

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Graham Mertz

Press Conference



Q. How much have you done into this rivalry a little bit? Do you have an appreciation for what it means?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Completely. I mean, I have been blessed to play in a lot of different rivalry games in the Big Ten. I mean, for me, when you get somewhere new, I never really experienced this, because at Wisconsin it was the first thing I had, from day one it was Minnesota-Iowa, you understood the rivalry.

One thing I truly appreciate is the second we got here, it was something we talked about, rivalry games, what it means, the history behind it. I'm sure he's talked about during camp we did a little lesson on each rivalry game.

My notebook was filled just with the history of it. I mean, I think any time you get into a week like this, it's bigger than just this team. It's the Florida Gators, and that's everybody, fans, coaches, families, people that have played here.

I mean, it definitely gets you excited.

Q. Any recollections, have you YouTube'd any of them?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I wish you guys could see the video they put up there. It went back years. In a short little 30, 45-minute window, you got a quick rundown of every game that has been played.

What you see when you watch those games is the passion and the love for this place. I think that's one thing that the current players, we saw that. You definitely want to embody that. Not only rivalry games, but every game.

I think any time you get a chance to watch a game like that, games played in the past, it's very exciting.

Q. What are you filling up your notebook with?

GRAHAM MERTZ: For me, it's understanding the emotion behind it. Really, like, the passion. I've been a part of

rivalries, like I said. Just understanding the newness of it. For me it's gaining that appreciation for what's come before me, really being able to honor that.

I mean, this morning flipping back and just looking through it again, realizing it's bigger than me. That was definitely exciting.

Q. What has it been like hearing from some guys that played for the program, motivate yourself about this game?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I definitely completely appreciate any time they get up in front of us and speak. They bring the energy. Like I said, passion, energy. They embody that every day.

You can tell when it's a rivalry week, they get a little more amped up. They got up in front of us during camp. You could tell how much it meant to them.

As a current player, it's got to mean that and more to you, to really honor those guys that came before you.

Q. You've obviously had success with some sustained drives. To get the deep shot in the second half, what does that do for the confidence of you and the offense, showing have you that capability?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, for us, we do that every day in practice. For us, it was just when the opportunity presents itself, coach harped on it all week, it was just make the play. If it's the right look, what we practice all the time, it's our job to make the play.

For us, we work on that stuff. Early in the game, they kind of threw a little three deep safety, three double cloud look at us, changed a little bit of our shot plan up. When the opportunity presented itself, made the play, so...

Definitely exciting.

Q. Coach wants to see more explosive plays. To that point, how much does it come down to taking advantage of those opportunities maybe than altering



anything this offense is doing right now?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think we definitely have the skill players to push the ball down the field. I know we're going to. It's not really a concern of mine.

For me, this past game, I wasn't going to force anything. When you zone it off, you got bracket coverage out there. For me it was making the right decision moving the ball.

We're fully capable of pushing the ball down the field.

Q. Do you feel like your timing after two games is improving?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, yeah. I think the game, any time you get a chance to play this game, it presents opportunity to grow, whether it's a look you saw. We had a couple in the first game where we might have been a little bit off on our communication. Gives you chance to clean it up. I feel like the season, it's a little bit quicker in your reaction time to correct things.

The game presents that. So definitely week to week you want to see that growth, and I've seen it.

Q. How important was that to get out there and have that sense of confidence that you can go and execute, you don't have to force things, run according to plan?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I think we all know any time a team plays this game, you don't execute, you're not going to win. I mean, that was my point of emphasis all week, that it's all the little details we need to be urgent, we need to execute them.

I was super, super proud of how the guys responded. I know this week will be a good chance to build on that. Obviously I'm excited to start practice up and get this thing rolling. We started yesterday.

Q. First SEC game, in Wisconsin did you play any SEC opponents?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think I played every other conference, if I'm correct on that. I think I played everybody else.

I mean, I'm definitely excited. First SEC game in the Swamp. I know the place will be rocking. Wearing all blue, like coach said. Definitely be fun.

Q. How important is, a team like Tennessee, which wants to run 80-something plays a game, how important is it for Florida to control the tempo of this game?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Obviously I haven't really studied a lot of their offense, but I know they run tempo and want to run a lot of plays.

For us, I mean, I've played an offense that has a lot of time possession and controls the rock, comes out of a huddle, gets up on the line. For me it's a little bit different. But we know we can do that.

Yeah, I mean, any time that you go into a game, the time of possession, the control of the clock is defensively a big impact. It will be a point of emphasis.

Q. You scored on your first seven drives. How significant was that for the unit? Have you had many games where you guys were that efficient to start out? What does that bode for the future?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think it's great. Like I said, I think we got to build on it. I think the tape was good in the sense where you saw guys executing their job. That's a good opportunity to build on your confidence, so...

I think when you get out there and you're executing, moving the ball, that definitely sets us up in a great spot for this week to build on it.

Q. First game in the Swamp?

GRAHAM MERTZ: It was awesome. I've been blessed to play in a stadium like Camp Randall. Now I'm even more blessed to add a second one, and that's the Swamp. I think add a little moment of reflection in there, growing up, that's what I grew up watching, games like that, seeing that. I've been blessed in my career to experience a lot of different environments. The Swamp is special. It was awesome, man.

Q. This one is going to be a little more exciting.

GRAHAM MERTZ: That's what I've been hearing (smiling).

