

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, October 23, 2023

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Good weekend. I think when you watch college football on weekends, it becomes apparent everybody's for the their own set of problems.

We had a very productive week. Obviously the players have been off for a couple days. It was good for them to be back in the building yesterday. We're kind of a day ahead here from a process standpoint, so today will be like a Tuesday for us.

This is one of those games that you as a competitor look forward to being a part of. Obviously ton of history and tradition here. I think we've worked hard to educate our players about the importance of the game, the history behind the game.

Certainly we have a ton of respect for Georgia relative to the caliber of football they've been playing, the personnel that they have, the coaching staff, and the brand of football in general. Obviously been ranked No. 1 for a number of weeks in a row here, won several in a row. Ton of respect for Georgia.

It's going to require our best. I know our players are excited about getting to work today.

What questions do we have here?

Q. Georgia puts you in a bind from a defensive standpoint, how do you answer those binds?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think they do a fantastic job. I think the personnel is really good. Height, length, really good players at every level of the defense. Going to have to earn everything. I think is year eight for Kirby, if I'm not mistaken. There's good continuity in terms of the veteran players have a good comprehension of the system.

Overall it's about the fundamentals, it's the execution and the personnel.

Q. For Graham, how do you think he's up for that type of challenge?

BILLY NAPIER: I think playing well at quarterback is certainly a big part of the puzzle, right, if you're going to put this thing together. I think the key is going to be that we play well around the quarterback. I think at each position group, there's unique challenges relative to the plan that will be really, really important.

Q. How does it impact later in the week? How can you see some benefit from that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think one of the benefits of playing in the Sunbelt is you get a chance to play in a lot of midweek games, have unique schedules. I think we've come up with a blueprint we've used in the past that we'll use this week. Ultimately excited about that. Be the first time we've done that. I think it will be good for the players and the staff.

Q. Are you already seeing some benefits from the alteration to the bye week or will that be determined later?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I do think we'll have some of these guys that maybe were modified last week to have an opportunity to be full go today. We'll give you a little bit more of an up-to-date injury report on Wednesday.

I think overall two days off for the players, good, healthy work last week. I thought huge emphasis on the fundamentals last week. I thought we got good quality work, including Thursday, I thought it was a really good workday.

Then I just think in general we played seven games. There's not only a physical break here but there's a mental break as well.

Q. Away from Gainesville, there's been issues with false starts. Against a team like Georgia, how have you been able to address that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think procedurally when you play away from home, I don't necessarily think if you evaluate our team, I think one of the things the open date



exposed is we've had issues everywhere we've played, truth be known.

The margin of error is small. I think in this league in general, I don't care who you play, where you play 'em, I think you can't afford to give the opponent anything. Certainly undisciplined penalties are in that category.

Q. The momentum you generated with the players around Graham in South Carolina, how important is that to capitalize this week?

BILLY NAPIER: I think what we've learned is 15 is a very capable player. I think when given the opportunity, if we can protect him, if we can create separation, if we can win individual matchups, we've got a good designed play, he can get it to the right guy, right?

I do think that we are steadily improving around him. I think the freshmen tight ends are growing up. I think the continuity in the offensive line has helped us. I think we're getting some pretty good receiver play week to week depending on who's available.

I think that's another area of our team where we've had different lineups for some weeks. But overall if you're going to move the ball in this league, it takes every position's got to do their part.

Q. You were on a staff of a team that won 26 straight. What goes into something like that? Georgia won 24 straight. How impressive is that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think ultimately, much like I mentioned before, it's a new set of problems, right? It's a new set of issues that you're managing relative to keeping your team motivated.

They haven't had one of those experiences that kind of recenters you at times, right? I think oftentimes we used to say sometimes maybe getting beat early in the year is good for you. Most of those championship teams did get beat early on.

Ultimately I think it speaks to the level of consistency that they've been able to achieve from a continuity standpoint. The systems on offense, defense and in the kicking game have remained the same, therefore the players continue to develop. They're working on the same concepts, the same set of fundamentals. I think they benefited from that.

Obviously they've got a talented team. This is a result of a lot of hard work. I can remember, I think I told you guys this, when I got the job, I saw Kirby for the first time since he won it, I congratulated him because I think we all know,

having been a part of that, the amount of work that goes into it.

It's evaluation, it's recruitment, it's teaching and development. I think there's an intangibles side of that as well that's important. I think to sustain that is impressive.

Q. The defense, what stands out? They're not creating a lot of sacks. Kirby was talking about creating havoc. Are you seeing a lot of havoc?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think ultimately it's the category of third down that you're playing in. I think you want to be good on third down defense, make 'em play third and long. I think they've done a good job on the early downs creating those passing downs. Obviously those are much more difficult to convert.

That's the key to the drill. I think it's trying to keep third down manageable in the game will be part of the game, both sides of the ball, for us and them.

Q. The offensive line has improved over the last couple weeks...

BILLY NAPIER: I think continuity helps. I think the ability for players to be available so that we can practice at a certain intensity.

I think people don't understand that this is a developmental game. You don't just show up and play on Saturday. There's a ton of work done. You got to stack days, right? You have a number of players that are banged up, that affects the entire rhythm of a practice. Certain position groups get depleted, it affects the entire team, right?

