

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Real quickly here, just to recap the game, there's no sugarcoating it. We started slow in the game. We took punches. We contributed to the issue by making mistakes, and the next thing you know, we're down three scores. We're on the road in the SEC, and we're in a dogfight. We can coach better. We can play better.

Ultimately we've turned the page, and that's exactly what we're focused on. We play Vanderbilt Saturday at 4:00. It's our next opportunity as a team. I think, after meeting with the leadership group, I think there is urgency. And certainly being with the staff all day yesterday, there's urgency to do everything better.

Ultimately, all these things are my responsibility, and that's what I think about. So I can do my job better for our players and for our staff. And I would say that's probably the consensus among all our players and all our staff members.

This weekend presents a great opportunity. It's homecoming, and there will be a number of activities across campus this week to help celebrate homecoming. Gator Growl is a great event, obviously the parade.

I think just in general there is a responsibility that you feel as a staff, as an organization, as a team. I know just speaking with the players, you're representing a lot of great people that came before you. This place has impacted a significant number of lives. It continues to produce people that are making a difference, certainly becoming the No. 1 ranked public institution in the country, years and years of success of the athletic programs.

Saturday will present an opportunity to celebrate that. A lot of great Gators coming back. We look forward to that. We're doing something that we do annually here as well, in that this is GatorMade week, and we're celebrating our player development program this week. This is really ultimately about creating awareness about what we're trying to do to impact our young men and create awareness for our alumni, how they can get involved with the program.

We were very fortunate to have great leadership in that area. Savannah Bailey has come over from Clemson and implemented GatorMade, and I can tell you, just in the brief time we've been here, it has made a significant impact on our young people. We recently have added Dr. Stephen Alli to our staff as the director of career and professional development. We continue to have four full-time people there. We started an endowment for continual support from investors.

We're very thankful for Mike Ricketts, who's a former player, who's a pillar in that endowment. Very thankful for what he's contributed not only his investment, but also just his input and his passion for this area.

I think we're looking for good mentors. I think we have a great group of alumni out there. We're looking for corporate partners for internships, all of which can be great resources for our guys.

Just this year we've done some really unique things. The South Africa service abroad trip was outstanding. The business break in New York City, guys came back. They're different as a result of that. We took a group out to the Nike World Headquarters corporate visit this past spring. Next year we anticipate going to Los Angeles. We're also doing a real estate workshop in Miami for the players.

Savannah will be around if you've got any questions about GatorMade.

The desire here is to have the best player development program in the entire country. I think we're in the process of creating that and developing that, and I would tell you in a place like the University of Florida is we continue to grow. The reach that this place has with the alumni, with the degree, the type of experience that we can create for the players is pretty special.

Football perspective, I think I like what I hear from our players, just spending time with them here yesterday and then certainly today having met with the leadership group, accountability group earlier. It's good when your players



have perspective, and they are passionate about wanting to do better, and they have insight to where the team is at and the things that need to be done better. Proud of the things that I've heard from our young people, our players the last few days.

Vanderbilt Saturday, 4:00. We've officially moved forward here, and we're looking forward to the next challenge. What questions do we have here?

Q. You expressed a level of frustration over the loss the other day. Just overall where the program is 18 games in, .500, and the nature of some of the other losses, where is the level of frustration? There's a lot of outside questions. What's the path forward in your mind?

BILLY NAPIER: Look, reality is when you lose, there's always going to be issues that come with that. You lose as a result of not playing winning football. But you also, when you do win, you get a lot of pat on the backs, and you win as a result of playing winning football.

I think for me let's not make this any more complicated than it is, right? We lost the football game because they rushed for 9.2 a carry, we rushed for 3.41 a carry. We turned the ball over four times if you count the turnover on downs and the penalty and special teams. They turned it over zero. We lost the explosive battle. We lost the hidden yardage battle, and we lost the penalty battle.

We know what winning football looks like. Certainly Saturday was not that, wasn't it. So there's no sugarcoating this. There's no excuse. All we can do is evaluate it for what it is and do better the next time.

