

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: I think first we need to express our gratitude to our fans for showing up and creating a really special environment. To have the largest opening day crowd in the history of the school, I think, is pretty remarkable. And to think about what we kind of set out in the very beginning to create here, for them to do their part -- we talk about it being a team effort. They were a significant factor in the game and created issues for the opponent.

So we're hopeful that we can continue that positive energy and that momentum and the impact that they can have on the game. I think we've got just a handful of tickets left for Kentucky.

When we evaluate the game Saturday, we were very fortunate to win the game. Very pleased with the intangibles of the team. We showed some mental toughness. I thought we showed some togetherness. We stuck together throughout the adversity of the game. We continued to respond in critical moments in really every phase of the game, both sides of the ball.

When you look at the numbers and the statistics relative to the game, the game came down to red zone effectiveness. We scored four touchdowns on offense, and I think they scored two touchdowns or two field goals and four opportunities. So two turnovers, two forced field goals ultimately could be the difference in the game.

The film is sloppy, just so we're all on the same page. I know we're ready to put the crown on the Gators, but the Gators got a lot of work to do to play at our expectation and our standard.

I think the big challenge with the staff and the players yesterday was to control the things we could control. We went through those things -- communication, alignment, eye discipline, using the fundamentals and techniques that we've been coached, and then just the simple execution of your assignment and the in game decision-making as the play is taking place.

The great thing is the effort was there, the physicality was there, the toughness was there, the passion. I thought the chemistry and morale of the team was good. I thought we saw some leadership emerge. But overall, lots of areas on our team where we need to improve.

So I think we've got a little bit of the best of both worlds here. I think we've got some momentum. But we also have a team that is very self-aware. I think we've got a smart group. I think they understand good football. They watched the tape. They know that they can do better.

So our level of detail in how we prepare and how we play needs to improve. And I really believe we will see some improvement week 1 to week 2. I'm hopeful that we'll see that.

So as our team -- and not just players, but the entire organization gets comfortable with Sunday to Saturday and how we do that, I think we'll see the team improve.

A lot of good, a lot of bad, some ugly. We've got work to do here. But it's good to be 1-0. We're excited about getting back and starting SEC play here. What questions we got.

Q. You kind of addressed it a little bit, Billy, but how do you avoid the pitfalls of all the emotion surrounding that? Looking at your 2020 Louisiana team, that big win against Iowa State to start the season and you guys stayed the course. How do you keep the team grounded?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, one of the things I talked to the team about Friday, you've got to operate in truth, right? Operate in truth, tell the truth.

I think sometimes we hear the things we want to hear and we don't hear some of the things we need to hear. So just remaining objective, evaluate it for what exactly it is. I think sometimes we get consumed with the results. Reality is we need to always evaluate, win or loss, independent of the result. What does the film look like, and what can we do better?

I think that's one of the things that we have refined over the last couple years is like how do we evaluate a game? How do we quality control a game independent of the outcome? What do we do well? And I think our staffs knows what winning football looks like.

We played winning football in a lot of areas on our team, but there's some glaring areas where we need to get better. It is what it is. You find a way to win, right? Ultimately, that's what I'm proud of is the kids. This group's got some fight to them, and I think we're making progress when it comes to the human element. I think we're getting somewhere there.

Q. And the emotional component is all I was kind of driving at too. You've got young guys who that was an exhilarating experience.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I'm hopeful we have a lot of those. I think you're right. I think that's the big question. It's like how is this group of players and this staff going to handle everybody patting them on the back for the next week?

I think it's one of the things about University of Florida. You're in a state with 21 million people. You've got a huge alumni network. You've got unbelievable amount of passion. So when it's good, it's good. When it's bad, it's bad. So learning how to navigate that, ignore some of the subjective opinions, and call it what it is. Call a spade a spade.

I think the sense I got from our team is that they know they can do much better.

Q. There was a stark difference in run defense first half and second half. How did you evaluate that when you looked at the film?

BILLY NAPIER: I think I've had a lot of people ask me that question. I think it comes down to precision and our play. That's a physical team. I've got respect for their line of scrimmage play, their edge play. The backs are big. I think we need to align correctly. We need to communicate at a high level, align correctly, get our eyes on the right things, and use the fundamentals and techniques we're coached to use and play team defense.

I think sometimes just one player being misaligned causes the combinations to be a little bit more you're stressing a part of the defense. We've got to play team defense, first level, second level, third level. Got to work together and play team defense, right? One player is out of their gap when you're playing a good team, you can get exposed, and I think we saw a little bit of that.

Q. On a similar note, Gervon pretty routinely lined up a yard or so off. Is there anything specific about that that you can divulge?

BILLY NAPIER: I don't know we're going to get that technical in a press conference here. Maybe you can figure that out. You can tell me that later.

(Laughter).

Q. Billy, O'Cyrus brings a real element of toughness here, and this has been an offensive line that's been considered a finesse offensive line for years. Would you talk about the toughness he brings and the toughness you saw from your offensive line.

BILLY NAPIER: I think that's one of the areas where we play the way we want to play. I thought that group showed -- that's kind of who we want to be. That's the brand of football we played in the past. We invest in that area. We have two offensive line coaches. We put a premium on line of scrimmage play. That's a developmental position.

But certainly O'Cyrus, he rose to the occasion. We always felt that O'Cyrus was one of the better players out there, and he showed it. He was one of our players of the game. And I think that his comfort with the system, his comfort with the routine, I think that rubs off on that group a little bit.

