

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: How's everybody doing today?

Well, I'm really proud of the progress that our team made this summer in phase 5. The development staff I thought in particular really improved in year two. All the metrics that we have from a testing perspective I think we took a step forward, strength speed, explosiveness. All the Dex information was really good.

Certainly that group works together. They execute as a team, the strength and conditioning, sports science, the nutrition, the training room. Really good leadership and insight from Mark Hocke and his staff, and then certainly the addition of Tyler Miles and Kelsey continues to get better, Tony Hill and Paul Silvestri, that group of people has to work extensively together, oftentimes while the coaches are out of time for vacation.

Their leadership, their relationships with the players and their plan, I think we took a huge step forward there.

Some really interesting numbers here. For you guys, I think you'll get a kick out of some of this. We had 53 players that set records for max velocity this summer, which I think was really positive. T.J. Searcy gained 12 pounds of muscle since January; Jalen Kimber has gained eight pounds since April of muscle; Jack Pyburn, 10 pounds of muscle mass since January. His body fat percentage went down 6 percent. Really Jack did a terrific job.

Jason Marshall, seven pounds of lean muscle. A couple guys, Princely had a fantastic summer. He maxed in all three lifts, all three core lifts, bench, squat, clean. He improved his max velocity, gained 10 pounds of lean muscle, and he lost seven pounds of fat mass. Really good summer there.

I do think Tony Livingston, this guy has gained 28 pounds of muscle since January, so there's two Dexes worth of information. Bryce Lovett gained 10 pounds of muscle and lost 10 pounds of fat.

There's others, Andy Jean, nine pounds of lean mass; Graham Mertz gained four pounds of lean muscle; Ricky Pearsall, four pounds of lean muscle, actually decreased his body fat slightly.

Got a lot of guys using the resources. I thought the buy-in was much improved, and I think we've benefitted from being in the Heavener Center. Overall really pleased with that part of our team.

I think there's a renewed accountability with this group of players. I think they would tell you that. I think we saw really good leadership.

Really from a team perspective, I think leadership, we're asking them four questions coming out of the summer. Amongst the team, who do you view as a great example and a guy that really did a good job throughout the summer in your position group. Within your class, I think we're looking for lots of cross-section in terms of giving the player a voice. A lot of players had different places relative to how long they've been here, and then one of the things we did this summer, as you guys know, is we have accountability teams. We have two leaders for each team, and then we ask the players, hey, which person on your team that wasn't a leader did the best job.

I think that's one of the things I've been most pleased with is we have a number of leaders emerging that maybe weren't in that place when we started in January, if that makes sense.

I think there's a different level of connection with this group. The team chemistry, the morale, the energy in the building is really fun to be a part of.

We're turning the page. Today is report today. This is phase 6, training camp. It's going to be 21 days this year, so essentially we'll finish up three weeks from today.

As a competitor, and I would say as competitors that make up our team, this is a time of the year that you really look forward to, as we kind of prepare for the challenges that are ahead of us.

This is a critical time of the year. You've got to work really hard, but you've got to work smart.

I think we're kind of -- the theme here for training camp, all parts of the organization and the team, is we have to agree to an expectation. I think that's a big deal.

I think if we can agree to what's expected of each other, we can go into this training camp with the right attitude, the right approach, and we can say, hey, you know what, I'm up for that challenge. I'm going to put my ego aside, and I'm going to put my emotions aside, and I'm going to be -- coach me, tell me the truth. We can establish trust. We can establish respect, and I'm talking about relative to core values.

I think there's a football piece of this, but more importantly, how about your integrity, your role on the team, what type of teammate you are, your discipline, your effort, your toughness, both physically but mentally, emotionally, and then do you bring confidence to the team, do you spark belief amongst the team because of how hard you work, the attitude and approach that you take.

We need to expose and eliminate any issues that we have, any chink in the armor that we have as we build our team.

I ran across a question the other day that I think is important this time of year. What is integrity. We talk about it being a core value.

I would say you almost have to ask yourself, am I doing the things that I expect of others. I think if all parts of our team and organization take that approach for the next 21 days, we've got a chance to have a good football team.

Do we have any questions?

