

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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## Graham Mertz

### Press Conference



Florida 38, Vanderbilt 14

**Q. You've taken a lot of hits this season. Where does that one that knocked you out of the game for a couple plays there, is that one top of the list?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: No, I just got hit a little weird, landed a little weird. I felt fine. It was just a little weird landing, so I just wanted to make sure I was all right.

**Q. What about the guy after you released, after you threw and the guy came at your knee out of nowhere; do you remember that one?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: No. The knee is fine. I mean, one thing that -- I've taken a lot of shots in my career, so I feel like in a weird way you learn how to land and protect yourself. It's kind of like an unwritten rule of playing quarterback. Sometimes you're going to get blindsided and get hit, but it's kind of feeling where it's coming from and bracing for it if you can't do anything. Some of those -- some shot plays, I've got to do a better job of throwing the ball away when it's not clean and just not taking those hits, but just got to play smart.

**Q. Is there kind of a badge of honor to that?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: To?

**Q. Getting back up. And when did that start happening, realizing that at quarterback you had to kind of show that to the huddle?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I mean, the big thing is you want to play the game. Like I said multiple times, I feel like I owe this place and this team everything I've got. A little hit is not going to take me off my mission.

**Q. You've been doing that your whole career. I looked at Wisconsin -- was it Michigan you missed a half?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, that was a big hit. I remember that one like it was yesterday.

**Q. I think you went to the hospital, didn't you?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, yeah, I could tell you the whole defense on that one. Yeah, that's part of it. I think being able to take those hits and keep moving -- sometimes they're inevitable. They're going to happen.

But you've got to get up, man. I think for me, that's my whole life. I take that approach to everything. If you get knocked down, you've got to get back up. That was kind of our theme of the week.

So it literally happened.

**Q. Speak to the balance on offense today. It was 270 passing, 210 rushing. Seemed like when you had to run, you could run, when you had to pass, you could pass. What was it like guiding the offense to a game like that?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I'm proud of the O-line. We had King and Barber out, a lot of guys moving around in there, and I'm proud of how they approached the week.

I knew we were going to be effective running the ball after watching the film last week and we corrected it. I think the O-line did a great job in the run game and the pass game of providing that. We knew they'd be multiple in their pressure looks, and I think we did a great job communicating that, getting us in the right protections, right run checks.

I think Slaughter did a great job of communicating with me and working together in that, so it was really good.

**Q. Graham, winning here, you're 4-0, it looks fantastic on the outside, but of course the big thing is trying to win on the road, and of course South Carolina is coming up next. Outside of what Billy kind of blueprinted to all of us as far as how a win works, what you need to do, how important would that be in terms of credibility --**

GRAHAM MERTZ: In winning on the road? I think that's

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big time. We've had two road losses. I think back to those games, and the big thing was we didn't start fast, and we didn't execute.

Going into this game, the point of emphasis was okay, we're going to start fast and we're going to finish faster. I think the guys did a great job of coming out swinging. We had an early turnover, but I think they did a good job of bouncing back. The big thing is watching that and realizing, okay, look, regardless of where we are, we need to start fast. I think that's one thing Coach has been hitting on us, especially this week, and that's one thing we've definitely got to build on going into next week. It's the ability to start fast and maintain that throughout the game regardless of the circumstances, and especially on the road you've got to -- everybody always said you've got to bring your own juice. That's one thing, we've got to build that during the week and then bring that to South Carolina.

**Q. Would you talk about how the practice week came together and getting ready and getting to the feeling that, okay, we're ready for this game after such a disappointment last week?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest thing, especially anytime you experience a disappointment or anything like that in this sport, it can do one of two things, and I think I hit you guys after the game on it. There's two ways that can go, and it can go downhill or you can go, okay, we've got to build and we've got to go uphill.

I mean, I think throughout the week, especially starting on Sunday, we hit everybody on that, like look, this is the only way we're going. There's no option of going this other way.

Like I said, I saw it in the O-line, in their response. I thought the guys were locked in throughout the week, and it just kept building. I thought Friday was especially clean, and we've got to keep doing that.

**Q. Graham, sticking with the O-line, how do you feel like Damieon did sliding from right to left, and then how do you feel like Lyndell and Kam did with their opportunities at right tackle?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Man, I thought they did a great job. I think Dame did a good job moving to the left. I think Lyndell and Kam, especially during the week, did a great job. Like I said, moving parts in there, but when you've got a group of guys that they want to win, they want to play hard, they did a great job.

