

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida State - 24, Florida - 15

BILLY NAPIER: Obviously a lot of seniors in there. Out of respect for those guys, just want to make sure to spend some significant time with them. Ultimately, I would tell you it's important that all parts of our organization, in particular the players, and really emphasize that with our other guys that we spent time telling those guys what they've done for the program, their example, their approach.

There's some really special players in that group that have not only been productive on the field. We also had a lot of guys that worked their tail off throughout the week that maybe never get to play. They contribute to our team in a major way. So, yeah, that's always a tough time.

I do want to compliment the crowd tonight. I thought our fans were fantastic. We continue to sell out these games, and certainly not only that, but their impact. I thought they were a factor tonight, and we're very thankful for that. No doubt it was special in there tonight, over 90,000. We continue to do that, and I think that speaks to the place. This place is impacting a lot of people, and certainly we're thankful for them showing up tonight doing their part.

I think that, when we look back at the last couple weeks, we had the lead in the fourth quarter multiple times. I think, when you're coaching a team that has the makeup of this team this year, there's got to be -- we have to use this experience. There's a ton of players in that locker room that are going to be back next year.

Look, we haven't been able to finish. That's the bottom line. I think we're learning how to do that. We've been in position to do that. But ultimately I think, as we build a team that's made up of veterans, it's going to be important that we at some point -- you know, the old adage you fall down seven times, eventually the eighth time you get up and finally get it done. I think at some point this group, the experience they got this year will pay off.

They get to go into this off-season with that experience,

and that affects their entire attitude and approach to training, to practice. Certainly as you build another team dynamic, I'm hopeful that this group learns how to finish. Once we do that, I think there will be a ton of momentum opportunities that come with that.

I'm thankful for this team. Regardless of what anybody else says, this team was a special team for a lot of reasons. Their ability to continue the resiliency, the toughness -- and I'm not just talking about physical toughness. This game requires mental toughness, emotional toughness. It requires work. It requires investment. It requires sacrifice.

I think this group has continued to show up with a really good attitude and do their part to prepare, and then when the ball's put down, they play with effort, toughness.

We need to play with better detail. We need to execute better, there's no question about that. But I respect this group, and there's a lot of individuals in that locker room that are made of the right stuff. I don't want to lose sight of that just because our record this year.

Ultimately, we've got to get up off the ground, and I think we have to learn from failure. Growth comes through struggle. I think this season presents that opportunity.

Look, we have work to do. Ultimately as a staff, we have to evaluate where we're at from top to bottom, every inch of what we do, and we have to work hard to try to position the players and do better. I think that's what I'm consumed with. That's my purpose, and that's the way I view my platform opportunity.

The coaching profession is about the players and doing the absolute best job we can do for the players to position them for success. Certainly football, that is on the field, but it's also everything that you do throughout the off-season and certainly how we can impact who they are as people and as students.

We'll have an opportunity here. Players will be off tomorrow. Then we'll begin kind of a process Monday to Thursday as we kind of turn the page and move forward



here. What questions do we have?

Q. Some conservative decisions in the first half when you had the lead. When you had a little bit of momentum and you had the lead. How much of that was a by-product of Max and the state of the offensive line, or do you wish you could have taken more shots at times?

BILLY NAPIER: There's no question we'll be able to look back at this thing and say, hey, maybe we should have taken a different approach, but at that point defensively we were really humming. I think we held them to like 85 yards in the first half. I'm not exactly sure what the numbers were, but they were struggling to move it.

Obviously the environment was a factor. They've got a young quarterback out there as well. Look, Max, I think he did his part. There's a handful of plays he'd like to have back, and I can certainly do more to help the players.

I think, when we look back at it, there's going to be -- whether it's a sack in the red area or a holding penalty right before the half that contributes to the outcome. So Florida State's got a really good defensive team, and they made their plays, but we also contributed at times. There are things that we can do better.

Q. The fourth quarter just kind of got away from you guys a little bit with discipline and things like that. What do you kind of point to --

BILLY NAPIER: Discipline? What specifically are we referring to?

Q. Over 50 yards of penalties.

BILLY NAPIER: I agree.

Q. What do you kind of point to with that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's a team that has -- I think that tonight it was a handful of decisions or a handful of execution opportunities, missed plays. It's been a little bit different each week. I think a number of things contribute.

But the penalties obviously, those are things that we need to address. There's no excuse for those. I think some of those were technical and some of those were decision-making. So, yeah, I think a lot of things contribute to the result.

But we've been in the fourth quarter with some really good football teams the last couple weeks. We've got to learn to finish those games, no question about it. We've got to

learn to coach better and play better.

Q. When you say evaluating every aspect, that's a very involved process, but where do you start with something like that more or less?

BILLY NAPIER: We have a pretty exhaustive process that we go through each year, whether we're undefeated and win championships or we're sitting here where we're at as a program. We're going to go through our process, and there will be some things that come from that.

We do it each year independent of the result or the outcome. We're obviously trying to improve our systems and do what we think is in the best interest of the players. Ultimately that's our job, so that's what we're going to do.