I think we've had inexperienced players, I wouldn't say young players, but inexperienced players that are getting those reps, therefore they're improving. I do think guys like Jake Slaughter, Kam Waites, those guys being available, being able to contribute have helped us.

I think we see Mazzccua, Damien improving. I think that's a part of our team where we've improved from a fundamental standpoint.

Q. A lot has been made about Bowers. They have quality players on that team. To what impact does that change your defensive game plan?

BILLY NAPIER: Obviously this is not only one of the best players in America this year, last year, I mean, this is one of the best players of all time, if that makes sense. I mean, this guy is a really, really unique matchup relative to his ability to run routes and get open, his ability to run after the

catch. They're handing the guy sweeps. They were handing the guy the ball. He's a terrific blocker. He's tough. He's got a really good set of fundamentals. Made him really hard to defend.

I think ultimately the matchups just change. I think these are probably questions more for them than they are for me. But we'll prepare for the personnel that we've been watching.

What direction they go I think will be part of the next couple weeks for them. But probably having an open date helps. They're not lacking for skill players. They got 'em, all positions. Obviously up front, it's a big, tall, long group that's very effective.

I think the quarterback gets a little bit better each week obviously as he gains experience.

Q. When you look to your offensive growth over the last two wins, how much of that is opponent driven or confidence in the coaching staff figuring out what you got or the players figuring out who they are?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's a little bit better execution, in my opinion. A little bit better fundamentals. I do think getting Trey back helps. Jake gaining experience helps. Just getting healthy to some degree. Trevor is back. I think you got a number of things that contribute to that.

Look, I think the coaches have done a good job. I think the tight ends have improved. We're getting good play and production from boarding ham. I think Hayden Hansen is steadily getting better as he gains more experience.

Look, I think we're going to continue to be challenged in this league. Every week's a new week. I think for us to have some consistency, we got to continue to play at a high level across the board.

Q. Where are you guys in the havoc rate? Sacks are low, but... How would you assess where you are, where you want to be?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think if you look at our team, we'd like to be ahead of schedule a little bit more in terms of forcing more third and longs. To do that you need to create negative plays. We've been playing probably too many downs in the four to six, two to three range. You'd like to play some more yardages and ultimately the havoc rate is not quite where we want it to be on normal downs, if that makes sense.

We've been pretty effective on third down, but we're probably getting away with some there. We're just playing

really good in that area of our team, although we're not playing in long yards as often as we'd like.

Q. What are some of the things you want the defense to accomplish during the bye week? How much is improvement a matter of those guys getting experience?

BILLY NAPIER: Takeaways is an area where we need to do better. I think ultimately we'd like to take the ball away a little bit more. Tackling at times has been an issue on our team. I think just overall gap integrity relative to fundamentals. Line of scrimmage, edges. Those are some of the areas we've worked hard for three practices last week.

Look, I mean, we just quality control the areas where we feel like statistically we need to be better, but more importantly what we know are chinks in the armor that we need to shore up as we run into the tougher part of the schedule.

Q. Can you walk us through the end of the South Carolina game, the play where Austin sent Jaden to the other side to stop the reverse. Austin was yelling him to get his attention before the play.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I mean, I think ultimately those things happen every week in college football, right? I'd have to revisit that one a little bit. I do think ultimately the players sometimes make mistakes. As coach you can recognize that and you can get it fixed.

I watched several games this weekend. It happens a lot (smiling). Yeah, that was definitely a big play in the game.

Q. Obviously been progress, but when you're talking about measuring sticks, probably top of the list. Can there be too much put into that or do you try to downplay that in terms of this is the best team in college football for the last two years, unbelievable opportunity to prove yourself?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately you try to get as specific as you can about the plan. All three parts of your team, there's a conceptual part of the game, there's a fundamental part. Certainly you want your players to be in the right frame of mind when it's time to compete.

I don't think you've got time to look up and think about that. I think ultimately you're engrossed with preparing. I know as a staff ultimately we're trying to position the players, put 'em in a sound play, give 'em an opportunity to compete, work on the fundamentals and the communication that will be important, and let's go play.

I think we're all aware of what Georgia has been able to accomplish. Certainly we have respect for that.

Q. You have the ability to host prospects up there. Do you plan on taking advantage of that? Where do you feel like the state of the class is in your efforts recruiting?

BILLY NAPIER: It's definitely a benefit to get guys to the game. Certainly Georgia was able to do it last year. We'll be able to do it this year.

You don't get to have any interaction with them when they're there, but they do get a seat in the stadium. I think that list is close to being full. It will be a good group.

I do feel great about the product we have, our ability to attract some of the best talent in the country. We work hard at it. We'll continue to work hard at it.

Q. Do you think that steppingstone opens the door for more? Wouldn't you like to be able to interact with them, have them in the locker room?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think ultimately there's a set of rules that we got to play by. We're going to play by the rules. It's been that way for a long time.

You think about these neutral-site games have been taking place for a long time. The home team gets to take advantage. We played Dallas, we played Atlanta, all over the country. Sometimes you got a group there that matters, sometimes you don't.

Ultimately it's just good for them to be able to take in the game, to observe your team compete, ultimately try to play good and put on a good show.

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