Especially a guy like Kam, when I first got here, I saw him, you look at the guy and you're like, holy crap, that guy is a refrigerator. But just for a guy like that, I saw him go

through rehab every day. It's a blast seeing a guy like that out there, and I think that's one thing that -- especially on a team when you go throughout the year, you see guys slowly get through their recovery and get back. We've got a lot of guys that are hurt right now, but that's a really, really good feeling when you see a guy like that in the huddle.

**Q. How do you feel like Max Brown did with his opportunity and what did you see from him out there?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I was excited for Max. I think one thing about Max that I see throughout the week is just his prep. I think he does a great job of asking good questions and then during practice executing.

I've got all the faith in him when he goes in there. I was excited for him to get some tick at the end of the game. He made some good throws and got a little facemask action, so he got into it, but I'm happy for Max.

**Q. Just talk about your ability to spread the ball out to different receivers because Ricky was a little less involved in the offense today, but 17 combined targets for Eugene and Arlis. Talk about your ability to really develop chemistry with them and get the ball to them.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think that was big time. I hit you guys last week after the game on I felt like there were some opportunities where I could space the ball out and help our run game, so I really during the week made that a point of emphasis. When I have those chances, to get those chances out there. I thought we did a good job across the board.

Ricky, I missed him on that slot fade by like four or five yards. Got to give him a little better ball, but I know that guy is going to make that play 10 times out of 10, and then you think about Trey -- sorry, I'm thinking about all the misses right now, but yeah, I'm proud of all the guys.

I thought Arlis played great. I thought he played physical, especially on what was that, like a 3rd and 15. We repped all week. We knew we'd get that zone look. We talk about catch puncture, and he did a great job of catching the ball and puncturing, getting vertical and playing physical.

I'm proud of all those guys, and I appreciate everything they do during the week.

**Q. Billy had said that even though Arlis, his numbers necessarily didn't show it during the game, but he was watching him in practice; this wasn't a surprise to see him put a game together like this. Would you agree with that?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, yeah, 100 percent. Like I've said, just across the board, the week of prep, before the game I told the guys, look, we're ready. Like we've just got to go out there and just play and have fun, and I think Arlis did a great job during the prep of stacking good days together.

I think the important thing are those Tuesday-Wednesdays, and that's what really builds the confidence for the game, and I thought he had a great Tuesday and Wednesday.

**Q. You talked about all the misses, but your completion percentage has been through the roof. You were 30 of 36 again tonight, and six games in, how much more confident are you with this group, Arlis Boardingham especially? Did you see something during the week in practice that indicated he was going to have a game like this tonight?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I thought he practiced hard. I mean, every day. Going into even the walk-through and just his attention to detail. It's funny, you say all the misses, and the first thing he comes up to me after the game, he's like, ugh, I should have caught that one early in the game.

That's just how we think. We're always -- in this game you've got to have a growth mindset. Complacency kills, and you've got to look at where you can improve. I thought Arlis had a great week.

**Q. Coach said you may have held on to the ball a long time a few times tonight. Just go into that a little bit.**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think I was mentioning it earlier, but especially -- there was one look where I could have thrown it downfield and thought I could step up and make a play and got sacked. That was the one I went out on.

But there were definitely a couple times I held the ball a little too long. I've got to be quicker in my decision making, and when it's not there, especially like the intentional grounding, I've played football long enough to know you've got to throw that past the line. You just don't hold on to the ball and don't make a bad play worse.

I've definitely got to do a better job of that.

**Q. Would you say the next step is to start hitting those downfield passes?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, yeah. That's definitely a part we've got to hit. But we're good.

**Q. You touched on it a little bit earlier, but winning those road games, what have you learned from the trip to Salt Lake and the trip to Lexington, whether it's good or bad, that you can use next week?**

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I've played in a lot of away games. The ones that go right, you start fast. I mentioned that.

But we hit on it after the Utah game. It comes down to execution. When the environment is loud, how can we use nonverbal communication, how can we get that right during the week so we can be ready for the game.

The big thing, this game is all about execution, but especially when you're on the road it's starting fast and executing. I can guarantee you that's going to be my point of emphasis for this whole team this week.

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