough. They've been a very consistent performer in the Pac-12 and certainly admire the program that Coach Whiting has built there. Our team looks forward to the challenge and the opportunity.

I think it's really important for our players this week to focus on the things that are going to help them play well in the game. I think preparation is the key to confidence. We've worked here to kind of inform our players that life's not designed to give you what you want or what you need, life's designed to give you what you deserve.

I think it's very important that we have the self-discipline in our approach this week in terms of how we prepare. Our staff has done a good job of setting up a structure and a routine for the players. It's their job to follow through, and I'm a firm believer that that detailed preparation will allow them to be well-prepared and play with confidence, and that's our job as a staff.

A lot of work to do, very thankful that we've got a couple days here to kind of implement our routine. We had a Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and we kind of reset the clock and started over yesterday. I'm in the middle of that process right now.

Q. I guess a week from today is nine months since you arrived. Never enough time probably, I'm sure you feel. But where do you feel you've made the strides

that have this program ready for the challenge ahead this season, beginning with No. 7?

BILLY NAPIER: The lessons that we've learned over time is that that type of question, I think, is one that you ask at a different time of year. I think the important thing now is that we control -- you know, you spin an entire year to get your team equipped. You try to create discipline, structure, culture. You work hard on each individual member of the organization, players and staff, their role, how they contribute to the team.

Then you get to in season, right? That's almost like a separate entity. You've got to execute your plans Sunday to Saturday each week, regardless of what's happened in the past, regardless of what people on the outside are saying or what really matters. So that's where we're at. It's Monday in the opener. This is our first game at the University of Florida as an organization.

We've got some players, we have a handful of staff members that have experienced that, but we're focused on the things that we need to do today to get our team in position to win the game.

Q. What has four previous opening games at another location prepared you for this opening game?

BILLY NAPIER: That's a good question. I've spent a lot of time thinking about that. I think that a lot of openers, there's a lot of them that are lost, more than one, if that makes sense. I think you spend a lot of time thinking about all your game day processes, making sure that they're game ready. There's a lot of things that go with that.

We have a lot of things built in, training camp, if that makes sense. We've done a lot of mock situations to prepare for this week. I do think there's some things -- it's important in a game week that you set priorities, that you avoid clutter. I think you've got to really focus on controlling distractions, and I think we're trying to do that for players and staff, right?

My wife, she's burning me up last night with questions about game day. But I think it's important that we set

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priorities. We've got a very specific plan to get ready.

It does help -- you know, I've told you guys this many times before. I don't know that I would feel as prepared or have a certain level of confidence without those four years of doing that.

The good thing is we have a good core group of people in the building that have been with us at some point, maybe not all four of those years, maybe three of the four, one of the four, two of the four, and they understand our expectations in terms of the detail and the timeliness and how we operate.

Q. What are the priorities?

BILLY NAPIER: I think mainly just focusing on the task. I talked to the players a lot about it yesterday. Execution is what's going to decide the game. Anything that doesn't contribute to that, I think could be a distraction this time of year.

So we try to map it out for them, and I think it takes self discipline and focus and keeping the main thing the main thing throughout the week so that you -- you know, ultimately, each week you start over. It's almost like you're taking a final exam each week. It's a new set of material, new personnel, new venue, new variables, new matchups.

This is an opener. You have a little bit of extra time, so that changes a little bit. Each week, erase the board, start over, and begin preparation for another competition, another challenge.

Q. What has your mock been for game day? Have you practiced coming out of the tunnel, you know, what side you're going to be on, all that? I don't expect you to run to the other sideline.

BILLY NAPIER: Spring game was a healthy exercise. I think we -- you know, actually creating two teams. We did a mock Friday to some degree with both teams. We do some of that in training camp as well. We actually went to the hotel. We did pregame meal. We did chair drill. We did Gator walk. We've done unit warmup, pregame.

So I think that maybe every year you don't do that, but I think in year one, you obviously feel like it's worth giving the players that experience so they know what to expect?

Q. Will you have butterflies or jitters, or are you beyond that at this age?

BILLY NAPIER: I don't think I'm ever going to be beyond that. I think, as a competitor, man, football in particular,

you work the entire year and you only get so many opportunities to compete.

I think what I've learned over time is the important part is that how do you get to a place where you are well prepared and you have confidence, right, as a competitor. I think, as a head coach, having done that, I don't know how many times, 40-plus times, you make a lot of mistakes.

So I think along the way you learn what works for you and what helps you deal with some of that. So I think I'm a little bit more seasoned maybe than I would be if this was the first time.

It's a new place. For me, it will be a new experience. There will be some things that will -- for me, I think the big thing -- we've got to continue to learn. We've got to continue to refine our process to get the team ready, right? We talked about that just a minute ago with the staff.

Everything that we do can improve regardless of the outcome. You might get a great outcome, might get a bad outcome. Each part of what we do can improve independent of the result.

Q. How would you describe your approach to play calling on game day? How collaborative is it? How much is scripted? ^?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I don't know that those are things I'd like to talk about publicly here. We have a process that we go through to get ready.

I think that a lot of work is done during the week, but I think, as you approach the game, we do a number of different things. I think the quarterback is involved in some of that. I've learned that that guy's confidence and comfort level with certain things is important. Him anticipating that we're on the same page relative to down and distance and field zone and the clock.

