

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

Saturday, November 4, 2023

Gainesville, Florida, USA

## Billy Napier

### Press Conference



Arkansas 39, Florida 36

**BILLY NAPIER:** I think it requires courage to play this game, and oftentimes we'll say to the players that courage is working extremely hard on something and going and giving your best, okay, with no guarantee of the outcome that you want. I think that this game is rewarding for a lot of reasons. It's a great game for a lot of reasons.

We've been on the other side of a win like that.

I think that I feel for our players, right, because I do think that in that game, I thought we competed. I thought our players played with effort. They played well. We showed a lot of fight. We get down 14-0, and we have to fight our way back into that thing. We go to the locker room with a tie game at the half, and it was a battle.

I said prior to the game, and I thought Arkansas had a better team than their record indicates. They played a lot of close games this year. Certainly we talked a lot about the quarterback, the return of the running back, some new wrinkles on offense, and we saw that today.

I think that that group in there, my challenge to them was to be who they are because ultimately I think that it's a group that has character. I think it's a group that cares for each other and that has worked hard.

This game can teach you a lot. There's so many things that we're going to learn as a result of today.

I do feel like there are things we can do better. I know there will be questions about that. We had our opportunities. There's no question about it. We had many opportunities throughout the day.

You know, the big thing is I know the players in that locker room, I know every single one of them, and I do think that this has been a good week for a lot of reasons, and I want to make sure before you start asking questions that we don't lose sight of some of the good that was done this week relative to saluting those who serve, the uniforms, the

values, the people that we heard from this week.

Ultimately the calls behind the jersey, and hopefully we created some awareness.

I'm hopeful that our young people, and I think they would say that they're going to live life a little bit different because of what they experienced this week.

But I do have a ton of respect for Coach Pittman, and certainly his Arkansas team played well at times today.

What questions do we have here?

**Q. How do you preach patience right now to the fan base after a loss like this, disappointing, maybe unexpected on some levels?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Yeah, it's not my job to preach patience. It's my job to coach the team. It's my job to lead those young men in that locker room.

Again, I think ultimately I've got a job to do relative to the people in that locker room. The most important thing to me is the young people in that locker room.

Look, when you lose games, there's going to be criticism. It comes with the territory.

I understand it. I've grown up in this profession. It comes with the territory. We knew this was going to be a challenge, and we're right in the middle of it.

I believe in the people in that locker room. That's what I would tell you. Ultimately what gives me conviction, what do I think about, I think about what I can do to help the players. How can I put them in a position to have more success. How can we build a program where we impact them as people. We prioritize education.

Ultimately our job is to develop football players and field a team that can be competitive and be in contention, and we certainly were competitive today.

**Q. How much did Sanders' return change the**



**complexion of things, pairing him with KJ? That was kind of what they expected to have all season. And then conversely the injuries on defense, you guys worked out some key guys?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we knew that -- the quarterback is well-documented. He's a terrific player. He's been a good player for a long time. Heck, I feel like he's been around forever. He's big, and that's part of what makes him a challenge is getting the guy on the ground he's unique in his ability to throw but also in his ability to take off.

We struggled to tackle the guy. We struggled to finish on the quarterback today.

I think you throw a good back, probably one of the better backs in this league in the mix, and you can tell he's big, he's physical, he can lean on you. Both of those players were a huge factor in the game today. There's no question about it.

**Q. End of regulation with the illegal substitution, what happened there from what you saw?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think ultimately we have a scenario where we would run the field goal team on the field. That's what you're talking about, right? A player felt like he heard that specific word, that scenario. We have a player that's in charge of that. And he did it. Ultimately, the players around him followed him.

I'll get to the bottom of it, but ultimately just having talked to that player, I think he thought he heard it, and he did his job.

There's no question that there was some confusion there, and we're fortunate. We're fortunate that we got away with that.

That's one that I haven't been around before. I think that player, he's doing the absolute best that -- he's doing what he thought he was supposed to do. We'll get to the bottom of it.

**Q. Then you touched on it, but how different was Arkansas's offense with the new play caller? How much of an impact did that have?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think there was no question they did a good job, especially early, the tempo being the main difference.

There were wrinkles. The pace with which they played on the earned 1st downs in particular was a factor, and then

they did a good job spreading the field. The quarterback's ability to run the ball was a factor. The read game, the empty Q-draw game, and then the GT counter. They did a lot of things well.

I think they were probably 8 of 18 on 3rd down, 8 of 17, like that. Man, I'm just like the players right now. I'm right in the middle of that thing competing, so I think when we go back and look at it, I'll be able to give you a better answer. But very evident that his legs were a factor today.

**Q. The special teams unit has pretty much consistently had issues, whether it's been procedural or otherwise. What can you do this late in the season to help them or fix that, and at the end of the season, do you have to look at changing the operation completely there?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, specifically what are you talking about?

**Q. (Indiscernible) field goal block, the bad snap, and then the procedural penalty running the guys on, then they've had issues pretty much the whole season.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think that we had a few young people today that had opportunities. That's what I would say. We also had some great punt returns today. We had some great kickoff returns today. We covered kicks and punts well today.

You know, I think it's important here -- and one of the things that I respect about our team, there's a lot of blame to be spread out, and in this game in particular, I think we're going to look back at all parts of our team.

Every single thing that we do gets evaluated. When we make mistakes that have nothing to do with the opponent, those are the things that we specifically try to correct.

There's no question what you're talking about is part of our process, and ultimately it comes down to doing the best you can do for the players. We have a responsibility to do the best we can do for the players.

There are things on offense and defense that we can do well today, as well. So it's all under evaluation. I think in particular for me, things that have nothing to do with the opponent, those are the things that you need to get fixed.

**Q. Would you talk about the problems you had protecting Graham early, and did that affect how you play called? A lot of stuff that was horizontal, perhaps because there wasn't enough time to get him the ball throwing it vertically?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, the edge players were significant going into the game. I think if you talk to people around our league, just turn on the tape. 40 and 7 in particular I think are two of the better edge players in the league, and then you throw in man coverage with pressure, creating five one-on-ones, bracket coverage where they're doubling some of your guys and you're having to hold the ball, it definitely affected the game. There's no question about it.

I think we protected with seven a few times. We threw it down there a few times. It wasn't successful. I think we had one right there for a touchdown, but I do -- it was a factor for sure. I think we had to move the pocket. We had to get the ball out of our hand. We had to try to rush the ball effectively.

I think you're spot on. It was definitely an issue within the game and part of -- one of the challenging things about playing Arkansas going into it.

**Q. Obviously a little bit of momentum halt here with a daunting last three games with top-14 college football teams that you guys will be going up against. What's your message to the team to keep them locked in for the next three weeks?**

BILLY NAPIER: We won't have that problem with this group. My message to them is be who you are, and I know who they are. I think we've got a group consistently that has showed up and put it on the line. That's what I would say.

You know, it's what you do it for, to play and compete against the best.

In our league every week is a challenge. You know, it's going to be no different next week than it was this week. You've got to go earn the right to win, and ultimately I'm hopeful that the experience that these guys are getting is going to pay off.

You know, Arkansas went toe-to-toe with about everybody they've played this year, and the same thing can be said for today.

We play good players and good coaches every week, and that group is up for the challenge. There ain't nobody running and riding in there, I can promise you. I appreciate the question, but we're not going to have that problem.

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