

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Gainesville, Florida, USA

## Coach Billy Napier

### Press Conference



COACH NAPIER: I think it's important that we understand that growth, improvement, development, is not a one-day event. I think ultimately for the individual players, staff members that we have, for us as a team, you just don't get to the top of a mountain in one day. You've got to climb the mountain.

And I think there's important things to remember while we do that. It's going to require a tremendous amount of work. I think that you've got to stretch yourself. You've got to get uncomfortable. It's going to be harder than you thought it was going to be. There's going to be some uncomfortable days.

I think it's important that we always keep a really good attitude toward learning and we apply the things that we learn along the way. Look, this requires focus.

I think there's distractions. You can get distracted with failure. You can get distracted with success. And I think success is probably even more of an issue at times.

And I do think there's an accountability piece here. Growth can be accelerated when you have a watchful eye watching you closely, and I think it's beneficial for us, not only the staff members, but also the leadership on our team, we provide that.

And we've got to build on the past. We've got to take the things that we know are true, that we've learned that are true and apply those. Applications, it's one thing to know; it's another thing to apply. And we have to practice what we know works, tweak and adapt and evolve in the areas where we know we need to do that.

And then ultimately, I think if you're going to continue to grow, you've got to remember to back up a little bit, take a deep breath and have some gratitude for where you're at and the opportunities that come with that.

And I think ultimately that's where we're at as a team. I think we have to continue to grow, improve, develop. We showed signs of life Saturday in certain parts of our team.

I do think it's important that we understand that even though we got a good result, there are some areas where we need to improve, whether that's communication, fundamentals, decision-making, a lack of discipline at times when it comes to penalties.

But overall we did a lot of positive things. We're excited about turning the page. I think every week is a new week. There's mental toughness required. Whether you had success the prior week or you had failure the prior week, the ability to turn the page and get started on the next challenge is important.

So South Carolina is a team that we have tremendous respect for. Shane Beamer is an outstanding coach and motivator and always has his team ready to be competitive and play.

They play with good effort. I do think he's got a tough group and they cause problems for every team that they've played.

I think Williams Brice is one of the tougher venues, better venues in the country, having played there many times in the past. And, look, we're an underdog on the road in the SEC. And this is an area on our team where we need to accept the challenge and take the next step by playing well and winning a game on the road.

We challenged the staff to do their best work. Our job is to connect with people and produce results. I do think there's an element to this game that is about connection. There's a human element. And I think we want to have an aggressive mindset this week.

We want to have good energy, and we want to work to help our players, to teach our players, to lead our players, to mentor our players. And I think that we're excited about getting to work today and certainly getting on the grass tomorrow.

**Q. What tweaks, if any, have you guys made with your process on the road? And you mentioned slow starts. Do you have some data that you have on starts on the road versus maybe at home?**

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COACH NAPIER: I think we're going to try to get to Columbia a little earlier this week. We're tweaking our schedule on Thursday. We're going to put a huge emphasis on sleep Wednesday night and things that, just little things. I think we're going to arrive to the stadium a little earlier, all these things are typical quality control that we do.

I think, ultimately, there's a pulse from the players that you've got to take into account. Most of it is mental. I do think that -- I just met with the accountability group at 11 and we talked about mentally being prepared, physically being prepared, but also emotionally being prepared. You've got to anticipate and visualize what it's going to be like, that it will be challenging.

There will be ups and downs in the game. Our dialogue during the week about being prepared to respond -- offense supporting defense and defense supporting offense and playing really good in the kicking game.

I think ultimately, kind of what I described earlier, we've got to know and apply the things that we've learned in the past.

**Q. Where does the energy come from? Because I don't know that we ever followed up on this -- not to go back, but Shemar, after the last road game, it was early start, just kind of was tough to get going.**

COACH NAPIER: I think, look, if we had bounced back and played better in the game and won the game we never would have had that conversation. I mean, I think some of this is a product of result. But ultimately it's our job to do the best job we can do for the players. And I think ultimately you have to listen to them a little bit.

So we tweaked things and I think ultimately -- bottom line is when the ball's spotted and we kick it off, we've got to be ready to mix it up. And if you've done a good job preparing all week, you're mentally prepared, you can communicate at a high level, you can play fast, you can anticipate.

And then physically you've got to have a sharp sword. You've got to be ready to go. That axe can't be dull. Gotta make the work a little bit easier.

If we take the right approach Tuesday, Wednesday, if we're growing and improving in the physical parts of our team, we can apply that. And then again, like I mentioned before, there's an emotional component that I think we have to bring that, gotta create an edge. And that's what this week's about.

**Q. Talk about the dynamic that having Arlis**

**Boardingham being able to run the routes in the middle and Trey Wilson (phonetic) kind of stretching the field horizontally. Could you talk about the dynamic that brings to your offense?**

COACH NAPIER: Arlis is a young man who -- he's a part of that group of players. I can still remember when we hit the ground after the signing period was over, all right, who are the available players? And we evaluated a ton of players. This guy's in California.

And we started a dialogue with him. He's a sharp young man. Comes from a great family. He has a unique skill set.

He had a little bit of an injury last year that set back his development because all this tight end stuff was new, but we do think that this guy has a future. And it's good to see some of that.

This guy, he's a good run-after-catch player. And I think he's a guy that's capable of running a full route tree. He can play inside and outside. Smart enough to handle it. I think he's learning the fundamentals of the position.

For a freshman to be able to do go what he did the other day I think is impressive.

And certainly Trey, Trey's a guy you have to be intentional about, making sure he has an opportunity to impact the game every week. And Trey has got unique acceleration. He's quick. He's tough to tackle. He's got some play strengths.

