

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Obviously back from the Tennessee game, kind of turn the page, a lot to learn from that experience. The collective effort of our team -- offense, defense, and special teams -- we made a few too many mistakes to win the game. That's as simple as you can put it.

I think Tennessee's got a good football team. When you play a team of that caliber, those mistakes are too much to overcome. I was proud of the intangibles the team showed. There's no question we were ready to play, we were ready to compete. We embraced the big stage and the opportunity that came with it.

And I thought we showed togetherness. I thought we showed competitive spirit. There was some fight there. There was physicality. There was toughness. We're in a similar situation relative to the execution.

So it's -- you know, we talk about winning football. What does winning football look like? I think we got closer in some areas, but we still got a ways to go there.

Very proud of the response from the players yesterday. I think we all -- sometimes in life we get in these situations where maybe we don't like our circumstances and we can't control that, but we can control how we respond to those things.

I think each day attitude is a choice. I think effort is a choice. It's always going to be that way for the rest of life, and certainly for our football team that is the approach. I think you've got to choose your vision over your circumstances, right? You've got to have a big picture of where you want to go, and you've got to simplify that and do the things necessary to get there independent of the circumstance.

So we really challenged the coaching staff and the players, what can you do to help? What can you do to improve? Really taking a good look at your weekly process to get ready, not only the things that are required, but what about the unrequired work?

I think Inky Johnson, when he spoke to our team earlier in training camp, he said hard work is a given. Its separators are the unrequired work. As teachers, as coaches, as leaders, and certainly as players on our team, I think everybody is excited about how they responded yesterday.

We turn the page. Eastern Washington, it's going to be great to be back in The Swamp. We're hopeful that happens, and certainly Eastern Washington, when you dig into the history and culture of the program, they have a winning tradition. They're very respected across the country for the quality of football that they play. This is a consistent playoff contender that made some great runs. Myself, being a former FCS player, I've got a ton of respect for the program that they run there.

So we started that preparation and look forward to the challenge.

Q. Coach, we didn't get a chance to ask you after the game, can you just take us through your process for the two-point conversion, trying to go from 17-9 to 17-11. Did it have a lot to do with being on the road, facing a Tennessee team that's tough to stop?

BILLY NAPIER: I'm glad you asked that question because I probably got more questions about that than anything else.

There's two avenues, when you really dig into the numbers, about the approach there. First of all, you start talking about playing for a tie, right? When you're on the road, there's a slight advantage for the home team in overtime, and there's certainly a bigger advantage when you're a two-score favorite. I think it's around 63 percent advantage if you're the home team playing overtime, and you're a two score favorite. So that goes into your decision-making.

Really all you're trying to do is declare the path early in the game. So you go for two there. If you get it, you're at 9, and now you're in a position to win the game with an extra point whereas, if you don't get it now, you still have two scores with an additional opportunity to go for two.

So if you kick it, ultimately, the numbers are going to tell you to go for two at the end of the game anyway to win the game. So you're just declaring the path quicker, and that gives you a chance to adjust your strategy the rest of the game.

This is pretty common in this era. Probably the last five years this has happened a number of times. I think it's all well thought out of, and really going into the game we're very aware of all the go for two situations and what goes with that.

Q. So the chart is set up long before the game and it changes weekly?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's all relative to the dynamic of the game, how much time is left in the game, the matchups going into the game.

Q. How about venue with too? If it's road versus at home?

BILLY NAPIER: Absolutely. There's no question.

Q. You had declared a path pretty early in that game, first series and stuff. Does that complicate things for your staff when you face a team like that? How is that going to complicate the preparation?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I don't think so. Your job as coaches is to help come up with a strategy for the team to put your team in position to win. We knew going into it part of the way you win that game is you've got to control possession of the ball. You've got to keep their offense off the field.

The play count on their end, on offense, can get high in a hurry, and that affects your defense, right? So one of the ways to combat that is to stay on the field on offense. And you know going in, based off of history, that you're going to have to score.

So there's a little more aggressive approach, and from the first possession on, we took that approach.

Q. From a defensive standpoint, the defensive coordinator facing a team like that, does it cause a problem in the preparation?

BILLY NAPIER: I think you're very much aware of that, especially when you're a favorite and you know the other team is maybe in that approach, of that approach in that mind. We've seen teams play us a little bit different as a result of that.

You know, it's a huge advantage, in my opinion, to approach each game really with this in mind, if that makes sense. So it's helped us win a lot of games in the past. I think it's going to help us win a lot of games in the future as well.

Q. When you evaluate the third down defense, two games in a row where it's been a pretty high percentage. What goes into it?

BILLY NAPIER: We haven't met our objective a couple of weeks in a row here on third down. I think, when we watch the defensive tape, it's simple. It's one player not doing what he's supposed to do quite often. It's a guy busting the coverage. It's a guy not in his pass rush lane. It's a guy mis-fitting a run.

There's a lot of good on the tape, but I think you talk about playing team defense, you've got to have 11 players doing what they're supposed to do. We gave up explosive plays in the game as a result of mental errors. It's that simple.

So I think we've got to do our part as teachers and as coaches and as leaders to help the players, and the players have to have the discipline to execute in critical moments.

Q. You made one significant change in the depth chart on defense last week. Do you consider others this week in light of that?

BILLY NAPIER: We always -- we've got the same process of preparing for the game. We're going to evaluate previous performance combined with what we observe Sunday to Saturday, and it's always based off of merit. It's based off of production. Then obviously what we're observing every day. I think that will be the same approach going forward.

Q. Regarding the mental errors, is communication continuing to be a problem with your defense? You gave up ten pass plays for 279 yards.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I'm with you. I think there's two in particular where we just have one player bust the coverage, right? I think there is a communication element to that, but a lot of it has to do with discipline to execute, the ability to do your job at a critical moment in a critical time.