Q. Billy, where are you guys depth-wise, personnel-wise, a year later?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we're in a little bit better place. I do think there's parts of our team where we're going to have young players playing. But I think they're talented. I think there's areas of our team where injuries are important. But I also think we've added some experience. I think we've added some awareness, some maturity. We've added some veteran players I think that make our team better.

In the two deep, I think when we get done with this thing, there's going to be a ton of competition going into this camp, but I do anticipate as we approach that first game, we're going to have young players that are going to be out there.

The positive thing about that is we've had those players since January, and I think with the amount of work that we do, our year-round plan to get those guys I think will give us a better opportunity to work with some of those young players.

It's becoming more prevalent, right, when you start talking about roster attrition, freshmen impacting your team, portal players impacting your team. We said it at Media Day, 93 percent of the team has been here since the first day.

Q. You mentioned expectations internally; is that more important when the expectations externally maybe are not where they have been in the past for the program?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think your question is relevant, and I think it's really a part of where we're at as an organization and as a program. I think the way I would describe it is if we can agree as a team all parts of the organization and especially amongst the players, hey, look, this is the expectation we're going to establish for each other, and that should be much higher than any outside narrative or outside opinion. If I'm walking around the building each day, if I'm living life and I'm most concerned with not letting the people down that are going to be in this team meeting in a couple hours, that's the most important piece.

I think when you have that and you're seeing things through that lens from a football standpoint but also from a character standpoint, and really am I doing what I would expect of other people, then I think you've got a chance.

There's no doubt in this arena that you have to have that perspective as an organization, as a team.

Q. How do you judge that outside of wins and losses, that people care about that?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think we have work to do, and I think again, I'm talking about the next 21 days. We'll evaluate what's next after that. We're going to allocate our energy and effort and time to getting our football team ready, technically but also the team dynamic. Building a team is building the football part, but more importantly I think it's building that human element.

You're sitting in that locker room before those games, you're looking around the room, there is absolute trust with every person in that room. That's what we're in the process of building.

Q. Last year there were so many close calls, a play here, a play there, and all of a sudden you're a nine- or ten-win team instead of a six- or seven-win team. How

do you change that mentality to we've got to make that play, we can make that play, we have to make that play, in an off-season?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think the cool thing about where we're at is lots of parts of our building, players and staff, had to go through that. I think when you have adversity, I think it presents opportunity.

I think the key here is that we grow through struggle. Anything that's been built that's accomplished anything significant went through some adversity. I think it's all about how you respond to that.

But there's technical aspects to playing winning football that in those games that we lost, we just didn't do what we were supposed to do. There's an emotional component relative to how you're going to respond. Are you resilient? Are you mentally tough enough to continue to be consistent?

Ultimately take a good look in the mirror, what is your role and how can you do it better to help the team.

We've got a core group of people that went through that with us last year that are back, and I think that's made our team better.

Q. A year ago you were standing here opening day coming, and now a lot has happened the last 12 months. How have you evolved as a coach? Are you a better coach now, and why?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think so. I think I'm much more aware of the arena. I hate to say it, but you're probably callused a little bit if that makes sense. I think there's an element to like, look, it is what it is. I joke around with my brothers all the time and say, hey, look, it doesn't matter if you're at LaGrange High School; if you don't win, there's going to be tough dynamics that come with that. This is obviously the same.

I think it goes back to the things we talked about earlier relative to perspective.

I think if we are more concerned with the people in our building that are part of our team and how we're going to do our job and not let them down, I think it gives us a better chance.

I think there's lots of areas where we had work to do. There was a long list of issues to resolve, to come with better systems, better strategies, rebuilding the player experience, getting accustomed to the recruiting calendar, getting really strategic plans for the portal, for NIL. There's

just a lot of work to do.

I think we've moved into a new facility. All parts of our organization are in a much better place from an execution standpoint. Ultimately, that's my job is to get each part of our organization executing at a really high level.

I think hopefully I'll be better because we've had a year to work on everything.

Q. How do you balance the physicality of camp, and what did you learn from year one and particularly facing another phenomenal opponent, actually the same opponent, Utah, that you saw last year?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I don't necessarily know that -- I think the workload may change depending on the players that are available practice to practice. But we've got a blueprint that we've used for a long time that's time-tested.

