

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Very proud of the leadership and the ownership that we saw last week amongst the staff and the players. By far the most complete game that we've played, and I think it's a direct reflection of applied leadership. I think amongst the staff and players people did a really good job in their position, in particular, all the people they directly affect. I thought that was the reason that we played well.

So great week of work last week from an energy and urgency standpoint. I do think we started fast in the game, which was a focal point. We controlled the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball, controlled the edges. We were the most physical team. And we felt like that, combined with turnover margin, would be critical.

A few plays on special teams we need to detail up and coach better, but outside of that, six quarters in a row here we've shut the opponent out. We're playing better on defense situationally. The coverage and the rush is working together better.

Offensively, outside the last possession of the game, I think that's the fourth game in a row we haven't turned the ball over.

A few issues in the red area on offense that we need to improve at, but a good day for the Gators. I think it's good to see a group work hard because they really care about a group of seniors and they want that group to have a great memory for Senior Day.

I thought last week from a military appreciation, saluting those who serve, first responders was very positive, and we're thankful to the people who contributed to that.

We're right in the middle of the Vanderbilt prep. This is a group that continues to get better. There's no question year one to year two Clark's done a great job. You can see the improvement within this season. They've got some young players that continue to get better. Got their first SEC win in a while, and there's some momentum that we'll have to deal with that goes with that.

So tough place to play. A lot of challenges when it comes to going on the road here to win a game. What questions do we got?

Q. One of the challenges would obviously be the weather. It will be the 20s when you guys are playing. What will be some challenges with that and another 11:00 a.m. kick?

BILLY NAPIER: We don't control the weather, so we'll do our best in regards to that. Can't have an opinion on it because we don't control it. We'll show up and play. Whatever the conditions are, they are.

Q. Did you learn anything from that A&M trip, just maybe starting out a little slower than you wanted to with an 11:00 a.m. local kick? Maybe something you'll do a little differently on the road?

BILLY NAPIER: You're spot on. We quality controlled that trip. We are going to do a few things differently, from a time allocation standpoint, what we do -- I think it's important in the beginning of the week. I think the sleep habits of the players and staff throughout the week will be important.

I think, as you approach Thursday night, Friday night, kind of making sure that we make adjustments there. Parts of our team started fast, but the other parts didn't. So I think consistency as a whole trying to keep some of this momentum.

The things that we learned worked Saturday. Hopefully we can apply those.

Q. Somebody who finishes fast or strongly has been Montrell. What is it about a running back who's able to just get stronger as the game goes? I forgot you were on the same staff as Derrick Henry. He's a little bit different physical stature, but what is it about a guy that can do that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think that's a heck of a question. That is definitely true, and those players will tell you that they get



more comfortable with more carries.

I think Montrell is a 215, 220-pound back. He's 5'11-1/2". He's not a burner. He's 21 1/2 miles an hour, I think he hit full gear the other day, which is good.

He's got really good instincts and vision. I think he anticipates contact. He's got really good contact balance. I think Montrell Johnson is effective because he's a great person. This guy is a very disciplined guy. He's got character. He's very smart. He's one of the best practice players that we have, and he's in year two of his career.

Last year he kind of got a feel for it. This is year two, but it's a different level of competition. So I think he's getting more comfortable, and I'm glad we got him.

Q. Is there a common thread, though? You were saying that's a good question, but if you had to guess. You've been around the game a long time.

BILLY NAPIER: I think a bigger guy probably fits into that mold, if I was betting. Then you've got to play on a team where they'll hand you it enough times, right?

You know, Derrick Henry, that's the freakiest football player I've ever been around, hands down. That guy is in a very unique work ethic. I've watched that guy come off the field on Tuesday practice and get in the squat rack and just go for another hour. I mean, he was -- and he still works that way. He's still doing it. So I think he's one in a million, very unique player.

Q. Billy, you used the word momentum about three or four times already. Are you seeing momentum in practice as well as -- we see it on the field. Are you seeing that kind of momentum in practice as well?

BILLY NAPIER: Yes, I think every part of our routine we're improving at: Self-discipline, the follow through with all the parts of running, lifting, recovery, training room, meetings, walk throughs, practice habits.

And it's not just players, right? You've got to remember that all these people are refining what they do. So there's no question that that momentum part, it applies to every single part of what we do.

Q. From a standpoint of getting a team ready for an opponent that you're favored over, how happy were you to see the result of the Vandy-Kentucky game?

BILLY NAPIER: I mean, I don't -- those are outside, those are external things. We'd like to think we're motivated by other things. There's a human nature element to this,

though.

There's no question that Vanderbilt will be different as a result of winning the game. I think that's a reality. So we'll have to combat some of the positive things that come with them winning the game.

I think it's healthy, but I do think we have work to do, right? We have things that we're specifically focused on here relative to our team.

Q. You talked about how it's the most complete game you played because of applied leadership. What do you mean by that, and how do you see that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yes, I see an intentional approach from players to be vocal about things that need to be addressed, things that need to be said. I just see more vocal -- and I'm talking across the board. I'm talking about doing extra. I'm talking about accountability. I'm talking about being intentional about connecting with your teammates.

Just across the board, I think just a little bit different level of accountability and being intentional about doing acts of leadership, right? I think you've got to -- and I think our staff is helping in that regard.

Q. How do you coach ownership like that, taking ownership?

BILLY NAPIER: I think you give them opportunities. Really believe in that part, right? You assign responsibility. You empower. I think there's a fine line in there between forcing something and then creating an opportunity. Praising -- I think the big thing is you praise what you see being done well. I think we want to promote the behaviors that we're looking for.

I think that incrementally over time, that becomes the expectation. So I think we've got more good going on in those areas.

Q. Can a coach influence which players the other players listen to, or is that something the players have to figure out for themselves?