Those two guys played well Saturday. And ultimately can they sustain it? That's the question. Young player, can you keep your humility, can you keep your practice habits, your approach?

I do think that's part of our team that I'm excited about. I think we do have a group of young players that are getting comfortable on game day but they're also getting comfortable what the week looks like and how to prepare and be ready to be at your best for the team.

**Q. I know each game stands on its own but obviously you did an effective job on Spencer Rattler last year. Anything you take from that and the challenging of facing him again in the passing game this year?**

COACH NAPIER: No, these are two completely different teams. Spencer is a really great player. He's one of the best quarterbacks in the entire country. He's got a good group of skill players. They do a nice job of designing concepts. They're very multiple.



And there's no doubt. Every week affecting the quarterback is important. But when you play a guy like Spencer, it's even more important.

**Q. How do you feel about your secondary? You had to start two freshmen at safety, for example. And obviously it's going to pay dividends down the road, but in the present, how dicy is that and what were your thoughts?**

COACH NAPIER: Those guys got here in January, and I do think that because they are smart and mature and really work hard at it, and they come from good backgrounds. They were a little bit more prepared.

Bryce comes from a really good program, and certainly Jordan has been working as a secondary player for a long time. I think they transition well. Jackson has earned snaps, and he's had some really good days, good plays and he's made some mistakes along the way. So he continues to get better. He showed some toughness and some resiliency by overcoming some of those things.

I do think that all those guys are very capable players. And nowadays you've got to be able to get a young player ready to go at about every position, truthfully, now.

**Q. You mentioned the lead-up to the game, in order to spur some quicker starts on the road. What are some of the things that you think need to happen on the field, maybe offensively, to get yourselves going faster, anything you've noticed?**

(Audio interrupted)

COACH NAPIER: In there with the preparation, like, look, it's going to be a 50-round fight. There's going to be ups and downs. And you've got to be prepared for that.

**Q. From an evaluation standpoint, is there something on the recruiting trail that you look for to determine whether you think a player's going to be able to handle everything that comes with being a first-year player ready to go year one to overwhelming them potentially?**

COACH NAPIER: I think that's a great question. We've actually spent some time, we're trying to develop right now a set of things that revolve around that in terms of -- for me it's not necessarily about whether they're going to be able to play as a rookie. It's more about are they going to stick. Because I think player retention is a really important part of today's world.

You've got to get it right on front end or you'll have this never-ending cycle of turnover that's hard to deal with. So you'd like to get stability in the roster and then you can spend time on other things, if that makes sense.

I think you're spot on. I think it's a big deal. But I think you kind of know, but sometimes we're wrong. The guys you thought weren't going to be ready to go are ready to go and the ones you thought were ready won't be ready. So kind of sorts itself out.

There's no doubt that some positions where maybe you have a need, if you can get them here in January, I think that's a huge advantage.

**Q. You were very complimentary of Montrell after the game. Where have you seen him make the most growth since you were recruiting him?**

COACH NAPIER: I think Montrell's one of those unique kids that just showed up and had it. I mean, he's very bright. He's very smart. He's very aware. And he's gifted. We wouldn't have got Montrell Johnson at Louisiana if it wasn't for COVID.

There's no doubt, if that evaluation process would have been like it is nowadays, he would have went somewhere else. Ultimately we found him. Nobody else found him. I think he was committed to Arizona at some point. We flipped him.

And then he shows up. I can remember in my notes from the second scrimmage, he was wearing No. 25. It was like 25 is a dude. So he's big and certainly in a Group of Five he was big. He's effective out there in our league.

Imagine him in Group of Five football. He was freshman of the year in the conference, and it was a no-brainer, we needed a running back. It was a no-brainer to get him here.

So people don't understand that Montrell's a really good leader. He has the ability to affect other people. Fun to be around, too. And I think although he did drop the ball the other day, I think he catches it well. He's a good protector. I think he'll play at the next level.

And he's a guy that you meet him, he's a guy you can be proud of in terms of how he represents the university, himself, the team, his family. He's a good kid.

**Q. (Indiscernible) dropped.**

COACH NAPIER: He did. That's who he is.

**Q. Could you talk about the procedural issues on the road, the offensive line? I know you (indiscernible) crowd noise. Is there anything else on the road to do with that?**

COACH NAPIER: I think the thing I would say is some weeks we've handled it really well, some weeks we haven't. We went and played some of these places and not had those issues.

So I think it's week to week. Ultimately it's about, during the week, making sure that we're doing all the things we can do to prevent those issues. But I think I don't want to make too big of a deal about it because I think we've done it really well on the road at times. We haven't had those issues.

But it is definitely part of our past and we have to make sure that we're on top of our game so it isn't in the future.

**Q. (Indiscernible) about the metaphor of climbing the mountain. How far up the mountain do you think you all are?**

COACH NAPIER: I think there's some clouds, and I can't see the top of the mountain yet. That's what I would tell you.

Look, we have to understand that it's easy to get about halfway up, easy to get about three-quarters of the way up, a lot of people do that. But the ability to kind of put your blinders on -- the air gets thinner, becomes more challenging, the terrain, the temperature.

So all these little small things that are happening right in front of us, those are the things that we have to focus on. And ultimately, if you slip and fall, it's a long way down to the bottom, too.

I think it's important to keep perspective here relative to what all goes into the challenge. I think we have to keep that mindset. Rain, sleet or snow, we have to keep building. Somebody's got to wake up and do the work every day. And we're going to be relentless in how we do that.

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