

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: I think a couple things here before we get started. Obviously excited about it being homecoming this weekend. A lot of activities around campus. Gator Growl homecoming parade, a lot of different events. People coming back to the University of Florida, a place that made a significant impact on their lives.

Certainly for our team a great opportunity to represent all the people that came before us, not only former players but also alumni in general.

We also are excited to be celebrating what we're calling GatorMade week this week, to really promote it. It's really about creating awareness about our player development program that specifically has been put together to work on and equip and educate and create experiences for our players. It's all about life after football.

We made a significant investment there. We got four full-time staff members. Savannah Bailey, Vernell Brown Jr., Marcus Castro-Walker and Diane Lebon, which I would argue we've got the best in the entire country. We've got really special leadership there. We're, what, nine months into this thing, and it's only going to get better going forward.

We want to thank Mike Ricketts. He made a significant contribution and invested in the program. Certainly a guy who is a pillar of the endowment there. We're very thankful for him.

We continue to look for really good mentors, people that we can get our players connected to, right? We've got a lot of strengths at the University of Florida. I think GatorMade is our attempt to connect the dots and really take advantage of this 470,000 living alumni, this top five university, and a number of values and tools that we want to equip the players with.

We did the Greece abroad service trip. We did also the Atlanta GatorMade business break. We're going to New York City in 2023. I know from my experience, I'm different because of the people I've met along the way, the people

I've listened to along the way, and the experiences that I've had.

We want to do that. We want to equip and educate the players. We want to create experiences for the players, ultimately that changes and impacts lives for the better. Hopefully these young men leave here more prepared for life after ball.

Savannah Bailey will be here when we get done and she can answer any more questions that you have.

Good practice today, back in pads. Knocking off the rust a little bit there. We were in spiders yesterday. Good energy out there. Certainly right in the middle of the preparation. A lot of work to do to clean up want plan and look forward to representing on Saturday.

What questions do we have?

Q. Is that a GatorMade hoodie?

BILLY NAPIER: It is, absolutely. I'm excited about GatorMade. I really am.

Q. I would think someone like you looks into things deeply. How many guys are there? 112 dressed the other day. 125?

BILLY NAPIER: Right around 125.

Q. How many guys are going to play football professionally? What's the message to the group? Hey, this percentage of you are going to play at all, and this is why you should take advantage of this?

BILLY NAPIER: I mean, I think Plan A should be the degree, the education, the experience, the skill set, the connections, right, the career, who I am as a person, my character.

I think Plan B is the National Football League.

Sometimes we obviously have to paint that picture in a little bit different way. But I firmly believe that football is a game



that can teach a lot of lessons about life.

I think sometimes people check the box when it comes to these things, right? We want to make sure in this unique window of time that we maximize every opportunity. It's never out of sight, out of mind, right? We're always being aggressive, creating experiences and putting people in front of our players to remind them that one day the helmet is hanged up, right, the cleats are on the shelf, you got to do something else.

We're hopeful that a large percentage of our roster plays in the National Football League. Even if they make it to the National Football League, right, who are they? What type of skill set do they have? How prepared are they?

I think even within GatorMade we're doing things that are going to make them a better professional player, right? I think this is more of a complete, holistic investment into making them the absolute best person, student and football player they can be.

Q. Why is this such an important topic for you? Why are you devoting so much time to that that doesn't show up on the field?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it does show up on the field. That would be my opinion. I think that trust factor, knowing that you've got a plan for them, knowing that you care for them, knowing that you're investing for them, I think ultimately that ends up paying you back in some form or fashion along the way.

I think we're at a unique place here where we have an incredible experience that we can offer the player, right? We want to do it better than anybody in the country's doing it. That's one of the reasons we've invested in it.

It's part of our organization, and we've made a significant investment in it. It's already making a difference.

Q. How?

BILLY NAPIER: I mean, I think we're making significant impact. We've seen young men change for the better. I think they're more prepared than maybe they would have been without it.