BILLY NAPIER: That right there is a book in itself. I do think that's always a juggling act. One of the key components of a team that involves so many people is learning who has influence, who has a voice.

Then I do think that that person's example is probably the most impactful part. If that person has influence, if that person has a voice, if they have an ability to affect other people, their words and actions matching up, their

consistency in their approach, their character not being compromised maybe by saying something that's out of line or doing something that goes against maybe what you're trying to create, I think that's probably the most important thing.

I think that's where our issues have been in the past, and that's what we're trying to correct and get back on the right path.

Q. It seems like there's a lot more kind of a gang tackling effort, guys at the ball. How much of that is an effort thing, and how much of that is maybe guys getting comfortable with the system too?

BILLY NAPIER: I think there's a little bit of both, but I do think you're spot on. I think the pursuit is better, the energy is better.

I really believe this. It's year one in a new system, but information, knowledge, when applied, can make a difference. So if I'm processing quicker, if I'm communicating better, if I'm anticipating, I get more production, and there's a compound effect. If each individual's doing that, I think there is a result that comes with that.

So I think we've got a group -- also, we haven't been very good. So I think there's a little bit of a pride element there, and I think we've gotten good leadership on that side of the ball within each room, coaching and players being more vocal about the things they know can be done better.

Q. How do you carry that over with Wright, who's a more dangerous runner?

BILLY NAPIER: That's one of the things that's tough about Vanderbilt is the uniqueness of him as a player. So that will be part of the strategy within the game.

Q. You mentioned keeping it technical. Is there something -- and this is not just an Anthony Richardson question. Is there something in season you can do to help a quarterback's accuracy, or is that a high rep, high volume off-season type of thing?

BILLY NAPIER: I think being accurate is physical and mental, if that makes sense. I think there's so much that happens in a very small amount of time relative to declaring where I'm going with the ball from the ground up, everything being synchronized, starting between the ears, and then fundamentally from the feet all the way to the ball coming out of your hand.

So I think it's mental and physical, and that's why it's the

most challenging thing to do in all of sports. But I think it's a good question.

Q. Is there a completion percentage threshold you'd like for him to hit? Do you have like a number? I realize it varies by pro.

BILLY NAPIER: QBR is really where we -- 145-plus is the number we kind of hang our hat on. A lot of things affect that, right? Completion percentage being one of those, but ultimately a heavy factor in that is touchdown-to-interception ratio as well. Explosive plays influence that number. So I think overall --

Q. How many times has he hit it?

BILLY NAPIER: That's a good question. I don't know that right off the top of my head.

Q. We know about Ventrell as a leader. Would you talk about some of these other leaders you had talked about before, the guys who have the ears of the younger guys? 75 percent of your team is sophomores and below.

BILLY NAPIER: I think that Rashad Torrence is a leader. I think he's a very smart football player. He's got great command of the system. His ability to communicate, I think because of his knowledge and his instincts in production, he has influence.

He's a guy that does a great job in the back end. He's a fantastic practice player, probably the best communicator that we have, and does a great job kind of helping everybody around him play better.

Amari Burney is an influential person, very experienced player. The guy's got a good heart. He's got character. If you don't like Burney, something's wrong with you. He's a good human being and works really hard and a guy that has -- he's kind of the old grandpa, if that makes sense. He's the old uncle. He's been around. He's seen a lot. I think he sees the big picture.

Gervon Dexter is a young man, I think, who's growing in that role. He's getting comfortable with his voice.

I do think my man A.P., Powell has some influence. I think he's a guy that is capable in that area. I'm just thinking about defense in particular because that's the area we've grown the most.

Offensively, there are parts of our team -- Anthony Richardson, I think, is really emerging as a guy who's developing that skill set as a leader. He's getting more

comfortable in his role. Speaking with clarity, speaking with conviction, being intentional about what he's saying, why he's saying it, taking time to think about our team and what they need to hear and what he can bring to the table. So I think that growth has been impactful for our team.

Q. A little 30,000-foot view here. You mentioned Vanderbilt showing progress under Clark Lea. Obviously there's varying degrees of turnarounds going on in the SEC, South Carolina, Tennessee, Ole Miss, Mississippi State a little bit. Is there a couple of things, one and two, that are absolutely necessary to getting that started?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think the big thing is at the player level. At some point you've got to have a nucleus of players that say we're going to do this. There's a conviction about -- there's a connection between the staff and the organization and the philosophy, the resources, the commitment, the process, whatever's being taught, whatever's being implemented.

But I think I go back to number one on the list is that there's a sincere approach. There's a care for the player more than just football. There's a plan for who they are as people from a long, long game. There is an investment in their character. There is a prioritizing their education.

I think that equipping them, educating them, creating experiences for them, and then ultimately if you have that sincere approach and they really believe that you care about them and there is a plan for those areas, then you've got to know what you're talking about. There's got to be a competency relative to, yeah, this guy cares and he can help me play better because ultimately, you can't have one and not have the other.

At some point it's, hey, I like you, but you can't help me. Or you can help me, but, man, you don't care about me. So I think that trust is a big part of that, but those are two things in particular I think matter.

Q. You mentioned the red zone offense. What do you feel have been some of the recent issues, and what do they need to do to improve?

BILLY NAPIER: Saturday in particular, the last couple weeks it's been penalties. We had procedure penalties, had a handful of mental errors. Nothing to do with the opponent, which is the frustrating part.

Those are all things we can coach better. Those are all things I think we can help the players with.

Q. When you get in a goal line situation, after seeing

what we saw Saturday from Desmond Watson, is there a consideration?

BILLY NAPIER: Always have a running deal with the defensive players. If we're top ten in the country in scoring defense and total defense, we'll put defensive players on the goal line package. Hopeful that day's coming.

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