I think that the good thing is I see players taking ownership of that. In particular, these individual errors maybe that are costing us, I don't necessarily see a lot of finger pointing. I see groups stay together, make adjustments, understanding what happened, why it happened.

But there's no question we can play better, across the board here -- offense, defense, and special teams. There's a lot of good on the film, but there's also a lot we've got to clean up.

Q. I wanted to follow up once more on the two-point conversion. Obviously it didn't work out. Did you second guess that at all on the flight home? Are you kicking yourself on the numbers?

BILLY NAPIER: I've got no issue with the decision. Heck, we tip our own pass there, we get the two-point conversion. We got the right play. We made the right decision.

This is one of those paths you go down where a lot of people don't understand, but we're going to base our decision-making off of research and evidence and true facts and numbers. So it is what it is.

Q. Last game Anthony had 112 passing yards. He quadrupled that on Saturday. How do you explain that discrepancy? Was it like a light bulb come off for him last week? What are some things that you guys did to get him to click like that?

BILLY NAPIER: He probably had his best week of practice. I thought he was really tuned in to the preparation throughout the week.

I think the matchup was different. We played South Florida, and we could turn around and hand the ball off pretty consistently. He wasn't maybe in the groove, if that makes sense.

We knew going into the park that we were going to give him the ball and let him go play. We'll continue to do that. It's just part of him being a young player, no different than you draft an NFL quarterback in the first round and, hey, he's your guy, let's go. There's been a number of rookie quarterbacks that have been through that same process, if that makes sense.

I think the big thing for him is I saw him kind of flip the switch as a competitor and really just get consumed with, hey, look, this is my team. I'm going to take my team. We're going to beat your team. I'm going to do everything I can do to help my teammates and help our team win, and just competing and not really worrying about anything else, what anybody thinks or how things are going, just like what is the next decision that I need to make to help the team win?

I think ultimately that's where I saw a little bit of growth

from him. He was enjoying it. He was embracing it. He was in his element, which I think ultimately, as a player, that's how the game is supposed to be played and that's why it's fun to play.

I can say the same thing about coaching. I'm proud of Anthony and how he -- there's a lot of noise and all that. You can get caught up in that. He didn't. He really showed up and did his job for the team.

Q. Going back to the defense, where do you feel like the safety position is at? How do you want to see them get better from a tackling standpoint and communication in coverage?

BILLY NAPIER: I think that secondary, in particular, is a position, much like our entire team, where we play well at times but we're a little bit inconsistent at times. I think each position on our team -- sometimes the magnifying lens gets put on certain plays or certain situations as they follow the ball, but I do think that they're much like every position on our team. They do a lot of things well, but we're looking for more consistency.

We've got to do the simple things well. There's a dozen plays in that game where Florida beats Florida, if that makes sense. We've always taken great pride in being a team that doesn't give the opponent anything. You're going to have to earn every inch that you get when you play our team, right?

We're still not there. We're still learning our systems. We're still learning how to adjust to playing different systems. I think there's a lot of repetition and growth that needs to take place to be the type of football team we want to be.

Q. Coach, you talked about beating yourselves. It seems like on kickoff returns guys aren't bringing it out, and there's penalties that set you back even further. Do you adjust?

BILLY NAPIER: Absolutely. There's no question. I think you kind of saw that not with the game, but those are frustrating, right? In my opinion, those are undisciplined penalties, some of those in particular. Those are decision-making where you're doing something that you know is absolutely not in the best interests of the team.

Then I do think, from a strategy perspective, we need to make better decisions relative to when we bring the ball out and when we don't. I think we're learning there. There's no question we need to adjust our strategy there.

The penalties are what I really struggle with because when

you're returning the ball, whether it's the punt return unit or the kickoff return unit, number one is secure the football. Get the ball back to the offense. Number two is don't get a penalty. That's the top two things on the list.

Hey, we're going to work extremely hard to try to create game changing plays, win one-on-one matchups, have an electric player that can create and try to position the team to make a game changing play. But we're not doing any of those things very well right now, if that makes sense. It's a part of our team we need to improve. I think it's a very germane question for sure.

Q. Austin Barber has stood out in his last few games. What's your evaluation of his performance and how important is it for him to step in as well as other younger guys?

BILLY NAPIER: I'm proud of Austin. He's a freshman that's never played in a game before, and all of a sudden he's got to run out there and play and do his job for the team.

He's one of the guys that I think has really developed a lot since he got here. He's got tools. He's 6'6". He weighs a little bit over 300 pounds. He's got length. I think he's a decent athlete, and I think he's got a bright future.

And he hasn't been -- it's not like we've had a huge dropoff. He's still a young player. He still makes mistakes in the game. But he's got tools to develop and grow and become a very consistent, dependable player for us.

Q. Can we ask one more question about the storm? Just the week and so forth and how is the facility with regards to that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think the big thing here, probably more important, is just that we hope that everyone is prepared, is making preparation. I know that we're going to have some wind and significant rain here, but we've got a lot of people in our state that are in for a rough ride here. So our thoughts and prayers are with them as they prepare.

Having been a part of these things in the past, it's nothing to play around with. So we've got a game this week, but I think these things are a little bit more important. Certainly, we're going to do everything we can do within our organization to help our players, their families, anybody that maybe is at risk.

Certainly what it does for me is makes you very aware of the thankfulness we should have for -- there's a lot of people that go to work where they're in a career where they serve others, and these are very difficult times. So it

makes you more thankful for that.

We need to get ready to go there, and we'll adjust as we see fit.

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