Q. The record from year two is worse than year one. What do you see from your team or the people in your program that there has been progress made and you're still heading in the right direction?

BILLY NAPIER: I think the youth in particular -- and look, I think it's important that we all understand that we'll have a good nucleus of players coming back that have significant experience next year whereas evaluate the roster going into this year. I think that's important.

Look at the teams across the country that are having success. They have veteran football teams, right? They have a number of players that have been in the program for a number of years. We need to do that. We need to retain players. We need to continue to add quality players. Then we have to get better in house at teaching, developing all parts of what we do. So that's what we're going to do.

We already have players in that locker room that are talking about getting to work. So I think that's an indication of a group that's much like they've competed, to be quite honest. I think they'll take that attitude and approach into the off-season.

Q. Billy, you said a couple minutes ago that the defense was kind of humming in the first half. What changed in the second half? Anything you guys did differently, they did differently?

BILLY NAPIER: I think they had 200 and -- total offense 224 yards, something like that. So I think ultimately they got a touchdown on the first possession in the second half. In the four-minute situation they popped a run and scored the second touchdown. So I think we had opportunities to get off the field on third down. We didn't. I think in the first half we did get off the field on third down. Made them play

a lot of third downs. They converted.

But ultimately, I think we did a lot of good things on defense. When you hold a group to 224, I think there's a lot of positive.

Q. You talked about how your players are hurting. How about you? How do you handle two seasons like this in which you've had so many close calls, et cetera, like that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think I view -- ultimately what motivates me is doing the best I can for our people, for the staff and for the players. I would tell you that this was six years at head coach. We've had varying levels of success and failure. But ultimately that's always the motivating factor for me is doing my absolute best for the players and the staff.

Look, I think we anticipated this being a challenge. I think that we felt like it was going to be a challenge going in, and then when we got here, we realized we were in for a battle. I think we're in the middle of that process.

I have a tremendous amount of confidence ultimately because of the people I'm around every day, that group of players being at the core of that.

I think I maybe would feel different if we didn't compete, if we weren't in contention, if we weren't in the fight. We're playing into the fourth quarter with some of the better teams in the country here down the stretch with a group that we all understood going into the year didn't have a ton of experience.

We're in the process of rebuilding the roster. We're in the process of learning how to make it work at the University of Florida. We were brought here for a reason. There's no denying that we have work to do, but I think what gives me confidence is what I see from the players, the growth I see, their words, their actions, the way they work, the selflessness, the sacrifice, their investment.

I think everybody likes to use the word buy-in, but I think for me it's more about action. I think I've seen a ton of action from the players, not just how they compete on game day, but also I'm with them every day. So regardless of what anybody else says, I don't really care because I know the young men in that locker room and I have -- I've got confidence and belief in that group.

You fall down. Much like many of you have fallen down in your career at times. Our young people, they came up short. They've got to get up off the ground and learn and adapt and evolve and grow, and it's hard.

But ultimately I think we all can agree that a lot of the growth and improvement that we've been through in life came from some of the tougher times. I think it's important for me to set a good example for them because I think ultimately that's what our young people need.

Q. Relative to that challenge and the rebuild process, do you feel like you guys are maybe where you wanted to be, where you expected to be through two years? Are you hitting the benchmarks that you wanted to be hitting by this point?

BILLY NAPIER: I think ultimately the record is what it is. Listen, there are things that without question I think that we can do better. I think we made some adjustments year one to year two. We need to continue to make adjustments.

I don't know that there's an answer to that question, if that makes sense. I think we're fighting every single day. We're trying to get a little bit better each day. Look, I think this is a very fluid dynamic relative to what we're trying to create and build here. I've got belief in the players, that's what I would say. I've got belief in what I've observed from that group.

Ultimately we have a veteran team that takes complete ownership. That's ultimately when we'll have the best opportunity to field a contender and eventually a champion.

Q. When you spend the next few weeks evaluating your program and your staff and any changes you want to make, how do you have to weigh the youth that you have on the roster and maybe some areas that aren't where you want it to be, injuries and stuff like that, when you're evaluating things with your staff?

BILLY NAPIER: I think you've got to remain as objective as possible. I think ultimately -- because, look, I think we work together as a team each day, and I think we do have good morale, chemistry, camaraderie, whatever you want to say. It's one of the reasons why our team plays the way it does.

Bottom line, we have to produce. We have to develop. We have to improve. And we all have responsibilities. There's all parts of the organization where you're in a leadership position, people have been entrusted to you, roles have been entrusted to you, and this is a production business.

I think you try to remain objective in terms of how you evaluate that. Certainly youth does contribute to that, but ultimately there's a lot that goes into each and every decision you make. We challenge our leadership, and there will be some of that. There's going to be some of

that.

I go back to the game's about the players, and we owe it to do the absolute best for the players, what's in the best interest of the players. The young people you've been entrusted with, that's the ultimate responsibility. So creating an environment where they can grow and develop as people, students, and players, and a lot of people contribute to that. So that's what we're going to do.

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