

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, September 18, 2023

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Everybody doing good today? All right.

So got to start off by this is a really unique experience in the Swamp Saturday night relative to our fans. They put on a show for the entire country to see. They impacted our team, brought a lot of energy to our players, created momentum in the game, and certainly made it very difficult for Tennessee. Caused procedure penalties. Ultimately they were a part of the plan and did their part. Can't compliment them enough.

When you get texts from people that have been around here for a long time, they tell you that's the best it's been in 15 years, I think you're probably doing something right. So our fan base was incredible.

That's what the University of Florida football can be. We need to do that more consistently. Certainly as a staff and team we can do our part. So proud of the team.

Ultimately I think that was a little bit of a buildup of a two-week response. Proud of the response in particular from the players. Certainly the staff provided great leadership.

Now you're presented with a new set of problems, right? Just met with the leadership group at 11. I think this is a challenge of principles-centered leadership. I think ultimately it's important that you don't react, that you actually have something that you can stand on.

I would say throughout history, we've learned that there's a set of values and principles that are time-tested. Also we try to teach those to the players. I think they use that, right? These can be a guide that can help you stay on the right path when you're experiencing tough things. I do think they can allow you to evaluate where you're at. They can help you recenter. Ultimately they can help direct your decisions, correct the things you need to correct in your life.

I was proud of the players and the approach they took since the Utah game. Now we can use those same things

to apply to success, right?

Reality is that you don't accomplish anything significant by staying in your comfort zone. I think we were uncomfortable for two weeks. We were frustrated. We were angry. We were embarrassed. That allowed us to have an edge and certainly affected the way we prepared for Tennessee and helped us play the way we played.

I think it's important that we keep that, right? We have discipline. Discipline ultimately is making yourself do things that you don't want to do. Our consistency is going to be key, okay?

Set of issues that come with success. Last year's team couldn't handle momentum. We failed to capitalize several times throughout the season. I think this group has the right approach and I'm excited about the work that we're going to do this week.

This Charlotte team has a new staff with a new head coach. They have a complete overhaul of the two deep. I mean, we're talking about multiple transfers across the board from all over the country.

When you turn the film on, I think the scoreboard doesn't necessarily predict what you would see. I think this is a very capable group. Big, long, fast. I do think they're very fundamentally sound. I think they play with toughness. I think they've got just enough here they can create some issues for you.

It's important that we stay humble in how we prepare, that we are getting uncomfortable this week so we can be comfortable Saturday ultimately try to sustain some of this momentum that we have here.

What questions do we have?

Q. About handling success, do you refer to anything from last season? Utah, Kentucky, South Carolina...

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, that's exactly what I'm talking about, right?



Q. Do you go back to those experiences?

BILLY NAPIER: We don't do that now. I think we've done that throughout the off-season.

I mean, I think it's part of the messaging from the jump when you evaluate the season, right? Ultimately it's leadership all throughout the organization.

I think every part of your building has responsibility to model what we expect from the players. We all have human nature to get comfortable, to relax, to not have the same urgency or detail, to not have the self-discipline to follow through. It's our job to attack human nature when we see it. That's at the player level, that's the video, equipment, nutrition, the training room, the strength and conditioning staff, all parts of the building.

The challenge here is that we do what we would ask the players to do so we're not just talking about our young people, we're talking about everybody.

Q. You alluded to no finger pointing, et cetera. Would you talk about how the leaders you've seen, how they have really brought this team to a better spot right now than they were after Utah?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think ultimately just the ability to take ownership, personal responsibility for your contribution to the team, and realizing this is a team game, and it resembles life in a lot of ways.

I would say that one of the things we try to teach our guys is that the minute that you start living life, and you are not an excuse-maker, you don't look to blame others or blame the circumstance, you accept responsibility of the things that you can do better right away - like, hey, I can do this better and make the necessary changes - I think that helps you. It not only helps you in football, but it helps you in life.

Hopefully we're making progress there. I think it's to be determined starting this week.

Q. You talked about making them uncomfortable. Is that kind of trying to counterbalance all the adulation, the ranking?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think it's exactly what I'm talking about. I mean, ultimately when you get beat and you go to the locker room and you're on the bus after the game, you got zero text messages, right? When you win and you play on national...

(Interruption in video stream.)

BILLY NAPIER: ...snooze button to some degree just like you guys did this morning.

What I'm saying is that we have to anticipate what is coming. That's the great thing about the University of Florida, right? We can have an environment like that, we can have a tremendous experience. We've also had an environment like that and had bad experiences. It's magnified here, right?

We're in a state with 22 million people. We got more beat writers covering our program than any program in the country. We have 500 million living alumni, right? There's passion here.

They want to tell you all about it when it's bad, and they want to tell you all about it when it's good. I think it's important that we have something that we can stand on independent of that, a process and a system, and we can eliminate the external and say, Hey, am I doing the best I can for the team today?

Q. Along with the fans, how helpful do you think it was having some of those former players, Louis Murphy, Brandon Spikes?

BILLY NAPIER: I think one of the things that we've tried to do here upon arrival is get better in all parts of our operation. We wanted to engage former players. I think it's important.

You really think about this place. Why do we have the passion that we have? It's because there is a lot of great memories that were made in that stadium. Ultimately the coaches that were here, the players that were here that contributed to that, we want them to come back at the drop of a hat and feel comfortable and be able to do that.