I think that's an important piece is the quarterback and the play caller being on the same page. I think that's the benefit for me is I'm in the room with that guy in a game week. We spend a lot of time together.

We empower every person on the offensive side of the ball, truth be known. We give everyone input and ownership in their particular area, whether it's field zone, down and distance, or the clock. We've got a lot of people that work to contribute, and I think that we've learned over time that you give them a little piece of the pie, I think that it creates a good chemistry and morale in the building. So we give everybody an opportunity to contribute during the week.

Q. What are your impressions of Utah's running attack? They have a bunch of guys, I think a thousand-yard back that comes back this year.

BILLY NAPIER: I think they have a fantastic system on offense. I think what you describe there is accurate, right? They're balanced. Obviously, the running backs are returning. This is a well-designed running attack, in my opinion. I admire the brand of football that they play, I think, on a number of different surfaces.

I think they obviously do a good job of designing the plan, either/or's, it's well thought out. Their coordinator, I've watched this guy for a long time. He's good at what he does. He's got a quarterback that can make the decisions.

So there's a reason why they're well thought of going into the season, the number of returning players they have, offensive line, tight end, running back, receiver, and most importantly, the quarterback. They present a lot of challenges for you on offense for sure.

Q. In the environment, do you have time to kind of soak that in Saturday, or are you just locked into the game plan and the game?

BILLY NAPIER: There will be plenty of time to soak that in, I can promise you that. It's part of the reason you take the job, right, is for those special experiences in that place. So we look forward to that.

Q. When your wife's blowing you up last night, did you have all the answers for her?

BILLY NAPIER: Please don't write stories about that. I'll be in trouble. I'm messing with you (laughter).

Q. Do you have all the answers?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we do. I can't compliment Miss Nancy enough. She's fantastic. My wife continues to brag about her all the time, and Josh Thompson is a pro. So we've got really good people here that have experience at the University of Florida. So I think we're well prepared.

Q. Is Anthony where you wanted him to be, where you expected him to be entering week 1?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I'm very pleased with Anthony's attitude and approach. I think he's really worked hard to have a better comprehension of the system, a lot of reps. If you think about off-season program, you think about spring practice, his attitude and approach.

Now we get to zero the focus on a specific plan. Spring ball and training camp, the number of variables is way up there. You've got a lot of install on both sides, offense and defense. So this kind of narrows the focus.

It's good to see him buying into the routine in terms of the way we approach it with the quarterback. You know, he's got a punch list of things he needs to do each day starting yesterday, and it requires some self-discipline. It's not easy.

But I think he loves the game, and I think he's bought into this. The preparation ultimately is going to give you the confidence so you can go play fast and make good decisions and put the team in a position to win.

Q. In terms of information that people want you to divulge, just want to get your thoughts on releasing the depth chart at the beginning of the week as opposed to the middle of the week, which is what you did with Louisiana. Where do you stand with even releasing one in the buildup to the game?

BILLY NAPIER: I think some of those things are a little bit -- you know, you can make a big deal out of them, or you can't. I think we're not necessarily just certain level of -- you know, you want to be process oriented. The two deep is not ready to be put out there until probably Wednesday when we walk off the field, and sometimes then it's a little bit to be determined.

But I think in fairness we -- to you guys, we give you something that you can use, that you can talk about. Sometimes that changes depending on availability of players, and a lot of those things are up in the air. But we give you two deep on Wednesday night at the presser, and then you can take that and do what you want to do with it.

Q. How much different do you feel on Monday of game week versus the first day of fall camp about your depth? Because you talked a lot about that.

BILLY NAPIER: I think that's a good question. I think obviously we've observed and seen the growth not only physically, the fundamentals and techniques, but just the football IQ, the awareness of players, the IQ has grown.

I think you walk off the field in spring practice, and it's pretty apparent that you've got a lot of work to do, and you spend all of May, June, July, you give them a plan for improvement. You work on all these different things for each individual.

Then they show up for training camp, okay, they have made a jump. They have done a lot of work in the

off-season. Then you see you're there every day. This time of year is always tough for coaches because you know every issue that you have. You're anxious to see how you're going to perform against another team.

So it's not like the NFL where you get some intersquad practices and get a couple of preseason games. You're beating up on each other. You're playing chess with each other, and now all of a sudden in front of everybody, you've got to go play the first one.

But I do think we've got a lot of young players that have minimal experience that have improved.

Q. You mentioned using this week as a week to kind of learn what you have with your team and to kind of get into the rhythm of game week. How important is it potentially to play a team as strong as Utah to open things up to really learn what you have and to start it off that way?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's healthy. I think it gives you a little bit of an edge when there is respect there. You like to think that each team performs independent of the opponent. I think there is -- and we'd like to get to a place around here where our preparation is really the same independent of where we play and who we play. It makes sense. It's just a different set of variables.

But I do think we all have some human nature in us, and I think it's healthy for our players and the entire staff that we play a team that's well regarded out there, that has significant success in the past and brings back a lot of really good players.

This is a heck of a football team. There's a reason why they're a top ten ranked team and won their conference championship. If you think about it, the few losses they had were independent before the quarterback change, so this is really an accomplished group with a lot of veteran players coming in here Saturday.

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