Q. You're almost at the halfway point of the season. After this game you will be. You talked earlier in the year about these guys understanding what call goes into winning. How far along are you in this process with the bulk of your players really understanding what all it takes to win football games?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we're a lot closer. I think when you lose football games, sometimes it becomes a little bit more real to you, right? It stings a little bit more. We've played losing football at times and ultimately it's cost us games.

I also think that our process of quality control in a game, evaluating the game, what contributes to winning, I think we've done that a number of times here.

We're getting better. I think our players are getting more comfortable in the routine. Certainly part of that routine is how we quality control the game and give them feedback about what helps them have success as a team, how we can play complementary football, offense, defense, special teams.

Q. Three sacks in five games. What do you attribute that to? How important is that going to be with Missouri's pass-rushers?

BILLY NAPIER: I think that's a great question.

We've been fortunate. Number one, we conceptually are built in a way where we try to eliminate negative plays, obviously sacks being one of those, right?

I also think we've got a really good plan there to develop the offensive line. I think we've got a good understanding of protection. A lot of it is conceptual. I also think it's a commitment and a premium put on the offensive line and their development.

It also helps when you have an athlete at quarterback, right? I know we always were really good in that stat the last couple years. Certainly we had a really good athlete at quarterback. I think that contributes to that, as well.

Q. The December, January period of playing retention, what can you divulge about how much you prioritized a guy like Ty'Ron Hopper? What are you comfortable revealing about that?

BILLY NAPIER: Nothing but respect for Hopper. I really thought he was a good player. The time that I had with him, I thought he was a really good person as well.

We certainly would have loved to have him on our team. He's a good player. Just a unique window of time there. Certainly with his family, I think a family member that also went to Missouri. A little bit of a deal there.

Nothing but respect. He's playing great. Certainly a good competitor, one that I think has a good future in front of him.

Q. Is he a true Mike, athletic Mike?

BILLY NAPIER: I think he's a Will. I think that's what makes him a good player. He's got good height and length to him. But he can run, right? He's good in coverage. He's a great blitzer. He'll be a fantastic special teams player at the next level. I think he's a really good football player.

Q. You talk about homecoming. We've talked to some former players, and they talk a lot about you being incredibly welcoming, maybe more so than previous coaches. What makes that important to you?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think those guys put a lot of time, effort and energy into this place, right? They were here living it, right? They lived what our players are experiencing right now.

I think just as a simple sign of respect, this is a place that you worked extremely hard to represent, you were here as a student, a person, as a football player. You ought to have the opportunity to come back.

We want to work hard to build that bridge there, too, right? I think it's a network of people that can help the University of Florida, right? They can help us, they can help our current roster. I think if we're going to have success as a team, as a university, as an organization, we need as much help as we can get.

It's one of the things that we have here, right? We have history. We have tradition. We have a lot of people that had great experiences here, they had success here on and off the field. They're out there living life.

That wisdom and that opportunity to connect to our current team is important.

Q. You saw how Missouri was able to put Georgia in a corner, almost came away with that big win. How much respect do you have for a program like that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think what it's a reminder of is in this league you got to be ready to play every week. There's no easy outs here.

Each team in our league, they got their own set of problems. Everybody's working hard to come up with solutions. They're trying to put the best product they can out there each week.

The matchups are different every week. Not only personnel-wise but also schematically. No easy outs in the SEC. It's going to be a challenge every time. Certainly this

past week was a great example of that.

Q. How are bodies holding up this week with the shorter rest?

BILLY NAPIER: I think the positive there is play counts weren't too high Saturday. Large number of the roster played 20, 30 plays in the game. We were able to spread that out. I think that was one positive from Sunday.

Q. (Question about Missouri offensively.)

BILLY NAPIER: I think Eliah does a fantastic job on offense. They've got an identity. They've got a set of concepts that they really believe in from a run perspective. They're committed to that. They do a good job with the play-action shots. They have a good perimeter game and dropback game to go with that.

Always had success moving the ball, if you really dig into his history. Creative, really good play-caller, a good game planner, for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

BILLY NAPIER: Second year we played them twice.

Q. What was it like competing against them in the Sunbelt, to see two guys ascend to this level?

BILLY NAPIER: That seems like a long time ago (smiling).

