

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, September 18, 2023
Gainesville, Florida, USA

Richie Leonard

Press Conference



Q. Kingsley coming back, how did that tie things together up front?

RICHIE LEONARD: It was real well having Kingsley back. He's just such a veteran and experienced player. There isn't much he hasn't seen out there on the field. Having a group like we have, it's great to have a guy like Kingsley with us.

Q. What did he bring? Calm everything down? Make protection calls?

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, just kind of his presence. Like I said, he's a veteran guy. He's seen a lot of things around here. He's played a lot of snaps around here, started a lot of games. It's always nice having that veteran experience next to you.

Q. You get on a roll, score six straight times. You had the big long drive, score four in a row. What is the feeling on that offensive line when y'all get on a roll like that? Nobody can stop us, something like that?

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, it's just a great feeling to be hitting on all cylinders as an offense. A lot of people contribute to the run game, whether that's receivers doing their job on the edges, quarterback giving the ball to the running back, the running back doing his job.

It's nice when we're hitting on all cylinders like that, for sure.

Q. Do you feel like you're going to dominate the guy across from you when you get on a roll?

RICHIE LEONARD: We try to go into the game with that mindset, whether we're up 50 or down 50. Our goal on the offensive line is to be dominant, so yeah.

Q. You were part of this team last year. No three-game winning streaks. You have a chance now. How do you handle that?

RICHIE LEONARD: We kind of try to stay away from looking at stuff like that, worrying about winning streaks or records or stuff like that from last year. We're just worried about the next game, that's Charlotte, trying to get prepared for them.

Q. Billy mentioned he had 268 messages. What was it like for you? How different was it? How do you not let that get to you?

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, no, it was a crazy experience after the game. These are the games that you come to Florida to play in, the big rivalry games. It was great. I loved it. Loved every second of it.

Q. What have you seen from the team in their approach to sustain momentum? Last year you guys weren't able to capitalize on that.

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, I think that was a big point of emphasis for us, maintaining the juice and energy, especially from guys on the sideline. That's a huge help.

Yeah, it was a big point of emphasis for us.

Q. Coach said last night especially that he could kind of tell it was starting to roll over. Could you expand on that?

RICHIE LEONARD: What did he say? What do you mean by that?

Q. Last night's meeting, he could tell you were locked in.

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, definitely. Another point of emphasis was don't let this carry over, don't linger on this Tennessee win too long because we still got to go line up and play Charlotte this week. That's a talented football team, for sure, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, Trevor is is electric. Him and Montrell in my opinion is the best 1-2 combo at running

back in the country. Those guys make our job easier, so yeah.

Q. 62-yard run. That kind of changed the whole game. If he hadn't done that...

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, like I said, Trevor is a great player. He has the ability to make those big plays like that, hit the home run. So does Montrell, too.

Again, it's great to be able to block for two great backs like that.

Q. What did it mean for him to give you the baton?

RICHIE LEONARD: It meant a lot to me, letting the offensive line get a little bit of shine right there, those skill guys' moments. It's huge, everything for us. It was a great moment for me and Trevor.

Q. I think he said after the game he was going to take you all to dinner. Location or restaurant yet?

RICHIE LEONARD: No, not yet. We talked about it, though. He's going to do something for us. He got something in the works, that's what he says.

Q. Have you ever gotten the baton before?

RICHIE LEONARD: I did one time last year I think. It was Nay'Quan who gave it to me early in the season last year. So, yeah, it was fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

RICHIE LEONARD: No, I don't think I was ready for it at either moment honestly (smiling).

Q. This is the kind of game where practice guys can get in the game later on. Some people question what's the value of this. Guys who played said it was great to get a chance to get the walk-ons on in there. How important is that, to get these guys some shine?

RICHIE LEONARD: You know, I think it's really great when it can happen. I think going into the game, that's not the focus or the goal of the game. The goal is to execute and go 11-11 on all cylinders. If it works out like that, it's great, I love it, especially seeing guys like Hayden Clem, guys who work so hard for us day in, day out. Them getting an opportunity to get out there, it's great to see.

Like I said, again, that's not the goal going into the game or the thought or mindset. It's just dominate, execute.

Q. What was your perspective on the game and what happened?

RICHIE LEONARD: The Tennessee game?

Q. Yes.

RICHIE LEONARD: It was just a crazy couple seconds right there. It's the SEC. It's a Florida-Tennessee game, so...

Q. What did you think about the way your teammates sprung into action?

RICHIE LEONARD: I love it, the way we do that for each other, protecting the quarterback. It was a late hit or whatever. Nobody wanted it to end in that fashion probably on either side of the ball, us or Tennessee.

It's nice to know that we got his back, he's got ours.

Q. What do you think you want to take from that?

RICHIE LEONARD: I think we got to learn from it because there's a fine line somewhere in there. There's a very fine line. We got to take the good with the bad and learn from our mistakes right there and move forward.

Q. From an O-lineman's perspective, what does Graham Mertz bring to this team?

RICHIE LEONARD: Just poise. It's kind of a cliché to say. He acts like a quarterback, walks like a quarterback, talks like a quarterback. It's great to have him back there. He's one of the smarter players I've ever been around. I like playing for Graham.

Q. You get in a game and everybody is excited. How steady is he on the field?

RICHIE LEONARD: Oh, extremely. Graham is always cool as a cucumber. Up or down, he's always got the same level of energy or focus. Great to have him with us.

Q. Completed more than 75% of his throws. How nice is that to be able to sustain drives?

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, it's definitely nice to hear that stat line. I just think as long as we do our job and keep him up, I know he'll make plays for us.

Q. What did you see from the defense that gave you a sense, the spring game, but even before then, during the fall camp, that kind of gave you -- 10th in the nation now.

RICHIE LEONARD: Wow, I didn't know that stat. The defense, they're so talented. Getting to go against those guys day in and day out, they make us nothing but better. I just love the way they communicate with each other. Hearing that on the offensive side of the ball in practice, how they coach each other up, that's another big thing.

I see a lot of the older guys coaching the young guys up. We got a lot of young guys that play on both sides of the ball. That camaraderie they have over there, it's huge.

Q. (No microphone.)

RICHIE LEONARD: Probably top 10. My favorite moment was just winning that game honestly. So yeah.

Q. The fans were booing him.

RICHIE LEONARD: Yeah, I saw that. All good fun. That's all.

Q. You were sitting on the sideline there. The defense is on the field. That's when the crowd starts yelling. How loud from your perspective was it?

RICHIE LEONARD: I think that might have been one of the loudest games that I experienced as a player since I've been here. I was here at that Auburn game in 2019 as a recruit actually. I hear people always talk about how loud that one is. I think this might be a real close second.

Q. Can you hear yourself think when you're doing that?

RICHIE LEONARD: No (smiling).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports