

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: How we doing today, guys? We good?

Okay, before we get going here, I do think I had a unique experience this morning. Got invited to go over to the stadium. Today being 9/11, we're 22 years removed, but we've got a group much first responders and military personnel that run the stadiums each year. Got invited to come over and observe that, speak to that group.

I think just a good, healthy reminder here relative to perspective, some of the simple things that we take for granted. I do think one of the things I've learned over time is we should have the utmost respect for people that select a career path where they put their life at risk, right? I think got a tremendous amount of respect for that.

I think young people in particular, there's a little bit of a history lesson. I know I got young kids, and certainly as they grow, when it's time for that, I think there's an element to that that they need to understand.

I do think there was a generation of people there that were significantly impacted, and it changed our country. A little bit of a history lesson there for our players and staff today.

I do think great event, would encourage others in the future to get involved in that. I thought it was pretty special this morning early.

I was proud of our staff and I was proud of the leadership amongst our players for how we responded. Certainly independent of the opponent, we did what we should do, what we all expected probably to happen. But I think the way we did it was important. We had the right mindset. I thought the attitude and effort was good.

For the most part played pretty clean. There were a number of things we addressed with the team yesterday. We needed it. It's been a while since we won a football game. So I was really proud of that response.

I do think it's a big week. It's Tennessee week. I think we've done a ton relative to educating our players about

the rivalry. We do have some veteran players that understand that, that have played in the game.

It's time for SEC play. Certainly this is an Eastern Division opponent, as well. So there's magnitude of that. I think it's a big weekend for Gator Nation. We play at home. We play a really good opponent.

I think when you start thinking about their team, offense, defense, special teams, they have an identity. They've got a veteran team. There is a significant number of seniors. I think when you look at that two deep, there's a ton of experience there. I think they have good personnel and they present variables on defense, the tempo on offense. They've done a good job on special teams.

The combination of all three parts of their team presents challenges. It's going to be a really important week. I think when you play in these types of games, it's about the preparation during the week, really sticking to your system preparing as an individual player, staff member. Certainly we're right in the middle of that here today.

Good day yesterday with the team. Really looking forward to the week. Going to work hard to represent the Gators the right way.

What questions do we have here?

Q. Aside from SEC opponent, division opponent, do you handle rivalry games different at all with the program during the week?

BILLY NAPIER: So I think what we've tried to do is we try to spend some time in training camp, part of onboarding new group of people, new staff members. I think there's an element to that where you have new people in the building each year, right? We did some work there relative to going back and really educating everyone on the history and the magnitude of the game. Do you understand that this was the game at one point in time in college football relative to the SEC, the Eastern Division and certainly the national championship picture, right?

It happens early. I do think that's helped in particular this



year. Met with the leadership group at 11:00. Certainly I think some of the things that we emphasize during training camp. Look, we have several of these games, right? They all matter. I think this one is unique because if you go back and look at the history of this game, the importance, so...

Yeah, I think there's an element to it that's a little bit different, for sure.

Q. What are your thoughts about maybe this is going to be the last year of divisional play?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, this is one that we know will be present next year. Then I think it's to be determined after that. We know we'll play this game next year.

Then there's a lot of decisions to be made, right? I think we all probably anticipate changes. But ultimately it's an incredible opportunity, man. I think for me in particular, I can tell you, get a chance to play Florida-Tennessee, it's a big deal, right?

We're excited about the challenge and we look forward to the opportunity.

Q. Relative to the flow of the season and goals, how kind of pivotal is this game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's a big game. I think any time you play a rival, it's a big game. Eastern Division opponent, SEC game, home opener when it comes to the SEC. There's magnitude here as a program.

I would tell you they all matter, right? I don't necessarily think there's one that doesn't matter on our schedule, so...

I think the big key here is that we focus on what's going to help us play better. I think that's the whole key to the drill. Played these games in the past. Ultimately today is Monday, let's go do Monday as best we can, put our team in position to win the game.

Q. Second in the nation in fewest snaps your defense has been on the field this year. Nine more minutes a game possession time. Talk about the correlation between keeping your offense on the field and keeping your defense off.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think there's a commitment there to play complementary football. Ultimately we've got off the field on defense. We've been much improved on third down.

Look, I think as the season unfolds and we get into the thick of the schedule, some of these statistical things will

settle in. But, I mean, there's no doubt we've been better in that area.

Time of possession has been a factor. Ultimately we probably need to create a few more explosives, truth be known. There's so many things that contribute to those stats early in the year. I think it can be a little bit of a misnomer.

There's no doubt I'm confident that we're much improved on defense. We talked about it in the pre-season. I think we're going to continue to get better, too, because there's a lot of young players out there playing.

Q. How important is it to keep your offense on the field against a team like Tennessee that likes to run 75 plays a game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, the play count number can roll up. I think it's right in the high 70s relative to both sides of the ball. They're going to play in the high 70s. We're going to play in the high 70s.

The play count is going to improve. Depth can be a key component, especially late. I think the game's about first down, then you got to get off the field on third down. Ball gets into the red area, you got to force 'em to kick field goals. Last year's game was indicative of that if you dig into it.

Q. What is difference against Tennessee's offense compared to last year? Different quarterback, offensive coordinator.

BILLY NAPIER: Two new starters on the left side of the offensive line. The tight end is gone. A couple of the receivers that were significant are gone.

But they've got skill. I mean, they've got some really unique players, some speed in the slot. They've got some matchup issues.

The center has been out. I think they'll get him back. I think he makes it go, his ability to communicate, really dictate the tempo and pace of the game.

The quarterback is a freak of nature. I mean, he's very, very talented. Not only can throw it but can run it. I do think his ability to rush the ball may be even more effective and more willing it than the last guy.