Fantastic program, Appalachian State. They had an unbelievable veteran team there, quarterback was a veteran player. They had a handful of NFL players on that team. Just an unbelievable culture there. Certainly Eliah did a good job leading that program that year that he was there.

Q. Jack Miller, you have him listed as questionable. Is he practicing? Getting in any kind of activity?

BILLY NAPIER: He's out there at practice. He's doing all the things outside of the team. We're doing some things on the side with him, as well.

Balls come out of his hands good. It's a comfort level. I think there's some things there from a fatigue rehab standpoint, just getting adjusted, getting back in the groove a little bit. Quite a bit of time away.

He's just sharpening that axe every day, improving, certainly making good progress.

Q. Do you feel like your team has an identity?



BILLY NAPIER: We're getting there. Yeah, I think every year your team is a work in progress. Certainly I think we're there. We're certainly in year one, so I think it's even more of a work in progress.

Q. Is it what you thought it would be this far in?

BILLY NAPIER: I don't know if I'm ever going to be happy standing up here.

I just think we got work to do to get better, right? We have yet to play a clean game, in my opinion. I don't know that we ever will, but we're always going to chase that.

I do think that this team works hard. I think we're just growing up right here.

Q. Same answer 40 games in?

BILLY NAPIER: Probably (smiling).

Q. A lot of programs have player development initiatives. How unique is GatorMade here?

BILLY NAPIER: I think what makes an organization is the people, right? I think that's where we've hit it out of the park. We have absolutely hired an unbelievable group of people there. This is all they do, 24/7, 365, right?

I think we've got fantastic young leadership. I think we've got some familiarity with Florida with Vernell. We've got experience all over the country. A couple Florida graduates. I think there's a little bit of an investment there, as well.

I think they take great pride in their role, right? People make a team. People make an organization. I think that's where we're really, really blessed to have the people we have.

Q. Trey is listed to return this week. What did you see out of Kamari and Donovan? Did they do enough to continue earning opportunities?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, they're going to continue to play, Kamari in particular. But, yeah, I thought they played well in the game. Still first start, made a few mistakes here or there. Got to eliminate the mental errors. Got to communicate better.

I think we're making progress fundamentally. I think the secondary's much like the offensive line, right? It's a developmental position. There's a lot of communication. Everybody's got to be synchronized. I think both of those

are of the utmost importance on their side of the ball.

Kamari is going to only get better with reps and experience. Had a great practice today. Made some really good plays in practice. Good young player. Got character, really cares. He has a good tool set, skill set to work with.

Q. Ventrell Miller announced earlier he was going to use his platform to raise money for hurricane relief. What does it say about NIL that that's something players are able to do now?

BILLY NAPIER: It doesn't surprise me. Ventrell is as good a human being as I've been around. What makes him special to me is he actually has a significant care if other people, right? I mean, he's walking around living life, and he's got enough wisdom and perspective to realize that there's other people out there, and he's not consumed with himself, he's actually thinking about the people around him.

He's doing good things for other people now. He's making a difference now. He'll do that the rest of his life. That's who he is.

Q. One of the areas you haven't been clean in is special teams. What can you do? Is it personnel? Scheme? What can you do to make that area of your team better?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I agree with you. I think it's an area of our team where we need to improve.

When I think about special teams, I think about really good specialist play, right? I do think our specialists have played relatively well. Then you talk about covering kicks, right, punt coverage, kickoff coverage. For the most part we've been okay there. The kickoff return we've had a few slip out of there past the 25.

Then you get into the return game. That's an area on our team where we need to improve, right? It's a combination of personnel. It's a combination of decision making. Ultimately one-on-one matchups. When I think about game changers, I think about ultimately at the end of the day, if you can do those things we talked about, it's because you got good specialists and you're winning one on ones.

I think that's personnel. I think it's decision making. I think it's technique and fundamentals. Those are areas where we can improve.

Q. Do the kickoff analytics say take it out over taking it at the 25?

BILLY NAPIER: It depends, right? It depends. I think some weeks there's some calculated risk that goes with it. In some weeks you're very kind of in the box relative to when you actually return it. When I say 'decision making,' that's what I'm talking about.

Thank y'all.

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