

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier Press Conference



COACH NAPIER: All right. I think the big thing here is very proud of the team. I thought our staff did a really good job from a leadership perspective throughout the week. And then I saw ownership from the players.

I think those two things, in particular, worked together to help our team play, not what I would describe as a complete game, but we're getting closer.

I thought we played physical in the game. I think, when you look at the tape, I think you see that. Third week in a row we haven't turned the ball over, which I think is a little bit more of who we want to be.

For the defense to respond at halftime, go shut them out in the second half I thought was positive.

We had 156-yard advantage in the special teams, hidden yards there, which was huge in the game. And certainly had some guys step up, some guys that maybe got their first opportunity.

Tough place to play. Certainly a pivotal moment, to some degree, I think for our team. But to see what I would call a healthy response after two losses in a row I think was really good. So I need to build off of that. Use some of that momentum. Certainly need to continue to challenge the accountability. And really I think we're developing some leadership amongst the players, which I think has been big.

South Carolina has got a very talented team. I think this is a team that has a good group of veteran players, combination of players that they recruited in high school and transfers.

I think they've won five out of the last six. You see the effort on the tape. Certainly Coach Beamer, we have a ton of respect for what he's created there and what he continues to build there.

So this is a team that is very capable. They've got some really unique matchup players, individual players that I

think can present a number of challenges. So big day in The Swamp, obviously sold out. We announced that last week. It's going to be Senior Day for 17 guys.

Certainly always an emotional time for those players, in particular. So I think the good thing I see from our players is we've got a group that wants to send this group out the right way.

It's also going to be a salute to those who serve. So we're going to be recognizing military appreciation, first responders. This is an initiative that will continue in the future. We'll do a number of things with the team throughout the week relative to inviting people to practice, exposing them to different speakers. Really important to me in terms of creating a level of respect here and a gratitude for some of these things that I really believe we take for granted at times.

So great week. One that I think we get to celebrate a lot of people who live a life of service. And certainly excited about the last home game, last opportunity to play in front of our fans.

Q. What would you pinpoint about this team's ability to rally from deficits?

COACH NAPIER: I think it's we've worked on connection part, the relationship part. Brotherhood is a term that was used last week to kind of describe what we're trying to create here. So I think that there's also a level of -- they're starting to understand the football component of it a little more. I think it's easier to maintain your poise when you understand what happened, why it happened, what you can do to fix it. And I think we're starting to get to that point.

So the defense would be a great example of that. I think they understood what the issues were, and they knew they could go in the locker room, adjust and fix it in the second half.

Q. You talked about building. How big is it for the team to finish one of these? You rallied several times in SEC games and not finished.

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COACH NAPIER: I think you can't put a price tag on it. I think it's certainly really valuable, given where we were at as a team. I think that's huge. Can't put a price on that.

Q. You talked about, after the Georgia game, about turning the corner. Is what you saw in the second half the example of what you had been seeing building up to that point?

COACH NAPIER: Getting closer. Really believe that. I think to go three-and-out, to get a big punt return, to put a touchdown on the board, you know -- I think when we had lost the momentum right there at the end of the half. Yeah, I think what I'm seeing is kind of what I described after the game, that human element.

We've spent a ton of time on scheme, fundamentals, situational football. We lift weights. We run. We focus on all different forms of development physically.

But I think that team dynamic -- the, quote/unquote, culture or brotherhood, however you want to describe that -- the expectation from each other, the accountability at the player level, actually I'm not necessarily worried about my coach getting on me, but I'm worried about letting my teammate down. I think there's a place in this game, for an elite team, you've got to have that.

And I think that's what we've been working hard on. You're starting to see some of that show up, I think.

Q. How do you feel about the running back rotation at this point? It's kind of evolved to Trevor and Montrell. Is that how you see it the rest of the way or how do you view that?

COACH NAPIER: I think those two guys have been a huge bright spot relative to what we've been able to do offensively. No question. Two new players, both of which are getting more comfortable, very capable. Both are smart players. Both are very consistent in their work ethic, their practice habits, their prep during the week.

They've got discipline. They take care of themselves. They both have character. And they certainly have been very productive.

And we've rolled the other guys in at times. But I think when those two -- we kind of saw it -- they were both in a good place Saturday. We were able to continue to feature those guys. So it was good.

Q. You talked about the defense and how it changed first half to second half and the adjustments that were

made. Curious, how much of it was actual X and O percentage-wise versus just guys playing better?

COACH NAPIER: I think maybe a few adjustments, but primarily just 11-for-11 execution. I think that was the thing that was a little bit frustrating, for the players and staff, is like we're in some great positions. And we've got one guy who is short.

So you've got to play well at every level. And then it just -- we were in a lot of plays where one guy was making a mistake and it was getting exposed, whether it's gap integrity, eye discipline.

So I think ultimately they knew and understood what was happening out there. So that was the thing that was really cool to me to see is they were vocal at the half about what needed to be addressed amongst themselves. I think that's when, I think, you're making progress. So the staff and players were well aware of what the issues were.

Q. Were there any concerns about the illness that was going around Texas A&M, not that it really matters? But last year last year South Carolina game was a flu game for Florida?