We continue to evolve relative to the information that's available from a sports science standpoint.

It's kind of all the data -- we've taken a look at the last few years' training camp relative to approach. We use the information, we adjust, and I really believe it's not only the team practice to practice, position group to position group, but it's the individual player.

We've gotten to a point where we can say, hey, we know the player load on this guy and we need to adjust accordingly.

The scripts are built. The meeting time is built. The walk throughs are built, the sleeping, everything is built, and we're going to try to go execute it.

We'll adjust relative to the data, practice to practice.

Q. I'm curious about the decision to hold an open practice, and what are you hoping for for next week for that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think some of these traditions maybe that existed prior to COVID, I think that those are healthy things to bring back, and I think our fan base obviously -- you count the spring game, you count the open practice, they get two opportunities to come see the team, and I think this is a special place because of the following and the support that we have.

It's a little bit of a thank you and appreciation for what they do for us every Saturday in the Swamp in the fall.

I think that there's an NIL piece associated with that, as



well, relative to what's available after the practice is over.

It's an old tradition that I think we can bring back, and certainly there's an NIL opportunity, as well.

Q. When you opened fall camp last year one of your big points of emphasis was "productivity." Where do you feel like that's at with this team or do you have a word or phrase that's your point of emphasis this year?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we do some cool stuff. This year we're moving the players into Tolbert Hall. We're putting them in a random roommate. They're in there for the first week of training camp. We're eating all of our meals in the dining hall where they actually have to sit down, put their phone away for the next three weeks.

We're going to do some leadership cross-sectioned of our team from a leadership development standpoint, and then we're going to have some unique opportunities throughout camp where some small groups.

I think that it's important that we connect and we try to create crossover relationships in all parts of what we do. It's absolutely important to what we do.

Q. How important is the get-to-know-your-teammate initiative that you do because I understand you'll make guys redo it if you're not satisfied.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's one thing to know the guy's first name, but it's another thing to know his first and last name, where he's from, part of his story, and I think with time we'll get to that place. But it's about agreeing that there's an expectation, and then hey, if you can do better, you can do better.

I think that's the key to the drill. That's where we're at as a team.

Q. Is the rooming really random?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we just try to put them with someone maybe they don't spend an extensive amount of time with, like an O-lineman is not with an O-lineman. He might be with a DB, running back might be with an outside linebacker. And use it as an experience, as well. It's beneficial.

Q. Where did the know-a-teammate quiz come from?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's an emphasis, right? You get what you emphasize. You'd be surprised how competitive these guys will get. (Laughter.)

You know, some of them take great pride in it, and I think it uncovers some things. It uncovers some realities to some degree. I think we might have a little know-your-teammate quiz in here one day.

But I just think it's relevant to -- football, there's a human element to the game of football. This is not just players. Heck, we challenge them to know the names of their equipment manager, their student trainer, the people that work that clean the building, whatever the case may be.

You want a place where everybody's role is appreciated and everyone feels like they can make an impact, and they might just be the difference.

I think we compete just a small amount of time, but there's a ton of people working the entire year that may never step foot between the lines.

If we can create a humility where every piece of the puzzle matters, I think it gives us a chance to have a better team.

Q. How has the changes to the preseason practice calendar since you've even become a head coach, they've curtailed a lot of the practices, two-a-days ended the season before you came in. What's your opinions on that, the thoughts, and what are the challenges that come with that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we've learned that it was a wise decision. I think ultimately, whether it's concussion protocol and testing, all the data we get from the helmets, from the mouthpieces, it's Catapult, it's force plates, it's HRV. There's a number of metrics here that -- these things weren't available 10 years -- I can remember specifically when I was a college football player, we did freshman-only practices for a week and then we did 10 straight days of two-a-days in full gear. Those days are long gone.

We're basically going to practice in four-day cycles in training camp, five four-day cycles, 10:30, 2:30, 6:30, off, or I should say reload, and we practice one time, we walk through one time.

You know, there's rules relative to spiders, to shells, to full gear. I think it's really well thought out, and I think we've all learned that we can get the same things across.

COVID taught us a lot in that regard, I think. Your team can be prepared and the quality of football can be presentable with this amount of work.

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