

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: We really had a lot of good stuff on the film. I was proud of our team. There was lots of parts of our team where we executed really well. Met a lot of goals -- offense, defense, and special teams.

Certainly we're well aware of the red zone issues, and certainly we've got to get more touchdowns in the red area, but I thought we were good. I think that we moved the ball really well throughout the day, created 19 explosive plays. We were over 11 yards a pass attempt. We were right at 5 a carry.

Ultimately didn't do a great job on third down and certainly the red zone, forced to kick five field goals. Those were the areas of concern.

I do think we met every goal in special teams in the game outside of the two penalties. Then defensively, we're lights out outside of one possession.

The two turnovers, we didn't get any turnovers compared with the red zone issues, keep with the game a little bit closer than it should have been. But I would tell you we had a lot of players play their first significant time. Some of those guys played well.

I think we pretty much understand where the issues were, whether those were mental errors or fundamental or technique issues in the game. But I thought we did take some steps forward in certain parts of our team, which was beneficial.

I think this is a big week. Obviously Kentucky has a really good football team. We've got a ton of respect for Coach Stoops and the program that he's built there, the consistency in which they play and the brand of football that they play -- the fundamentals, the philosophy.

It's a tough place to go play. We've got to go up there and play at 12:00 noon. Our players are well aware of the program Kentucky has. They've beaten us two years in a row. I do think there are challenges that come with going on the road and playing in this league, and certainly

Kentucky is one of those.

We're off to a good start. I thought the players were in a good -- the frame of mind was really good yesterday. Sometimes you can capitalize off winning but maybe not playing to the expectation, and certainly I think that's kind of where we're at.

It's going to be an important week, and obviously an SEC East opponent and first opportunity on the road in the league. What questions do we have here?

Q. Billy, Micah, is he going to be back able to play this week?

BILLY NAPIER: Yes, Micah will be back.

Q. Offensive line, you had three new guys in there more or less. Does that part of it, red zone issues, do you think? Could you pinpoint that a little bit?

BILLY NAPIER: The red zone issues were, simply put, mental errors and fundamental technique issues. I do think from a design perspective there was one or two plays that we could help the players with, but very technical. I mean, we know exactly where the issues are.

Q. The defense obviously has impressed throughout the season, but where do you think they can improve? I know you mentioned that one possession, but in what areas?

BILLY NAPIER: We're trying to get more takeaways. How many do we have? I think we have one maybe in four games.

I do think we've done a better job playing the normal downs better. We've done a good job of getting off the field on third down. And when we do get into the red zone, for the most part, we're playing pretty good down there.

I think they were a little over five rushing in the game, so a little bit better in that area. The quarterback being able to run obviously affects those stats. Outside of the one possession, they hit us on the speed option. Tough pattern

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match first quarters, the route concept there, and we busted on the quarterback draw, just flat out busted. We're in the perfect call. We've just got to do what he's supposed to do.

I think there's lots of ways to win. The key is that we grow through some of the mistakes but also learn from some of the successes for sure.

Q. A couple of Kentucky skill guys, obviously Devin Leary, the quarterback, and then Ray Davis, the guy you were familiar with last year at Vanderbilt?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, they're transfer heavy on offense. They've got a good group of skill players. Running back, primarily the player you're talking about is the featured back. The quarterback was fantastic at NC State, he's had a terrific career. He's off to a good start.

I think they've got skill players at receiver, at least two true freshmen that played last year, a back, a sophomore that transferred from Virginia Tech, and then the tight end, I feel like this one guy, he's been there forever.

They've got a good group. I think up front is where they made some progress. In general, I do think they have a good complementary group of players on offense for sure.

Q. A little bit of a mixed bag last year in terms of the first game of the year, that time slot. Do you enjoy that as a coach, prefer it over waiting all day Saturday in the hotel for a night game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I don't view it that way. We don't get to decide that. We've got to play at different times. One of the reasons why we formatted training camp the way we did this year.

I like to win, okay? I don't care what time the game is. I like to win.

Q. Do you find it easier to get up and go as opposed to kind of wait, wait, wait, wait?

BILLY NAPIER: Don't think of it that way. I think we find out, what, ten days ahead of time what time the game is. So it is what it is.

Q. What do you see in Kentucky's defense? It's pretty impressive, but what have you seen?

BILLY NAPIER: Kentucky, that's one of the reasons why they've been able to be very consistent as a program and as a team is because they play really good defense. They've got an identity. They understand who they are and

how they play. It's a veteran group, and I think they've added a couple transfers also that have provided depth at certain positions.

But they've got a good group of defensive coaches. Obviously the head coach is defensive background. They're systematic in what they do, and they do a really good job, play well at all levels of the defense, in my opinion.

Q. Any idea if Kingsley will be back this week?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's to be determined. I think that he's made progress. We anticipate him practicing tomorrow. I'll be able to let you know Wednesday.

Q. Are you almost surprised when Graham doesn't complete a pass right now? I'm looking at 77.8, and it's fifth nationally right now.

BILLY NAPIER: We're pleased with Graham. Graham's made our team better. His work habits, his attitude, his practice approach, the way he prepares, his leadership. I think this guy has done a really good job for our team.

He's playing at a high level. We need to keep him cleaner. He got hit a few too many times on Saturday, but the ball's going where it's supposed to go. The guy's been really accurate.

And Saturday -- look, I think, if you charted the incompletions, some of those are bad design and some of those are drops, so I think -- or maybe he's throwing it away because of the rush. So he's playing really efficient for us right now.

Q. It's early still, but are you happy for him, what you're seeing, considering he left the place he'd been for all those years and is having the success he's having so far?

BILLY NAPIER: One of the most gratifying things as a coach is when a guy works extremely hard and he gets the result. I think ultimately for me I see a guy who's having fun playing football, and he's voiced that to me. Man, this is unbelievable.

He's just having fun playing the game, right? It makes me want to play again, to be quite honest. He's just in the moment. He's enjoying it. I think it's been great to see him.

He's a great competitor on game day. This guy's tough. He's into it. He's present. I think he's just in a good place. I'm proud of him.

Q. Just following up on the point about keeping Graham cleaner, nine sacks allowed. You guys were so good last year certainly protecting the quarterback. What are you seeing in that aspect? How much of it is on the offensive line or even Graham holding the ball, or what are your thoughts?

BILLY NAPIER: I think any time you start talking about sacks and pressures, typically all position groups are contributing. If you just went down a list right now, I think that that would be the case this year as well, whether it's the back had a mental error or the -- we had an issue in protection with the front guys or a receiver didn't separate or you held the ball too long.

Like one of the sacks Saturday was a result of we just held it too long. We like to speak to the quarterbacks in terms of what is the ball out time, like, hey, ball needs to be out of your hand, right?

Look, we have a new group of players on the O-line, and then we've had injuries. So that group, the continuity has not been there this year so far. So we've played with a mixture of lineups, and I think that's contributed to some of the issues we've had. But I do think at times we played really well also.

Q. You mentioned the importance of generating more explosive plays. Almost 200 passing yards on explosive passes. How important was that to get going against Charlotte, especially as you start to get into this road stretch against defenses like Kentucky's?

BILLY NAPIER: I think typically it's good to -- you've got to create explosives to win, right? We know that you've got to take care of the ball, and you've got to get takeaways. You need to win the explosive battle. You need to win the rush battle, and you try to make a game changing play every week on special teams.

If you just simplified it, those are things that could contribute to that. In our league, rushing the ball consistently can be challenging at times depending on who you're playing. So you're going to have to create some explosives in the throw game.

Q. Then in the special teams, did you look at the ten guys on the field and maybe what led to that situation? You also mentioned the block in the back, you wanted to look at that before you commented.

BILLY NAPIER: I think the block in the back, Jaden, it is a bang-bang play. It is a technique, choice, decision. He's

trying to do exactly what he's coached to do, but it's right there in the gray area. Is it a block in the back? Probably from the guy who threw the penalty, he viewed it that way.

I would say it was a good call. I do think it's close. Jaden Robinson is very close to doing exactly what he was coached to do. The good thing is later on in the game, he's in a very similar situation, and he did it exactly right.

No one's more conscientious than that kid. Look, those things are going to happen.

Q. And the ten players on the field?

BILLY NAPIER: Again, it was very similar to another situation we've had this year where significant loss of yardage on the play. So is it the kicker? Is it the punter? The returner is the missing piece there. We're in a grouping where we can go, say, for a rush we think it's safe, and then we pull a returner off and it's rush. So we're one short.

Q. What's your assessment on special teams through four games?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we took a step forward Saturday. I think we're getting better specialist play. Saturday was a step in the right direction. I thought all the operations were really good. Rocco was great. Jeremy had one of his better days. And Trey Smack has been a weapon.

The touchbacks, where essentially we haven't had to cover a kick this year because of him. Obviously he's done a fantastic job stepping up as the placekicker as well.

It is an area on our team where we are playing young players, and I think a lot of guys are getting significant time that this is their first college football. So I think those players are getting better.

We've won more one-on-ones in Saturday's game. I think that was the reason we were able to have some of the returns that we did have.

I think we've got to eliminate some of these communication errors, game day operation errors, much like you guys have talked about. But I do think that -- I believe it's an area on our team where we have a chance to continue to improve because the personnel that's out there playing.

Q. I'm not sure if you're aware of this, but the last time Florida went to Kentucky, they had 15 penalties on the offensive line, a ton of false starts. I know Kingsley's status is still to be determined. He's the only guy that played in that game. Have you visited with him yet

about the challenge of playing there, maybe what guys can do better if he's out there Saturday?

BILLY NAPIER: I think that was a part of last year, playing on the road. I think we played at Tennessee early last year on the road, and we procedurally were pretty good. I think, as a result of the conversations about the year prior.

So that's in the past. I think we've resolved that for the most part. Obviously it's part of playing on the road in this league. It's going to be challenging. We've got to do a good job with the nonverbal count. I think, for the most part, when we've done that, we've done a decent job.

But those are some of the challenges that are an issue with going on the road. You see it every week in college football. It's like every game you turn on where -- I mean, look at the teams that have to play here.

I'm hopeful that the things that we've done in training camp and the things that we do throughout the week can replicate that for the players. If not, we've got to evaluate our process and think about what we can do better for the players.

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