COACH NAPIER: We don't put our stuff out there, but we've had our issues here as well the last few weeks. It's that time of the year, right?

So I think the big thing is having the discipline to do the things that you need to do to take care of yourself and get yourself prepared to play. It is what it is. We've had our issues along the way. But it's part of the game. It happens every year to every team.

Big thing is the guys who get opportunities, they step up and do what they can do to contribute to the team.

Q. O'Cyrus was named SEC Lineman of the Week. He's playing at an All-American level. Was there any question in your mind, him stepping up from the Sun Belt to the SEC, would he be able to make that transition?

COACH NAPIER: No question for me. I think we played a number of Power Five opponents at the other stop. He always played really well. The guy's 6'5". He's 335 pounds. He's got 11-inch hands. He's got long arms. He's got more lean mass on his body than any player on our team. He's a big-time player.

More importantly is he has discipline. He has character. He's tough. He's a very consistent worker. He's durable. And football comes easy to him. He processes really well.



He's a good communicator.

It's really been a big deal, one of the reasons we've played well up front, I think, is his ability to translate because he had played in the system.

Q. (Indiscernible), I know you have a vet in Lamar on your staff. Can you tell me why it means so much to you and why you put this kind of emphasis on the game every year?

COACH NAPIER: I just think when you're in the coaching profession, I think you've got an opportunity. You work with young people. There's some things that you really want to impress upon them.

I think this is something that's very important. It gets overlooked. I think we all can agree that at times we're walking around living life and we don't really appreciate that we have a set of people that risk their life every day.

They chose that path, that career, a path where they put themselves at risk every day. So ton of respect for that.

And I think it's one of the things that we can do independent of football that I think can create good. A place where we respect and appreciate what we have. And I think that want to do that each year and celebrate these people. I think they're deserving.

Q. How much time do you spend during the season on roster management? Is it a daily thing? And does it ramp up this time of year when you talk getting closer to senior day, guys maybe going pro, guys maybe in the portal, those things?

COACH NAPIER: I think it's something I think about every day because I think you're always trying to take that wet towel and get every single drop you can get out of it. We get 85 scholarship players. We're trending towards having 50 walk-ons. We're not quite there yet. But in the perfect world we've got 135 players.

And you'd like each of those to be the best they can be. It's a big jigsaw puzzle. Certainly when you take over a program, there's a lot more that comes with that. It's a big math problem that's very fluid. It certainly is this time of the year, in today's era even more than ever.

Q. Year two --

COACH NAPIER: A lot of variables that contribute to that. And I would tell you that I would think it's one of the reasons we had success at the previous stop is that we worked really hard at that component. There's a lot of

rules. A lot of things that contribute to that.

Q. Do you have it on a big board or is it on a binder?

COACH NAPIER: We've got lots of ways that we keep up with it. We've got a very systematic approach. But it's something we've refined. It's one of the great things about those jobs, those G5 jobs. You've got to become an expert in that area. It will be beneficial for us.

Q. Speaking of walk-ons, your kicking system, Adam, it's been kind of an up-and-down year for him. He makes a 52-yarder and he misses a 28-yarder. How do you evaluate where you are with that situation?

COACH NAPIER: We've still got a lot of confidence in Adam. No different than any other player on our team. I think we do well at times and then sometimes we don't quite do what we're supposed to do. Much like you write a good article occasionally. Occasionally you write a bad article. (Laughter).

Q. You're obviously a songwriter. (Laughter).

COACH NAPIER: Adam, he's a very talented young man. Nobody wants to do it more for his teammates than he does, right? He stepped up. He had to kickoff in a game and did a really good job against a returner that obviously was very capable.

So forced some fair catches there. And when we did have to cover him, we had a good kick, able to cover the kick. We believe in him.

Q. You've outscored opponents 38-14 in the last half of the last two games. How do you get a full game?

COACH NAPIER: I woke up thinking about that. That's who we are. That's where we're at. I think we're still chasing that. Can we put it together, possession after possession?

I think we are taking care of the ball better on offense, which is really if you look at our teams, that's the way we play. We're getting takeaways.

We're just very -- we've got a lot of work to do. And I really believe -- I know you guys don't like to write about this, but it's the human element part of the game. That's just who we are right now. We're working on that component of our team. The football I think will take care of itself as that becomes more of who we want to be.

Q. (Indiscernible) USF player (indiscernible), you've known him a long time. What was your reaction at

that?

COACH NAPIER: It's a tough profession. I feel Jeff a little bit of a tough dynamic given his first year being a COVID year. So three years in -- Jeff's a great coach. I think just he'll bounce back.

It's the reality in this profession. But no one works harder or takes more pride in trying to do their job for others than Jeff Scott, I can promise you that.

Q. What (indiscernible) Emmitt?

COACH NAPIER: Emmitt was great. For a guy my age, that's pretty, when Emmitt Smith walks up on you, that's pretty impactful.

Emmitt did a lot for this place. I think he had an unbelievable career after the University of Florida, but when you think about his impact here as a player, I'm hopeful to see him around more often. This is a place he's welcome.

Did a lot for the place and certainly we're trying to create an environment where those guys that played here can come back anytime they want to.

Q. His first game as a starter he ran for, what, 239 at Alabama.

COACH NAPIER: We need more of those.

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