I'm not up here to make any excuses or talk about it. There's nobody that wants to have more success than this group of players, and ultimately I feel responsibility to do a better job for them. It's that simple.

Q. What are the signs that you're seeing that this program is heading in the right direction?

BILLY NAPIER: I'm on the inside. I have relationships with the staff, with the players. We're getting better at our process. I think that we have young players that are getting experience, that are growing and developing. I think we have veteran players that have improved as people and as leaders, and I think that we play good football at times.

Some of these questions you're asking, you weren't asking a couple of weeks ago. Ultimately it is what it is. We have to deal with the result. So when we lose, we've got to

come in here every week and answer questions from the outside.

Nothing's changed here. When we play well, we do what we're supposed to do, we coach well, we're capable of winning games. There's an old Brad Stevens quote, you're really close to being a very average team, and you're really close to being a really good team, and I feel that way about our football team.

I think, if we're ready, we're capable, and we're executing and we're playing with good communication, good fundamentals and techniques, we have urgency, we have hunger about us, we play with discipline, we can be a very effective team. If we don't have those teams, we can be a very below average team as well.

Q. The offense right now, it's last in SEC in scoring points, last on third down conversions. Put your finger on anything, just evaluating five games in, where it is and what can be done to kind of spark something?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we're very inconsistent. I think we have individual players that play inconsistent, and ultimately offense is a precise game. It requires 11 players to execute.

And we need to coach better, and we need to play better. There are certain areas on our team where we can do better, and I think ultimately the back half of the year we're hopeful that we can improve.

Q. You played with such emotion and fire when you came out against Tennessee. Did you see that same thing there in Kentucky, or was there something that just fizzled and wasn't there?

BILLY NAPIER: I felt like we were lethargic early in the game, I do. So to answer your question, no, I don't think we quite had the same edge we had when we played at Tennessee.

Now, I think reality is, when you go play on the road in this league, starting fast is important every week, but when you're on the road, it's really important. All of a sudden, you take a few punches. You contribute by making your own self-inflicted mistakes. Then you look up here, and you play three, maybe four possessions in the game and you're down three scores.

Their crowd's into it, and ultimately all those things contributed to the result we got Saturday. So it's part of the things that we're trying to improve at.

Q. Oftentimes, the questions from the outside are also being contemplated inside or behind the scenes. Is there any conversation about giving up like calling duties for yourself and spreading that to somebody else and maybe you can focus more attention elsewhere?

BILLY NAPIER: I spoke about this briefly in preseason. Everything that we do is always being evaluated. I think one of the things that's challenging as a leader when you have a core responsibility, if there's things in that area that can be done better, you've got to be able to tell yourself the truth, if that makes sense.

And I would tell you I'm a lot more critical of myself than anybody on the outside is. And I said it, I've said it publicly, there's no sugarcoating this thing. We have no excuse. We can coach better, and we can play better. I'm hopeful we will do that.

Q. So you're still the play caller?

BILLY NAPIER: Yes, sir.

Q. You said after the game that you were going to take a look at just overall operationally. When you looked into those areas, what did you see? Ultimately have you determined these self-inflicted wounds are still easily fixed because of the operation that you believe in?

BILLY NAPIER: I think -- listen, the level of detail that we put into evaluating a football game every week, that process doesn't change. I know we all like to think that it does change according to the result or the outcome that we get, but that's not necessarily true. I think there's got to be some consistency and some continuity in how you do that. You've got to keep it objective to some degree.

So I think those things I talked about earlier are the things that we're evaluating, that we did evaluate. Look, your team continues to evolve, right? I think every individual player, your position group you have, your unit, all six parts of the kicking game, every part of that continues to evolve.

Look, you can play really well one week and play below average the next week. Look, not just individual players -- every one of those categories that I just talked about. They all contribute to the team.

You've got to remain objective in that part and keep it technical with the players because I do think this group that we have is working hard for us, and I think that they'll continue to get better.

Q. Is there some under appreciated involvement maybe that you've seen or that we can't see this year from your team that you are proud of the growth that you've seen?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I love our team. I like -- I think we have some veteran players that have good perspective, that have maturity, that are able to -- they have reason. They understand, they have a pulse on where we're at, what needs to be done better.

