

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Dante Zanders

Press Conference



Q. You're a tight end again. You came here as a tight end. You've gone all over the place, and you're back to tight end. How does it feel going into your senior season, I guess it is, your last year here, and you're a tight end again?

DANTE ZANDERS: I want to say it feels good but also feels like homesick because I miss defense too sometimes. Being there the last 2 1/2 years with Gervon and Princely and all of them, but coming here and switching roles and just being the team person that I am feels like good to be back to where I officially came in at.

Q. What from defense helps you, as far as now that you've switched over to offense, for example, knowing how a defensive end makes his moves, et cetera, like that? Does it help you like with your blocking and things like that and your reads?

DANTE ZANDERS: Yeah, because with our old scheme, we used to drop, and we would slant inside and everything. So like I can see from their body language like what they're doing, if they're going to drop, if they're going to rush around the edge, if they're going to try to come inside, and also help me be more physical.

I feel like, when I first came in and my confidence wasn't as high as it is now because I wasn't really like -- I was a smaller guy. I wasn't really as big as the defensive ends that we used to play against. So playing defense and just hitting every day during practice and banging with the offense and tackles and each other just built my confidence to tight end to help me with my blocking.

Q. What can fans expect to see from this offense on Saturday, do you think?

DANTE ZANDERS: An explosive offense. How can I explain it? We've got a lot to show, especially after last season, we've got a lot to prove. Not even to fans, not even to people around the world, but ourselves. We worked hard in the spring and worked hard this off-season and into fall camp. We've got a lot to show.

Q. How would you compare your preparedness, how you feel right now about it, to previous seasons?

DANTE ZANDERS: I feel pretty good. Coach Napier really emphasizes a 4D structure, making sure each player also knows their position as well as like the assignment and the scheme of everything, not just like, oh, I need to block this guy. So if something happens and it's not the look that I'm used to, I'm like, oh, now do I need to block? Because I know.

Q. A lot of the time there's going to be two tight ends on the field. Do you really care about depth chart and all that standing? Do you read any of that?

DANTE ZANDERS: No, sir. Everybody in the tight end room, everybody in every room looks for everybody's success. My individual success is going to bring the team their individual success. So that's why everybody sees, if the team wins, everybody wins.

Q. It's only one game, but just how big of a tone setter can this be for everything?

DANTE ZANDERS: It's going to be a big tone setter because they're an experienced team. They won their conference last year, made it all the way to the Rose Bowl and everything. For us to open against them is an experience that's a great opportunity too to show and prove what we're made of.

Q. Where do you think the program's made the most strides in the nine months under Billy?

DANTE ZANDERS: Probably our discipline. Last year I felt like we were really undisciplined team. We had a lot of silly penalties that could have been avoided. He came in, and he just structured everything to make sure everybody knows what they need to do.

Q. How about like coming into week 1? All this detail and discipline, are you noticing a big difference with like how you're hitting the ground running coming into this week?

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DANTE ZANDERS: Yes, sir.

Q. Can you like give an example maybe? That doesn't give away state secrets.

DANTE ZANDERS: Let's say with our special teams, our special teams is more locked in and more focused. That was something that we felt to win that last year a lot, special teams, because that's also a big part of the game. It's the third phase, offense, defense, special teams.

So he came in to make sure everyone knows exactly what they need to do, every position, everything, he makes sure that each person knows their job and knows like the role, like special teams isn't just, oh, I want you to go out there just to tire you some more. Everyone knows that special teams is a big role.

Q. How much of fall camp kind of helped with that discipline aspect? Bringing in the SEC officials, getting feedback from them. How much do you think that helped the discipline and cutting down on some of those penalties?

DANTE ZANDERS: It helped discipline a lot because, if you have people jumping offsides in practice, the coach isn't going to call it, so the refs. You see that flag constantly.

And having our reports after practice, saying which person was offsides or which person had this penalty or which person did this or which person did that, it makes you as a person be like, oh, I don't want to be seen, I don't want my name on the board as jumping offsides or holding or face mask. So it makes everybody just up their game just a little bit more.

Q. Just to clarify, how new was all that, the SEC officials, getting that feedback --

DANTE ZANDERS: We used to have the SEC officials during like scrimmages sometimes. So having them during practice constantly was like really new. It was something I felt like we needed too because, as I stated earlier, nobody wanted to be on that board. You want to be on the board for good things. You don't want to be seen as, oh, he can't block because he's holding or he can't do this because he's constantly offsides.

Q. Coach Napier kind of described Utah as a tough, physical team. How prepared do you think you guys are for the physical challenge of it?

DANTE ZANDERS: Forever prepared because we're a

physical team as well, constantly playing against each other during the fall camp, spring, head butting every day. So I feel like we're definitely going to be prepared.

Q. I imagine there's a lot more film study left to be done, but what are your earlier impressions of Utah's defense?

DANTE ZANDERS: I feel like they're a really good team. They're experienced. Got a lot of guys coming back. They made it really far last year. As an experienced team, we've got to come in and just show that we can hang in with the best of them.

Q. When you think about this new facility, how much of a lift emotionally was that for the whole team to have this facility open, and now you're in this place every day? Has it really helped the team as far as mental state?

DANTE ZANDERS: Yes, sir, because the locker room, being able to sit there and do normal tech in your locker and not have to go into the training room all the time and just be bombarded with, oh, are you hurt, are you this, are you that, and you just want to get your legs off of you, it's real nice.

Then having the training room have like different type of things, such as like the cold tub and contrast with the hot tub and the cryo chamber, all of that stuff, it just makes everybody feel good because they know we've got a high facility. So if something do happen at practice, I can go in and get it looked at and know I have the best provider to me to make sure I'm good as well.