But Coach Stapleton and Coach Sale are really good at what they do. I think that group -- there's a lot of room for improvement there, but we're getting closer to the identity we want that group to have.

Q. You said a minute ago there's a lot of good, a lot of bad, and some ugly. I was curious, when you went back and watched it, what was the biggest good thing you saw and one really glaring bad or ugly?

BILLY NAPIER: That's a long conversation there. We spent the entire day doing that yesterday. I would say half the day. I just want to see more precision, more detail in how we play across the board.

The good thing that I observed is the chemistry and morale of the team. Together this is a team, right? We stuck together -- ups, downs, we responded. I think that's probably the compliment I would give the team. They played hard in the game. Like anybody that watched that film or watched that game on TV would say, hey, the Gators played hard, man. They competed. That's what I'm proud of.

The football, we got work to do. So without getting too specific there, that's what I would say.

Q. There's so many facets in building a program. Winning is minor, but yet major, right? What does a mean like that and maybe even a game like this, what can it do to maybe jump start, fast track the big picture of what you're trying to do?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it helps -- you know, when you're new and you're doing things a different way and you're trying to establish trust and you're trying to connect with people, I think that it's important that they see progress. They taste a little bit.

I think this was our first opportunity to take some of these things we've been doing. We've been working for eight months, right? Then you've got to go play a game. There's no preseason games. You don't get to go scrimmage another team. So the player experiences, oh, man, some of these things that we learned are working. We may have a chance here.

There's always a little bit of doubt until they see, hey, maybe we've got a chance here. I think early on in your tenure you're always looking for these type of opportunities. And it ain't over, just so we all understand that, right? We found a way to win that game, but I think each week is going to present a new set of challenges and each week will be much the same.

Q. What's the evaluation of Anthony after seeing the film?

BILLY NAPIER: I thought the decision-making in the game was pretty good. I thought made one bad decision in the game, and that was third and ten where he forced the ball into coverage. He should have thrown an interception, truth be known. Outside of that, I thought the management of the game, decision-making of the game was good.

A few things we'd do maybe a little bit different. A little jittery early on, made a few mistakes, but ultimately he operated well.

You know, he's his own worst critic now. He's going to watch the film three times and tell you everything he could have done better, but he rose to the occasion is what I would say. That's what I saw. I saw a guy who is prepared behind the scenes, is a product of his work, and it showed up.

All this work he's been doing when there's nobody watching, some of that showed up. And then you've got the physical ability to go along with that. You see that, but there's a lot of good quarterback plays on the film, but there's also a lot of things that he knows he got away with

that he needs to clean up.

So players around the quarterback have got to play well for the quarterback to play well. I know that sounds cliché, but sometimes the quarterback looks bad, but players around him aren't doing what they're supposed to do. So it's a catch-22 there.

Anthony, he's going to get better. That's what I would tell you.

Q. Coach, this is probably a bunch of firsts, your first SEC game. What's your initial opinion in scouting Kentucky?

BILLY NAPIER: I think Kentucky I've got a lot of respect for Coach Stoops and what he's been able to do there, just the consistency, their improvement as a program. To win ten games last year -- I mean, his teams, I've always had a lot of respect for his teams because I think they're sound.

I think they know who they are on offense, defense, and special teams. I see a good set of fundamentals in all three phases, and they do a good job of evaluating players, and they've got some height, length, and speed.

They have some good players that maybe weren't highly regarded, but they're just as good as anybody in the country. This is a good developmental program that I have nothing but respect for. So you've got to beat Kentucky. They're going to make you beat them.

I think they're a well-coached team, and I've got a lot of respect for the intangibles, the effort, the fundamentals. All the things that coaches respect, they do those things.

Q. You talked about the importance of game changers. We saw one leave the game in Marco Ortiz. Do you have an update on how he's doing?

BILLY NAPIER: We'll give you an update Wednesday evening with regard to the depth chart.

Q. From a recruiting standpoint, you guys have obviously built a lot with this cycle and haven't even coached a game yet. To put a product on the field and have a recruiting weekend like that, what type of impact do you think that's going to have?

BILLY NAPIER: If we keep doing that, I think it will be better. There's no question that the experience of The Swamp, the experience of the fans, the passion, the tradition, that's a unique game day venue, and I think for a kid that comes here, maybe grew up coming here, but maybe that's the first time. He's sitting in there and he lives

that, that's hard to ignore.

I think, when you pair that with a top five education at a university, you pair that with Gainesville, Florida, a classic college town, two hours from Orlando and Tampa, you pair that with this alumni network that Gator made, you've got a pretty special product that you're selling.

All the things that we've done to improve with the facility, the housing, the infrastructure, that's kind of the exclamation point to say, and you get to play in here in front of this. There's no question that it helps, and we need to do it more. I'm hopeful we can do it again this week.

Q. Just seeing Des on the field for that volume of snaps -- I haven't counted them up yet. Were you happy with the amount he was able to go and stamina and all the things that go into that position?

BILLY NAPIER: Des is a work in progress. I think he's addressing some of his habits. I think he's made a different level of commitment in some of those areas, and I think he's starting to see the returns on that, if that makes sense.

But Des can be a weapon for our team if he continues in the right direction. But very much a work in progress and a guy that we need to step up, we need to have a significant impact, because that guy, he's a unique player. Certainly in games like last week, he can be a factor.

Again, it goes back to some of those things that I'm not singling him out, but, hey, okay, alignment, fundamentals, techniques, eye discipline, assignment, in-game decision-making, where are we at there? I think he's a guy that, much like the entire team, there's lots of areas for improvement.

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