In particular today, their desire to take that and run with that with their position group, with their unit. I think we've got a good group of kids that are giving really good effort, and I think, as they -- you know, they're growing up. I think that we have leaders that are trying to lead. We have young players that are getting experience and trying to get better. I think that ultimately, that's what I would say.

Q. (No microphone). Philosophy is quarterback taking responsibility. Does he have the ability to make audibles or changes or checks at the line of scrimmage? He keeps pointing out that he can do better?

BILLY NAPIER: I think the quarterback has a huge responsibility when it comes to being a communicator. Certainly in our system, there's tons of decisions made in every play. Not only pass plays relative to protection and where the ball goes, but also in the run plays, the RPO, the run/screen game. There's a ton of decisions being made by that player.

Look, when we win, nobody asks us questions. He probably feels each week that he can do better, sometimes more than others. Graham is a pro, and he's an experienced player, and he does -- he's critical of himself. That's one of the reasons why he's grown a lot as a player, as a person, and a leader and improved is partly because he's his own worst critic, and he works. He's been fun to coach for sure.

Q. Does he have the ability to change if he doesn't like the look you're in, does he have the ability to call an audible?

BILLY NAPIER: 100 percent.

Q. Looking back at Kentucky, another game you mentioned, how much of that is technique? How much of that is just physicality? Are you worried that you don't have the dominant power up front?

BILLY NAPIER: I think a lot of things contribute to it. I always think about every play relative to communication is

where we start, and then you get into fundamentals and techniques, decision-making. I don't necessarily think we lack physicality. Nobody asked that after we played Tennessee.

But I do think that Kentucky plays really good rush defense. They have some unique front players, and I think it wasn't the best day for our group, and that was probably magnified when you compare it with the fact they've got some really good front players.

Some of it may be design, right? I think a lot of things contribute, and the quarterback has decisions to make. The tight ends are involved. The footwork and eye discipline of the running back, how we block support. I've said this many times up here, when you rush the ball, every position group contributes. We always want to point the finger at one group or one player, but that's not always the case.

No different than playing good run defense. Good to play really good at all three levels. So every position group contributes to the unit, and when you play rush defense, you typically are getting good play at every level. Same thing when it comes to rushing the ball.

Q. Ultimately, some of this stuff is cumulative, back to my original question. It's not just Kentucky. Tennessee was a great performance, but there's some cumulative performances that are maybe somewhat similar to Kentucky. Vanderbilt is coming in here, and you guys had a struggle there.

BILLY NAPIER: This is 2023.

Q. I understand the struggle. Going back to your Louisiana teams and your struggle there, I didn't follow the year-to-year there. Are you seeing similarities in what's going on in terms of the rebuild, the struggle, or are you seeing signs there that maybe you were unaware of it?

BILLY NAPIER: I've got a ton of confidence in what we do and how we do it. We didn't play well Saturday, but that doesn't change my belief in what we do and how we do it.

Reality is you've got to always be have the ability to adapt. We've adapted in the past. I think everything is always -- you're always evaluating and trying to put your team -- each team's a little bit different, right? There's strengths and weaknesses of each team. So I think that's part of coaching is evolving based off the personnel you have, the strengths and weaknesses, what skill players do you have that year, what type of quarterback do you have.

So I think we've done that in the past, and we'll continue to do that. That's a really good question, though.

Q. (No microphone). What do you want to see him do to step up at receiver?

BILLY NAPIER: Andy's opportunities, his opportunities have been increasing because he's been preparing better, showing a better grasp, practicing better, more efficient, more productive, performing in practice. We've been playing him here the last couple of weeks as a result of that.

Obviously his role will grow. We get Burt back. Burt was banged up last week. I think that could help. But Andy's role will definitely grow here. It was good to see him be able to execute and to get some experience. I think that's going to help his confidence. You can just see it. He got a chance to play in the Charlotte game and experience some success.

Sometimes a young, talented player, when they experience some success, that kind of fuels the fire, and then they show up to practice a little bit different, right? We've got a number of players that are like that. Andy's a good example.

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