

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Gainesville, Florida, USA

Graham Mertz

Press Conference



Florida Gators 29, Tennessee Volunteers 16.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Sorry, everybody. Headband with a polo on. It's a good look.

Q. Just being able to put together those four touchdown drives in the first half, what was working, what was clicking to have the kind of completion percentage? You had also 17 of 20?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah. I think the big thing that I was proud about was -- I mean, we hit on it after week one. We said, look, we flat out didn't execute. And then the thing I'm proud about is that the guys took that to heart. And the moments we needed to execute, the guys were on, and we executed. I think that goes back to the work week. Like, Tennessee is a great team. And I'm proud of how we executed in the moment when you needed to make the play. Coach always talks about make the play. And I think across the board we saw guys from -- young guys, old guys, across the board, guys were just making that play. So I'm definitely proud of this group.

Q. And also a little surprised at the end of the game that you took that shot and --

GRAHAM MERTZ: I had no idea.

Q. -- what did it mean for your teammates to defend you like that?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think that just shows what this locker room is about. I can say from my end, I love every single guy in that locker room, and I'm going to fight with them every single day. That's across the board. So that definitely means a ton. But any time -- that was just the weirdest end to a game I've ever had, but I guess that's Tennessee. That's kind of how it goes. But, no, man, I'm excited. I'm proud of this group.

Q. Your coach said that in the last 17 days, this team stuck together, no finger pointing. How critical in your experience is that for helping enable what happened

tonight?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think the biggest thing there is what's the easy thing to do? It's to point. And it's always to point a finger. But when you do that, you have, what, three pointing right back at you. So what I'm proud about is that we talked about that up front. We said, look, adversity is going to happen in the season. What are we going to do? And the thing we decided is we're going to look internally, see, okay, what can I do better for the team? How can I serve the team better? And I think across the board I saw that. Guys took that to heart. They looked at what they were doing and how can I be better for everybody next to me. And that shows on game day. It shows every day in practice, in film, walk throughs, lifts. So I'm proud of how this team went internal and figured, okay, how can I serve everybody on this team to make it better. And that means a lot to me and every single person in that locker room.

Q. I hate to ask you about injury after the game, but we saw you wearing the glove. We talked about your toughness. What happened? Have you ever had that experience before having to wear a left-hand glove in the middle of a game?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I did last year. Something little. I was fine. It was just a little something. So I did it last year. I had a little sprain last year. So I wasn't afraid -- I knew that if I threw a glove on it, everything would be fine for now.

Q. Knock on wood, right?

GRAHAM MERTZ: We're all good.

Q. The second straight week you guys run off several drives in a row, completely efficient and you score. Would you talk about how this team is growing with your offensive efficiency, making plays, everybody playing cohesively?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah. I think we're playing complete offensive football. When you're running the ball effectively and you're making plays in the passing game, you're executing on third down, you're not getting third and longs. I mean, I think the big thing about this game in college

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football is staying ahead of the sticks. And I think our team is doing a good job of that right now. So, I mean, it's -- you've got to just thank the big boys up front, man. They're fighting all day. It's hot out there. It was a little humid. Those dudes go. So we -- all the skill players, I can't them enough. But the boys up front, man, they train for it every day and they go out there and execute it. It means a ton.

Q. How about the pump fake?

GRAHAM MERTZ: It's kind of funny. We've talked about that. We just talked about it a bunch in meetings. And we're like, look, if you ever get down there, just try the pump fake. And I was like, all right. So, yeah, it worked out.

Q. Graham, what's been clicking for you? Your completion percentage is off the charts, particularly in the first half.

A. Yeah. I think it's my process, man. Like all week, it's just investing in making the right decision in everything I do, whether that's -- it's so cliché, but when you stack small wins, it makes something like a game pretty easy. I know if I'm setting myself up for success and, really, I feel like I owe it every single day to this program, these players, man. I owe them everything I got. And that's what I'm going to give them every single day. Yeah. It's just the process, every single day, man. It's long days, but it's worth it when that's the result.

Q. Billy said he might have gotten a little conservative in the second half and not just, you know, kept -- wasn't aggressive play calling maybe because the defense was playing well, a big lead. What did you kind of see there?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, it was -- it's so different. I mean, everybody -- no one really talks about it, but the new ruling with the clock, it changes the game a little bit. So there's a new aspect to it that we're in constant communication about. So, I mean, I think at the time of the game, where the score was, I mean, we had to milk the clock a little bit. We all know that. Everybody in the stands knew that. But whatever coach says, I'm going to trust with all my heart and I'm going all in on it. Never once would I ever doubt anything that he does.

Q. The screen pass, that touchdown really seemed to fire you up. You have a guy bearing down on you and you get rid of it and Montrell sheds a tackle. How satisfying was that to be able to make that kind of play?

A. I think -- this might be a little weird to explain, but the

reason I was so fired up about that -- I mean, I always talk about process and everything. But the amount of times we repped that this week and Coach Napier, Coach O'Hara everybody told me, look, if you execute it with this technique, they're going to think they got you sacked. You're going to have a split second to get it out. And trusted the technique to a tee. And I was more fired up for all of us just because we repped it. We talked about it. And that's when plays are super fun. That's when this game is fun is when you rep it all the time and then you get on game day and it works out how you rep it. So that's why I was fired up for that one.

Q. You kind of touched on it a little bit before, but what's it like when you're quarterbacking and you see your offensive line, particularly in the first half, really asserting itself and kind of controlling things. How much easier does that make your job, and just talk about them a little if you don't mind.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, man, I could talk about them for days. I mean, I think going into the game we knew it was going to be physical. I mean, it's Florida-Tennessee, you know what you're getting into. So we knew that up front we had to set the tone. We harped on it all week. The big thing I saw about that group is just the communication all week. I mean, they knew it was going to be like that. They wanted to be the aggressor. And, really, in everything we were doing, that was their mindset. And it shows on game day. I mean, I love that group so much, but, yeah, they make our job a little bit easier as skill players so --

Q. Billy started his part of the press conference by thanking the fans who came to this game.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Man, oh, my gosh.

Q. But coming from Big 10 country, does this even compare or how do you even --

GRAHAM MERTZ: Man, it got loud. I was on the side, I couldn't hear my coach in front of me. I was trying to figure it out. Man, it got rocking. Yeah. We knew we got The Swamp, man. And when that place is fired up, that's truly special. So, yeah, we owe it to them to thank them for everything we got too. Coach hit on it in his press conference. I saw it on an Instagram, he was like, you have the opportunity to affect the game, and they truly affected the game. So props to them, man. That was freaking awesome.

Q. Was there a point there where you looked coach -- it was so loud, like --

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, yeah, a couple of times. No,



definitely. It was -- that place was rocking, man.

Q. Graham, obviously, one of the moments that it was the loudest was Trevor's touchdown in the first quarter. Can you talk about what that did for the offense, you know, obviously, as a whole. You guys go down the field, miss the field goal, and then, obviously, they get the quick touchdown. What did that do to kind of restore confidence in the offense?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think just -- I mean, he's right there. He's going to hear me talk about this. But the way -- the way our running back room runs the ball -- I mean, their intent is they're getting in that paint every single time they touch the ball. And you see that in practice every day. I always talk about practice. I always talk about the process. But that is what this game is all about. And if you don't trust it, you try to take shortcuts, that room does not take one shortcut any day of the week. Yeah. Early touchdown sets the tone, sets the pads a little bit, and it was great for us. I appreciate that entire room.

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