

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Graham Mertz

Press Conference



Arkansas 39, Florida 36

Q. Obviously disappointing result, finish at the swamp here. How do you keep this team together for the last three games do you think?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think it's not going to be a challenge to keep this team together. This team is so close. The love we have for each other, that's something you build throughout the season. Obviously this is extremely disappointing, but this needs to fuel this team, and we'll make sure it does.

Q. The run game has been kind of up and down the last few weeks. How much more pressure does that put on you guys when you're not as balanced as you want to be?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think anytime you go into a game, your focus is to be balanced. I think each game presents different challenges and opportunities, so it's kind of a game to game -- you're going to go out there, you want to play balanced, and depending on what the defense does, you have to respond.

In every game you go into it with that mindset. I thought that tonight the guys ran hard. I thought they had a really good defense. We knew that going into the game. We knew we had to set our pads before the game. I thought the O-line did a good job, and we ran when we needed to run.

Q. Could you speak a little bit to the inconsistencies from the offense today to come out with back-to-back scores, then I believe five of six drives punts, then exchanging scores at the end. How frustrating is that?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think we're going to look back at the film, and I think we had a bunch of plays today, so just kind of right now I'm big picturing it, but a bunch of opportunities that we should have made that we didn't.

Yeah, it's frustrating. But I'm sure when you go back and

look at the film, it'll all make sense on what we didn't do well, what we did well, and where we need to go.

Q. Talk about Trevor's continued emergence and Trevor getting in the mix pretty big again. It's been a little bit for him. How key was that and nice to see, especially heading down the stretch in some games you guys were lucky enough to score some points?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think Trevor -- Trey, I've known Trevor, he's been like that since the day he got here. His emergence to everybody else, but I've known what kind of player he is and what he's going to be for this place. It's awesome. That driver that Trevor just kind of took over, I threw him a swing pass and he took it I don't know how far and ran it in.

We definitely need to make plays. We know what's ahead of us. We're not shying away from that. We know we've got to make plays. We've got to play together. We've got to play hard. I think that's something right in the front of our mind right now.

Q. I asked Billy his message to fans, preaching patience and all that. What are you hearing in the locker room, seeing, that you would kind of pull back the curtain for fans who are frustrated losing a game like that?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I don't think there's anybody more frustrated than the men on this team, the coaches on this team. I think that's for any sport. The fans are obviously passionate, but this is our day-to-day, what we do. We want to win. It's frustrating when you don't win.

There's no part of me that feels like, oh, moral victory. No. You lose the game. This flat-out was not acceptable. That's how it should be in the locker room.

Now all you can do after you do lose a game is look at the facts on how to win the next one. For me, I'm so focused on the weekly process, the game to game, that I don't look in the future, I look right now, what we need to do right now to win the football game. We didn't win today. That's on us. But no one is more frustrated than we are as players.

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I'm sure everybody will have an opinion about it, but we flat-out did not make enough plays today, and I'm sure the film will say that.

Q. On that, is there anything in particular that stands out to you that can maybe lead to more consistency, or is there any element that you think of immediately that's like, we really need to do this in order to get where we want to be?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think we just need to play as one. We need to move as one unit in all three phases.

We need all 11 each play to make the play. It's a challenge in the SEC, but that's got to be the focus of all 11 moving as one in each unit.

Q. Is there an element to the youth of this team that you think might be a factor on a week-to-week basis in terms of there are growing pains that come with having a lot of freshmen and sophomores on the field?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, we are young, but I think I said this earlier in the week. I'm proud of how the guys have matured through the season. Coming from the game last week, we knew we had to respond, and it didn't finish the way we wanted, but you start the game 14-0, back against the wall, and I thought the guys responded to that, which was a good sign.

But the guys are maturing. That's what I'd say to that.

Q. On a little bit of a different note, Billy had said despite the loss, you guys during the week, with the Salute Those Who Serve week, learned a lot of important lessons. Can you touch on what some of those lessons are, especially what you learned from James Slayton who ran on the field with you guys?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, we learned a ton. That's one thing that coming from this game that I'll hold on to for a really long time, honestly for the rest of my life. Like you said, James is awesome. When he got up there and just talked to the guys, the passion, the fire he had for the career path that he chose, to serve us.

I can say that on my end I woke up every day just a little bit more juiced up, a little bit more thankful, a little bit more blessed to do this every single day. I'll hold that close to my heart every single day and know that this is a blessing and to treat it as such, and I've said that so many times, but this was a really good reminder that just as human beings and as Americans we are so blessed to have what we have, and to play a sport like this. Yeah, it was a big

week on that end.

Q. You guys did fall behind 14-0, but do you think the energy was a little bit different because of that when the game started, that, the black jerseys, there was some hype leading into the game? Do you think the team's energy level was a little different because of that?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think -- one thing I will say about this team is I'm glad to say that they're juiced going into every game. I think that's one thing that we had to learn that especially with an early start time you've got to bring your own juice. We learned that lesson at Kentucky, and I thought the guys had a better reply today or response today.

Yeah, I think the meaning behind it is awesome. I thought the guys were definitely fired up about the black uniforms. But in the end, you've just got to make more plays, score more points than the other team. It's frustrating.

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