

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: It's good to come in the building yesterday after a win. I was really proud of the team and how they responded throughout the game, through the ups and downs of the game.

We know anybody that watched the game, it wasn't perfect, we made a lot of mistakes in the game, but also think it's an opportunity for our team to show some character and to respond and handle adversity well, and we certainly did that.

I think, when we watch the tape, we see a lot of good, in particular on offense. I thought there was a lot of good. We improved certain parts of our team there. Defensively, I thought South Florida did a fantastic job, creating conflict, especially with the read game, gave us a lot of new stuff early in the game. And I think they've got a pretty good group of skill players there. The quarterback played well for them.

And then the kicking game, outside of the holding penalty, I think we can cover the kicks better. I think we can cover the punts better. I think that's an area of our team where we need to continue to focus and improve. If you want to have a good football team, you've got to cover kicks, and you've got to have really good specialist play.

You think about the game, we got points off of turnovers. Our defense got take-aways. We forced field goals in the red area. Offensively we were really limited in the game. I think we actually ran only 48 offensive plays or something like that. So the play count was a little bit out of whack.

We had two possessions that were take a knee possessions, one at the end of the half, one at the end of the game.

So I think there's a lot we can clean up on the tape, but I also think we did a lot of good things.

We turned the page here yesterday, probably halfway through the day, and started working on Tennessee. Tennessee has got a good football team. You can see

where Coach Heupel and his staff have improved in their time there. A lot cleaner product in all three areas of their team on film. Much cleaner football -- offense, defense, and special teams -- maybe compared to last year.

This is a veteran team we're playing against, starting with a quarterback on offense and a number of players on defense that have played a lot of football. They're a deep team. They play a lot of players, especially on the defensive side. I do think they do a good job in the kicking game.

So got to go play at their place, very familiar with Knoxville and certainly the challenges that come with that. Good football team. It's going to be a challenge, and we look forward and embrace that.

What questions do we have here?

Q. You had three games where you had a pretty nice routine, 7:00, 7:30 starts. What now are the challenges of going on the road with a young team and playing in the middle of the day?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's just a timeline on change. I don't necessarily know. Friday evening will look a little bit different, and certainly Saturday morning will look a little bit different. But outside of that, we'll keep everything intact.

You're right, though, in terms of our expectations and how we do things, travel-wise, schedule-wise, it will be the first time with the group. So there will be some things that go with that.

But I do think our players are starting to understand what it looks like relative to preparing with this staff.

Q. What about playing in a hostile environment?

BILLY NAPIER: I think the veteran players on our team, I think will be comfortable with that. I was just having conversations yesterday with some of the guys that have played here, obviously have played here in the past in those times at Alabama. I think we understand what comes with that.

We do a ton of work, training camp in particular, we do a number of things with crowd noise. So we get out in front of that, anticipate that, knowing that that's coming, and it's not going away, right? We're going to have to deal with it the rest of the way.

Q. You have to come up with a travel roster. Is that one of the harder things you have to do as a coach?

BILLY NAPIER: It is tough. You've got to get down to 70. We're limited to 80 at home games. You get a chance to play 70 on the road there.

So I think where we're at probably not as big of a deal. Down the road, you get into year two, three, four and you've got a little bit deeper team, that's when it becomes a challenge.

Special teams depth, that's ultimately the defining factor in those final 15 or so spots. But outside of that, it's pretty simple.

Q. What's the challenge -- they like to run a play every 18 seconds. How do you slow them down offensively when you're on defense? Secondly, does this make you get more deliberate with your own offense to kind of keep them off the field?

BILLY NAPIER: I think there will be some strategy when it comes to that, in terms of controlling the tempo of the game, and I do think that how you play offensively can ultimately influence how they play offense.

But I think you're about right that. It's about every 20 1/2 seconds or so they're running a play. I know they want to do it in 18. That's part of their philosophy. There's some things that go with that.

I think the key is first and ten's a big down when you play these teams, and certainly you've got to try to knock them out of their rhythm. It can become a problem for you when it turns into five, six, seven, eight-play drives. So it's a momentum system, right? I think that you've got to do everything you can do to slow down that momentum. That starts with playing well on first down.

Q. What did the tape show you with the run defense?

BILLY NAPIER: Conflict, right? First, second, and third level being on the same page. And I think any time you run the quarterback in a lot of different ways -- I'm talking eight, ten different variables there relative to involving the quarterback and the edge player, and I think a lot of it was new.

I will compliment the staff. I thought at halftime we went in the locker room and really cleaned it up. That's part of -- that's one of the good things that I see. It's like, okay, new concept. We're able to understand that. Here's the concept. Here's the call. Here's how we clean that up.

And we didn't make the same mistake twice, which is good. We defended some of those plays better in the second half.

Q. What's your assessment of the passing game for you all? Zero passing touchdowns through three games is kind of a surprising statistic.

BILLY NAPIER: We've been able to run it and haven't gotten into many of those four-point plays where we've had to throw it.