Q. Is it going to mean to get Kingsley back? The depth is coming along, too.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, shoot, I've seen King for the past two weeks want to be out there. He's got an edge to him. He's excited. It will definitely be great to get him back.

I'm so proud of Slaughter getting in there. He's had that thing rolling. I'm definitely proud of that group. We're getting King back, definitely excited for him, too.



Q. You were talking about players improving after a loss. How much is that reflected by what you saw in Slaughter?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, Slaughter had a great week. I think he had an edge to him. He knew what he wanted to put on tape, and he put it on tape. Coach talked about it, kind of make-the-play mindset. I think he did that all night.

Going back and watching the tape a couple of times, you saw him finishing blocks, making the right calls, great communication. It was definitely a good game for Slaughter.

Q. One of the things you said about Eugene, besides the athleticism that's obvious, is how quickly he picks up on stuff. Can you dig in on that a little bit?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think the big thing he's done, like, any time you're in practice, someone's going to make a mistake, you're going to make a mistake, I've made mistakes. It's the time after that, what happens. Do you dwell on it, or learn from it, move forward and apply the information you were taught.

You come in, you're going to have those slip-ups when you're a young guy. It's what you do after that that sets you up for the future.

I think one thing he did, yeah, early he might have had a few things he messed up on early in camp, but it was how quick he realized that, learned from it, moved forward. I always call it to the toolbox, took that tool, put it in a toolbox. Now he's carrying a big toolbox around everywhere.

That was impressive at that young of an age. You come in, you want to do everything right. When something doesn't go right, it can kind of affect you. Shoot... It dwells. For him, it was all business. I might have messed this up, but I learned from it.

Yeah, now he's out there making plays.

Q. What is the combination like with that football IQ and what else he brings?

GRAHAM MERTZ: It's great. As a quarterback, I think I can speak for that whole room, they're all wired like that. I think that's where he got it from. He saw guys do that right when he got in.

That just gets me excited because I know we're on the same page. I know that I can come to them with anything,

they can come to me with anything. We're only going to get better.

It's definitely exciting. It's really fun to go out there and play this wonderful game with them.

Q. Direct snap package with Eugene, what's the potential for that? Will you be lobbying for him to toss it back to you?

GRAHAM MERTZ: He's the fast one, man. I'd rather have him have the ball in his hands.

No, that was definitely fun. We repped that during the week. It was fun to see it executed on game day.

Q. Have you got it up in the slot?

GRAHAM MERTZ: We've done it a few times. A couple years ago we did a little wildcat package. Any time I'm out there, I just make jokes, Throw me a fade, throw me a post. Never happens. I don't know why. Great, undefeated.

Q. 74% completion percentage. How realistic, what is the number you'd like to keep that at?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I mean, I think the biggest thing for me is I don't really think in numerical percentages. For me, I play my best and we play our best when we're executing, moving the ball. That sounds so cliché, but that's how I think of it.

I don't go into a game saying I'm going to throw 80%. That will all come when we handle business. For me it's all about the process, all about execution. If I'm doing my job, that will come, so...

Sounds really cliché, but that's exactly how I think about it, man.

Q. How much of a confidence builder is it to have a game like you just had where regardless of the opponent, every throw you make, you don't miss throws?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I think it just comes down to playing quarterback. I mean, understanding the look you're getting, understanding the weakness of the look on defense. My job is to attack that weakness, find it and attack it every single play.

The perfect call called. Where is my outlet? Where is my check down? Staying ahead of the sticks, not taking negative plays. Really that comes during the week of prep.

You try to work through each progression. That's the time in the meeting room watching film, walk-throughs, to where you're set up. When you have the opportunity to make the play, you're going to make it because you've seen it multiple times.

Yeah, I think it's a balance between going aggressive but also being decisive in what you're doing and making the smart play.

But, yeah, we're going to take shots. Everybody in football loves the deep ball that's a touchdown. In my mind, that will come when you make the defense cover everything else. If they play deep...

Q. Who was your Tennessee coming up?

GRAHAM MERTZ: My rival?

Q. Yes.

GRAHAM MERTZ: For me growing up, I was just a fan of college football, man. I don't know why, I just had a flashback. I was a big poster board guy. I would have a poster board of all my favorite teams. It was like every single college football team on the poster board.

I think I grew up with the appreciation of college football and rivalries. I mean, everybody enjoys watching the games that are the rivalry games that have a lot of history. For me, I've never had one rival my whole life. I have had appreciation for these games. You grow up wanting to play in these games, so I'm excited for it.

Q. Jersey of one team?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Tebow jersey (smiling).

Q. (No microphone.)

GRAHAM MERTZ: Of course.

Q. (No microphone.)

GRAHAM MERTZ: I'm going to have to check.

Q. Joe Milton, Big Ten guy. Is there anything you remember about that game, hints of the defense?

GRAHAM MERTZ: During a game, I'm pretty locked into what's going on on our side of the ball, how they're playing us.

I think the big thing I just saw live was his arm, everybody talks about his arm, but it's live. It comes out hot. I mean, I

think that was a while ago. Shoot, 2020, COVID, Big House, empty, that was odd.

That's the one thing that stood out live. I really haven't had the chance to watch them on the offensive side up front ball yet this year. I'm sure I'll watch a little bit during the week.

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