They're plug-and-play. They've got really good talent there.

Q. You score on the first seven possessions in the



game on Saturday. How significant are those developments? How well does that bode for the future?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, just the ability to execute consistently, independent of the opponent, right? The film is clean. I think for the most part we're doing exactly what we prepared to do. We did a good job adjusting as they played us a little bit different.

You got to be able to execute. There's a discipline to execute, right? Make the play. I talked to the team last week. When we watched the film, you get put in position to make the play, make the play. Ultimately I think we did that more often, with more consistency. It's going to be really, really important as we get into these tougher competitions. The margin of error shrinks. Got to be on your A game.

Q. Any thoughts on the so-called demise of the SEC through two weeks?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately it's hard for me to evaluate anybody else right now. But I do think, look, as we settle in here, the end of the year typically, I think you'll be able to evaluate that more. To me now it's more about the Gators than it is about anybody else.

Q. You seem to have an appreciation for this rivalry. Where did you first notice this? Did a game stick out that said this is special?

BILLY NAPIER: Obviously my dad's family is from Tennessee, right? I've got a couple uncles and cousins that have never missed a Tennessee game, right? They've flown all over the country to watch them play. Well-versed in this one (smiling).

When your dad's a high school coach, the parts of the country that my family's from, the era that I grew up in, Florida-Tennessee was a big deal at that point in time.

Pretty well-versed in this one.

Q. (No microphone.)

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, there's an element to that. Former players. They're part of that, some of that history we study during training camp.

Q. Josh Heupel, the challenges he brings?

BILLY NAPIER: I think obviously the uniqueness of the offense, the tempo. They're snapping the ball. They run about three plays a minute, right? I think they're first or

second in the country in pace. There's an element to that that's unique.

We can speed the tempo up, but we don't do it every play. But I do think, yeah, the uniqueness in a typical week, right? They've had success moving the ball and scoring points. I think there's an element to that. Not only the personnel, but also just systematically.

How you going to play 'em? What is your fast ball going to be? What are your curve balls, slider? How can you dictate the pace of the game a little bit? I think there's some things to that.

I've got a lot of respect for what they do.

Q. The Gators rotating a lot right now on defense. What is the challenge there in terms of being organized, getting guys in place?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, the game presents opportunities to sub. Obviously they're going to do everything they can do to eliminate some of those opportunities.

I think one of the things we've done here, although it is young, I do think we have developed some depth there at most every spot on defense. I think that will be a critical piece of the puzzle. It will be hot and humid in there. Our ability to sustain, keep the game where the depth can affect the game.

Q. What are your thoughts on the offensive line rotation, saw a lot of Lyndell Hudson.

BILLY NAPIER: Third tackle, very capable player. I think he's impressed me. He did just show up in June, so there's an element to that. I think he's continuing to learn and grow and develop more knowledge of the system.

I think every week he gets a little bit better. But, yeah, gives us a swing tackle there, which we didn't have in the opener. Had some issues there.

We get Kingsley back this week, which I think will be a positive. Look, Jake was player of the game. He played significantly better week one to week two. I think there's some elements of that that's helped us developing some depth.

Q. The direct snap with Eugene, what is the potential for that package? How dynamic can he be in that role?

BILLY NAPIER: Every year you're trying to take the skill players that you have and come up with unique ways. Who is your quarterback? Who are your skill players?



What can they do? There's no doubt that guy is good with the ball in his hands. There's an element to every week we need to find ways for him to touch it.

We've got a group of skill. We're going to build our system around the skill.

Q. How daunting is that to recreate in practice from your scout team, guys who don't have a lot of experience at that speed?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think it's a really good question. That's part of teaching and coaching, is how do we recreate the game for the players. There's a skill to that. We don't just show up this week and think about that. We've been working on how we're going to do that.

I would tell you coaches, we all bounce back and forth ideas in terms of how we do that. How we practice, some of those strategic ways to recreate the game when you play these different teams.

I mean, the game continues to evolve, right? You see people go to the other end of the spectrum, get in the huddle every play. That's one thing that's unique about the SEC is the diversity in scheme, not only on offense. You get extremes on both ends, but you also defensively the number of variables you get in terms of front pressure coverage.

You got to have systems on offense and defense that are rules-based that have the ability to adapt. You got to play different ways each week to find ways to win.

I think that's one of the reasons why we're built the way we are, is so that we can handle those variables.

Q. Having a third tackle, what is the benefit of being able to use that swing position, maybe in the interior, Najee?

BILLY NAPIER: Najee played some center in the game, too. Look, you're trying to develop depth. We know history would tell you that you're going to get banged up a little bit at some point.

We commit to playing a fourth inside player and a third tackle most weeks, if they're all healthy. You got to build contingency plans, not only in how you play the players but how you practice the players, anticipating a guy getting banged up as we go.

Ultimately you're trying to create value for the player for the next level, if a guy can play center, whether he's the third tackle or one of the inside players.

Playing both sides, there's some value in that, as well. It's a good question and certainly that's exactly what we're doing.

Q. You gave a lot of credit to the fans last week. What kind of atmosphere are you expecting for a night game against Tennessee? Seems like marketing is asking fans to wear blue.

BILLY NAPIER: Rick volleyed that one up for you there (smiling).

Look, I think what's understood sometimes doesn't need to be said, if that makes sense. This is Florida-Tennessee. I think our fan base pretty well-versed in this one.

But we are encouraging our fans to wear blue. Look, our fans have an opportunity to contribute to the game. They are truly part of the team. They can impact the game. There's an energy that they provide for our players, but there's also an element where they can make it very difficult for the opponents.

It's one of the most iconic and more challenging venues in all of college football. I anticipate that Saturday night, it will be at its best. I know our people take great pride in their role and what they bring to the table.

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