I think that we need to improve in the throw game, and that's one of the points of emphasis with the offensive players yesterday is precision in the throw game. I think settling into some lineups. Obviously figuring out what we do well, what can we do well, what's the quarterback comfortable with, all those things that go into that.

When I say that, I'm talking about protection. I'm talking about detail and the steps and depths of the route, the aiming points, and the quarterback progression and decision-making. So all 11 players contribute, and I think we need to be more precise and more detailed in that part of our football team.

Q. Is that lack of precision just a new staff thing, different system?

BILLY NAPIER: Yes, first year in a new system, and certainly a first year quarterback in a new system too, to go along with skill players that are playing in a new system. I think we have protected the quarterback well to some degree. There have been a few handful of plays where we maybe can do it better, but we haven't been sacked, and Anthony's done a nice job making some plays with his legs when it has broken down.

So it's an area of our team where we need to improve, there's no question about that. You can tell that. The average fan can tell that. My wife can. She's informed me of that. So we need to get better.

Q. What's the key to keeping Anthony's confidence going in the right direction? And what kind of pressure is this guy under? When you really get into all the outside expectations from games, the NFL buzz, all these things.

BILLY NAPIER: I think the key is that you have the right perspective. I think you've got to see things from the big picture here. We use the word journey to describe that, like you've got to play the long game here, realize -- have a very technical way to teach and show what was done well, what was done -- can be done better.

Then you've got to have a standard and kind of an expectation for yourself and our process that who cares what anybody else thinks. Like I'm so consumed with improvement and detail and my approach, my routine, how I get myself prepared.

There's a lot of plays that maybe we had success on that we can do it better. I think we've got to evaluate things independent of the result, independent of the outside opinion, just what does the film say?

And I would tell you the guy played a really good first half of football. We ran 25 offensive plays, and he was spot on in the first half. The second half obviously is an area where we need to clean some things up.

We ask our quarterback to do a lot, and he's managing it well, and he's going to continue to get better.

Q. How can the receivers help him?

BILLY NAPIER: Just being precise. I think the attention to detail, there's a lot that goes with that position as well in terms of learning a new system.

A receiver's job is to get open and catch the ball, so get open and catch the ball.

Q. I think it was SEC Media Days where you said you need to let Anthony be Anthony, when you were talking about his mobility and things like that. Through three games, are you guys doing enough or calling enough plays? Do you think he's using his mobility enough?

BILLY NAPIER: I think our situation at quarterback has something to do with that, if that makes sense, but I also believe the guy's made some plays with his legs. The guy made two third down conversions in the game the other day, where it's third and seven to ten, long, extra long, and he goes through his progression and then breaks the pocket and makes a play.

I think each game and each week is a little bit different relative to the concepts that are called, how the team's defending you. I think teams are very aware that this guy can beat them with his feet. I think you maybe get different

structure as a result of that.

But I'm with you. I think we do our best to use his skill set, and I think we'll continue to grow in that area.

Q. Going back to the road, obviously, another first for Anthony, his first SEC road start. He's played on the road in the SEC before, though. What are the challenges for him there just in terms of running the offense and dealing with that noise?

BILLY NAPIER: Just focusing on the things that he can control. I know that sounds cliché, but I think the prep throughout the week and then just being a great communicator, verbal and non-verbal. You've got to do a good job overemphasizing the communication piece, not only to the core of the offense but the perimeter as well, and realize it's the same game.

It's not like we're going to Canada and they're going to change the rules. It's going to be the same game. It's going to be a little louder and played at a different location.

Q. You were born in Tennessee, right?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I was born in Tennessee.

Q. Do you have any Vols memories or anything like that growing up?

BILLY NAPIER: I've got all kind of family that's diehard Tennessee fans. My uncle's family and all that crew, they live in Crossville. My mom and dad went to Tennessee Tech. We moved to Georgia when I was about 2 years old. So my mom's parents owned a tobacco farm in Sparta, Tennessee. My dad grew up in Salina, Tennessee. Know all about the Vols for sure.

Q. They're Florida fans this week, right?

BILLY NAPIER: Absolutely, yeah. If they're not, they won't be at the game, I can promise you that.

(Laughter).

Q. Jalen said he's been practicing catching passes since the day after he got the cast off. Can you speak to his progress throughout the fall and how big that play was for him?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's impressive, the kid got banged up, made a decision he was going to play through. Could have had a surgical procedure that would have been put him out, but maybe got him back a few weeks earlier, or he could just wear the cast, deal with the pain management.

It really says a lot about the kid's character because he knew our situation with Jaydon Hill being out. So he was in the rotation, chose to go the long haul there, and for him to make a pick six at a critical moment, I think was big.

He's a new player. I think we've got like 44 freshmen, sophomore, first year players that played in the game the other day. He's one of those, right? So hat's off to Kimber. He's been a very consistent, steady player, and hopeful that he can continue to improve.

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