Q. What's changed with Anthony Richardson compared to spring?

DANTE ZANDERS: His leadership role and his confidence. You can see him work on Coach Napier and him learning his progressions. As I stated, the 4D Gator, you can see all of that rise.

Q. What's the excitement level to watch him, though? We've heard about the leadership and the intangibles, but everyone, ourselves included, want to see him out there and what kind of plays he's making and running and throwing. What are you expecting to see from him this season?

DANTE ZANDERS: Expecting to see great things. The only things I can say about Anthony, everybody was crazy with Kadarius Toney and how he can stop and do all that stuff. He's Kadarius Toney at the quarterback position. He's got an arm on him. He do incredible throws off his



back leg, run, everything. So he's an incredible player.

Q. From your position, you're going to be able to go up against Mohamoud a little bit. What's that going to be like? Have you guys been able to talk at all?

DANTE ZANDERS: Some people still talk to Mohamoud. Me and Mohamoud, we were friends, but we're not like super, super close to where we would talk every day. But it's going to be pretty fun because I went up against him his whole career while he was here at Florida. Well, not since I switched to defense.

But working with him at defense and when he first came, I was still at tight end. So we never really got to hit each other and everything, but he's a helluva player, and I'll be able to work with him too.

Q. You've done a lot of mock situations to get ready for the game. How detailed have those been, like going through the hotel, going through everything you're going to do?

DANTE ZANDERS: He wants to make sure everything is prepared so that way, when it comes down to the game time, there's no excuses to where, oh, I didn't know I needed to be here. I forgot this. I left this at home, or I left this. Or, oh, I forgot that we had meetings at this time.

So him going over everything like the week before, just making sure everybody knows everything is like to make sure people don't have the excuse to say, oh, I forgot.

Q. So you went through the hotel, you went through the bus ride, Gator walk, all that?

DANTE ZANDERS: Yes, sir.

Q. Just last week?

DANTE ZANDERS: Not just last week, but during -- yes, sir.

Q. Is there more energy now that you're going to be playing up against somebody else? You guys have been hitting each other for so long now, but now you get to go up against another team.

DANTE ZANDERS: I feel like a kid the night before Christmas. It's just the whole week of. We've been hitting each other, hitting our brothers all week. Now we finally get to go and show our talent to the world and show that basically to other people also.

Q. What stands out to you about Utah? You

mentioned the experience, but what are the things they physically do that stand out to you?

DANTE ZANDERS: Utah, I feel like that's more of a question for Coach Napier. I apologize.

Q. What are your thoughts about the game being sold out too? How can you guys maybe feed off that energy?

DANTE ZANDERS: The game being sold out, and then I feel like -- how can I say this? With the game being sold out, I feel like it just puts -- it doesn't put a stress on nobody. It's something that you come to Florida for. Like you come for the big games, you come for the sold out fans. You don't want to come and play in an empty stadium and stuff like that.

Even though during COVID we had to do it, we showed up and played every day. Like the fans bring more energy for us.

Q. Have you talked to any of the freshmen or even Coach Napier about what to expect for a 7:00 game in The Swamp? Like just the environment. Coach Napier keeps talking about wanting to experience The Swamp. You've experienced some big games here. Have you talked to the freshmen about just butterflies or what they're going to feel?

DANTE ZANDERS: No, I don't want to ruin it for nobody, to be honest. I remember my first game, going out there and being nervous and everything. I feel like that's a once in a lifetime opportunity, like just walking out of the swamp on your first ever game. Even if you don't play, you walk out there and look up and see 90,000, the lights all around you. It's just an incredible moment.

Q. You said this team's going to be real physical. What do you expect from this run game just in terms of being able to control the ball, set the tone for what you're going to be able to do on offense?

DANTE ZANDERS: I feel like our run game is going to be pretty solid. Our offensive line improved a lot from last year with Coach Sale and Coach Stapleton, and just in general, our O-linemen, they got bigger, they got faster, they got smarter in off-season training.

They got smarter with all the 4D training and knowing multiple things. Not only do they know their position, they know what other people need to do. They also know how to read the fronts better and who's the mike linebacker, and if it rotates how to switch it on the fly, rather than just I'm confused in the middle of taking my steps.

Q. Dante, how much better do you feel about your own physical conditioning this year than you have in previous years?

DANTE ZANDERS: I feel great. The first thing they did when they came in was run. The conditioning was just like unbelievable. All we did was just condition, condition, condition. We lifted weights too, don't get me wrong, but conditioning was a main priority because we want to be able to out beat the other team. We don't want to be tired in the fourth quarter when it's crunch time. You don't want to be tired.

So they came in, and they emphasized conditioning drastically.

Q. How much of a mentor has Keon been to the tight end position for you?

DANTE ZANDERS: Keon has been a great help. Me and him out there, we constantly talk. He'll ask me questions. I'll ask him questions, just things that we both still need to learn to improve on since this is really both of our first years like actually playing multiple reps at the position.

Q. Is it still fun?

DANTE ZANDERS: Yeah, it's always going to be fun no matter what.

Q. You mentioned the 4D scale a couple of times. 4D is an understanding of all 22, right? Every player on the field?

DANTE ZANDERS: Yes, sir.

Q. Where are you at on that scale? Have you noticed anyone get up to the 4D level at this point?

DANTE ZANDERS: It's probably a lot of people who have reached the 4D. Me personally, I'm not at the 4D. I understand what my job is. I understand what like the other roles are around me. But I still -- there's still things to always improve on. Even if you reach your peak, there's still things to improve on.

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