Game day presents that opportunity. I think it's always awesome for some of that experience, some of that wisdom to impact your team. That can be good and bad, right?

I can speak on behalf of Brandon Spikes. He's made our team better, partly because he cares about the University of Florida. It's made him better. It created opportunities for him. It helped him create value for himself. He's back here doing the right thing and getting his degree. That's allowed him an opportunity to be around our players and impact our entire organization.

He was here when they were successful, right? I think he can speak about that. I think that's impactful for our team.

Q. (Indiscernible) Eugene Wilson, and how do you



handle the kicking situation this week?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, so Trey's banged up. Nothing long-term. Ultimately the x-ray is normal. I think that it will take him a little bit of time to return.

Now, it's going to be a pain tolerance deal. It will be to be determined. Could be this week. Could be next week. We'll give you an update on Wednesday where we're officially at.

The good thing here big picture I think we're going to get him back at some point.

The kicker deal, obviously Adam didn't have it early. Let me say this. I think the protection also contributed to the issue. But I do think Trey did a fantastic job of stepping up within the game.

We'll go kick 'em as usual this week and create competition, then make a decision going into the game, just like we're going to do at all the other positions, whether that's backup quarterback, backup star, lots of positions on our team.

Q. Do you have a gauge yet for how the team has handled the win, the success?

BILLY NAPIER: I like what I saw last night. Then I like what I heard when I went to the leadership group today at 11. I think they'll have a platform here at 11:30 and 1. We have two team recovery groups. We'll see where we're at.

But ultimately the difficult days during the week are Tuesday, Wednesday. That's when we find out where we're at.

Q. Tennessee got out pretty quickly, yet that was pretty much all Tennessee did a good bit of the night. The defensive response, what did you see there? I know you don't like singling guys out, but can you talk about Austin Armstrong's impact on what we saw?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think they had a fantastic plan. I do think when you play these teams that are drastically different, you try your best to recreate it. It is kind of like playing a triple option team, right? Early in the game it's a nightmare, then you get used to it.

Ultimately the big play in that, we just aren't aligned correctly, not playing the right coverage combination, and it led to a big play.

I think that ultimately the crowd was a factor. I thought we played with really good fundamentals. We got the call in.

We had our cleats in the ground. We strike blockers. We played well on the edges of the formations. We covered down the perimeter. We missed a few tackles, but for the most part when space tackles were presented, we did our job.

They got a few big plays, but we survived a few. Ultimately, I mean, I think Austin has done a great job since the day he's been here. I think this game is a reflection of that, much like Utah was, much like McNeese was.

We have better personnel, I think all parts of that side of the ball are in year two. I think Austin has done a good job of connecting with the players and connecting with the staff.

Q. What do you think about Jordan Castell and the way he played? I don't know if you saw on film, but what he did with Ja'Keem Jackson, told him to keep his head up?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, Jordan, you evaluate players, you recruit players, get to know them, their families. Look, Jordan was a 6'2", 200-pound kid playing corner that had really good tape. There were questions about whether he was tough, could tackle. We felt like we had enough evidence there. Love his family. His mom's an incredible lady. Then obviously his dad's story is really unique there. This kid's been through some things. He's got some maturity. He's had to grow up.

I think when I really knew I thought he could be special is when I went to his school, and you see him in that environment. You see him interact with teachers and administrators. He was a leader, just a guy that had a lot of presence about him.

Showed up in January and has been about his business. Ultimately he's playing well as a rookie for us. Great play on the deep ball. Most kids panic, they get a PI or... That was impressive.

Look, the guy's playing partly because he's mature enough to handle it. He can process, he can communicate, and he has got physical ability. I think he is a future leader, and certainly amongst his classmates he's well thought of.

Obviously Ja'Keem is out there playing as a rookie. That's his boy, right? Doing his best to encourage him. Those are good things. Those are healthy things.

Q. How do you handle 260 unread texts?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, try to do it as fast as possible



(smiling).

Q. Do you get to them all?

BILLY NAPIER: Try to delete them all. That's what I try to do. Got work to do (smiling).

Q. (Question about attacking the quarterback.)

BILLY NAPIER: I think reality is the right mixture is what you want, right? You want to keep the other team off balance.

Ultimately you can't do the same thing all the time. I think that's what we did. We played the right mix of coverage. Look, we played some light boxes in there. Our front is controlling the game. You got to keep 'em guessing. Ultimately I think we did a little bit of that.

Q. Anything on Micah?

BILLY NAPIER: Nothing yet. Just in-house discipline. Outside of that, look, it's not just Micah. We got staff members that probably need to be disciplined, as well.

No, I think ultimately that's a teachable moment. It's an opportunity for us to talk about composure and poise, ego, temper.

Look, football presents an opportunity to teach some of those things, right? It's not going to be the first time you're going to be in an altercation. Look, you make a decision like that, we had multiple players that screwed up. They compromised the entire team 'cause you may not be available in the future, whatever the case may be. No different than some guy calls you a name at the local bar on Friday night. Are you going to compromise your wife and kids, make a poor decision?

These things are teachable moments. Ultimately hopefully we do enough on our part to teach 'em.

Q. He's the only one that threw a punch.

BILLY NAPIER: Obviously, you haven't watched the TV copy (smiling).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports