

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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## Graham Mertz

### Press Conference



**Q. Graham, what was your reaction to Ricky's catch? In that moment.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Wild. In that moment -- what were you going to say?

**Q. In that moment, just when it happened.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Presnap, I mean, if you watch the tape, I looked out at C.D. and signaled him a different route because I thought it was a certain look. Then I realized it was a different look when I looked and scanned the whole field.

So I had a feeling I was going to have to work Ricky. I had a feeling it was going to be a tight window because the boundary safety -- or the post safety was more off the hash. So I tried to look him off a little bit, come back into that hole.

In the zone I knew there was a hole there. I threw it a little too high, just tried to fit it over that back. From my viewpoint, it came off my hand. It felt like it had a little juice to it, figured it would be a high catch tackle. I just see a -- you see all these jerseys and just a hand go up and just snipe it. I was like no way he caught that, after the hit.

But that's just what our receivers in that room do, like they just make crazy catches all week. Then all the work in the off-season. Him, the entire room on the jugs machine getting extra catches and working that stuff.

That was a wild catch. That's got to be catch of the year.

**Q. Is it the best catch you've ever seen or been part of?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah. I mean, hard not to be. That was wild.

**Q. (No microphone) says he does stuff like that in practice all the time? Coach says Ricky makes catches like that all the time in practice. He said it was**

**amazing, but he wasn't surprised.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: We know what Ricky, his talent, what he does. He shows it every week. Like I just said, that whole room, they make catches during the week when we're in one-on-ones, when we're in practice. Yeah, they make plays.

Probably not to that extent every day. He's not going up one hand doing the jump every day, but he makes plays. That's what kind of player he is. He's a difference maker.

**Q. How was it to get Arlis Boardingham and Andy Jean involved in the passing game?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: It was big. Any time a younger guy gets his first touchdown, his first reception, that's a fun thing to be a part of. I kind of rolled out and threw a deeper ball to Andy, and just seeing the juice he got up with -- I mean, it's really fun to see a guy get his first touchdown, first reception in The Swamp. It was definitely fun.

With all the work they put in, you see them every day, and to see that kind of come to fruition, it's definitely a blast.

**Q. Did you have a chance to talk to Ricky and his decision about coming back to school, maybe trying to prove himself a little bit?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, when I came on my visit, they were in practice. I don't remember all the details, but it was like, if we come back, it's go time.

From the jump, I knew exactly -- I knew the standard he was going to hold me to, and I know the standard that I'm going to hold him to. From the start, we knew what we were going to do. We were going to be about our work, and we were going to work together and really push that across the entire offense.

**Q. When you talk about you've been sacked nine times this year, somewhere around the neighborhood of 20 last year. Coach Napier mentioned there were a few, or there was one maybe where you held onto it a little bit too long. What's the balance for you between**



getting --

GRAHAM MERTZ: Third and five, third and six.

**Q. -- balance for you between you getting the ball and potentially making a bad throw versus taking a sack? What is your mindset on that, I think?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think any time you get into a third down -- we call them four-point plays in the fringe, red zone, or fourth down. On my end, you need to know what their tendencies are, what they put on tape, the looks you could get. You always have to have that -- in quarterback world, you call that internal clock, but knowing kind of how -- it's a feel thing. Knowing when you've got to get the ball out, where the ball's got to go.

There was one play where I held onto it way too long, just it was one play I'd love to have back because I had a throw, and it's a big one. You convert that, then we have another shot to score points.

I think one thing I do gotta say is Trey Smack had a great game, and we've got to do our job and score seven points -- or six points and then seven, but he did a great job of extending that lead when we needed him. So definitely thankful for that.

**Q. Talked to you a couple of weeks ago about the amount of explosive plays you're confident this offense would generate. How impressive was it to have more than 200 yards of explosive plays in Charlotte?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think that's one thing I was proud about was the guys making plays down the field. Across the board guys just playing smart football on the back end. They were kind of zoning us off, had a post safety that was deep. So we didn't have a lot of our post shots or things down the middle. Everything was kind of deep over, we call them climb routes.

Guys having a feel for the zone, feeling where they need to be. I think about Andy getting a little more depth on the run. Arlis got -- same thing, got a little more depth because he felt the guy underneath him.

Late in the game, Ricky had the same thing, and he sat it down in the zone when I climbed up because he felt the guy on top of him.

I think that just goes to show the amount of detail that all those coaches in every room talk about is, when you're getting zoned out, where the void is, and getting a feel for when you're going to get the ball.

I think scramble plays and extending the pocket is great, but I also think that we can get back there and stay in the pocket and deliver on time that they're doing a great job.

**Q. What have you seen in Jake Slaughter, just from a procedural hitting the line standpoint in the last few weeks?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think he's doing a great job. I think, when we're in here doing blitz pickup, we're on the field talking. We talk through at a high level of what we're seeing, what we're feeling, how to get us in the right call. I think slaughter has done a fantastic job in that sense of preparation and then executing.

**Q. Speaking of zones, I guess Ricky's catch notwithstanding, you haven't missed many this year.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: On --

**Q. You're like 77.8 percent completion percentage. Can you get in the zone as a quarterback, like a guy hitting threes? Are you seeing the field any different? Is the ball coming out of your hand better? I was joking with Billy, it's like when you miss one, it's almost a surprise right now.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think that's kind of -- I always talk about like getting in the flow. I don't know why I got a flash of the Elf movie. You ain't in the flow. You've got to get out of the flow. I don't know why that popped in my head. I think it's a flow thing.

For me, I say it every week, but it's doing my job and getting the ball to our playmakers. When a team zones us out, taking what they give you. It's easy to want to force the ball down the field into double coverage, but it's not smart. For me, it just goes back to doing my job and doing it on a consistent basis.

From the start, my thing has been I want to be a consistent player here. I want to do that every week. I do get frustrated when I don't make that play, and there's definitely three or four plays in the game last week that I want back, and I want to execute those.

I think that brings you back every week to go back to that route of, oh, I just need to execute and do my job.

**Q. What's the level of gratification for you personally, though, having made this move, left behind a program that you were there for four years, to be having the success you're having early?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I owe this university everything I got, and I try to hold that every day. I tell the coaches every single day that I'm blessed to be here and I'm thankful for it. I think I said it the day after they announced me starter that it's a blessing and it's a privilege to be here.

That's what wakes me up every day. That's why I'm excited. I enjoy doing what I'm doing. I love this sport. I love this team. I love this university.

It's been an absolute pleasure, and I'm definitely doing what I love to do with the people I love to do it with. So it's a blessing.

**Q. You've played in some tough road environments in the Big Ten and so forth, but for the offense and for the younger guys, how much do you think Utah is a benefit, going back to Kentucky, having that road experience under your belt, do you think?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think any time you go on the road, there's an element of the team's mindset, and you've got to have that road warrior mentality. It's really -- if you go into any road game, it's a hostile environment. I mean, you've got your boys with you.

There's a mental approach, and I think that's any game that you have to have an edge. Yeah, we went to Utah, and we didn't execute. We mentally didn't have that edge. So across the board, we're talking about that. We've got to go out and execute at a high level and just have fun doing it. That's our plan.

**Q. In your delivery, have they worked with you or done anything mechanically that has changed your delivery since you've been here, your footwork or whatever?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Like throwing the football?

**Q. Yeah.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: For sure. The one thing I appreciate a ton is the attention to detail that our coaching staff has. I mean, they look at every throw, and they tell me what they see. I've played a lot of football.

I have a great quarterback coach back in Kansas City. So sometimes I know what's going on with my motion, and I know sometimes I'm overstrided, sometimes I'm long.

We do a great job during the week of kind of building in in our individual time of mechanics and clean up the delivery. So it's been great.

**Q. How much do you attribute that to your completion**

**percentage? I mean, you're up 20 percentage points from where you were last year.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think it's across the board. When you're prepping to play quarterback, it's a holistic approach that mechanics, your reads, seeing the field, delivery, where you're putting it on guys. If you're really be in their eyes, telling them this is the zone, there's a guy right here, put it right here and turn up.

I think across the board it's a holistic approach that for me I find so much enjoyment because you've never arrived. There's always room to grow. That's why I love this game.

**Q. Are you ever surprised by a defense on the field? You're renowned for your film work and study and all that, but this weekend Mark Stoops is known as a defensive guru. How often do you go out there and go, man, I didn't see that coming?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: My freshman year, that happened a couple times, but I'm confident I've seen a lot of defenses. I mean, I was blessed at Wisconsin to have a great coordinator, defensive coordinator in Coach Leonard, so he threw the -- I always joke about it, he threw the kitchen sink at me in practices, blitzes, coverage, combinations, everything. Here we've got Coach Armstrong who does the same thing.

And in game, I've had a bunch of different looks. It just goes back to preparation and knowing and understanding defenses, where guys should be. When something looks a little off, that means, okay, something's probably off. Then you've got to analyze a little bit more.

There really hasn't been an opportunity in a while where I've seen something where I haven't been prepared, I haven't seen it. So for me, it's gathering all the information, getting our guys in the right protection, run game check, combination with routes. For me, that's the game within the game. A lot of people don't really have the opportunity to experience that, but that's where the game gets fun.

It's like a chess game. It's a blast.

**Q. Have you guys talked a lot about how you had the edge going into Tennessee week, whether it's rivalry or a ranked opponent. What do you feel like the team's mindset will be for Kentucky? You've lost two in a row to them. It's your first SEC road game. What do you sense maybe the intensity will be like this week?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think, when you talk about mentality, and I really appreciated our approach going into the Tennessee game. I thought it was great, great week of



prep. I think the mentality is built within the week of work.

I think we're still building it this week, so it's TBD. We know, when we're playing our best ball, it's great execution, it's confidence, it's guys trusting the guys around them. So we know what contributes to winning football, and for us it's kind of going through the week, sharpening that blade of what we need to be for that week.

I think that holds true to every week. It all comes down to just execution in this game. We've seen that on both ends this year.

**Q. Do you think that Kentucky losing streak will be something that's addressed, or is that not even -- do you think essentially it's like Tennessee week?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: No, it's been addressed.

**Q. You mentioned some of the presnap issues at Utah. Do you change the process or the approach? Other than maybe you said mindset, going in, knowing you're going to face some similar issues, challenges.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think any road game, you look at any team that's come into The Swamp, there's issues where, if you're not in your game or not communicating at a high level, there's penalties that pop up.

We've been on the road. We've seen that. I guarantee you you're going to work at communicating on a high level. I mean, that's every week. I can do a better job. I can communicate better. I can make sure everybody's on the same page. So that will be a point of emphasis for me.

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