

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Saturday, April 13, 2024
Gainesville, Florida, USA

Graham Mertz Press Conference



Blue 19, Orange 17

Q. First of all, how did you feel like today's game went when you think back to last year because I think last year you evaluated your spring performance that you weren't very happy with it. What about today?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think we did some things that were good. I thought it was competitive. I thought the defense played well. I thought there were times where we -- we talked about momentum all week, and we've been talking about all spring ball. If you have it, you have to keep it. If you don't, you have to capture it.

If you look at the game, there were swings of momentum. I think that's a good thing. I think that's a competitive nature of a team to have that.

Obviously we go out there every time and want to be perfect and want to have 100%. We want to be able to run the ball, but we'll definitely have some stuff to learn about from this. It was a good experience.

Q. Where do you guys feel like you made the most progress this spring, and I guess what do you still feel like is left to do? What are the biggest focuses over the next couple of months in order to be ready for the season?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think the first part was the biggest part or the biggest thing.

Q. Where have you made the most strides?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think learning how to practice. That's one thing where you watch the tape and it looks like an NFL practice. You see guys taking care of each other. You see guys working on technique. Every player, there's teach tape stuff about how you should practice. Guys really learning how to practice the right way.

For me it's refining details all summer. Then things that looking back at the spring, where did we fall short? What

details were missing and just going full-force on those details as far as how to run a route verse two-man. Stuff like that. Do I need to talk to the guys about, watch film about?

Summer will be big in refining details. Just building on the foundation that we've already laid.

Q. Do you feel like those are smaller adjustments that you're going to need to make relative to the work that was required after the spring and before the season last year?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah. This time last year I was still learning the playbook. It's definitely nice to have that year under the belt of learning the plays, understanding what we're trying to do, what Coach is trying to get out of a certain play.

Now for me it's taking that next step of ownership of, all right, if this is our offense and we're the ones running it, we have to know exactly what's going on every single play and every detail versus any look that could pop up. For me it's just being able to dive into that and teach the guys that.

Q. Graham, obviously the connection between you and Tre is off to a roaring start. Just talk about --

GRAHAM MERTZ: How many yards did he have today?

Q. 128.

GRAHAM MERTZ: That will do.

Q. What are your thoughts on that and kind of how he's played so far this spring?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, he picked up where he left off. Just so explosive in what he does. I love his -- I don't know if he had his back played out today, but the tape with the "YAK!" with a sharpee is just Tre.

I love throwing the rock to him, but he's taking a big step in understanding route running, and I think that's one thing that learning from Ricky and then bringing a guy in like

Chim that understand how to get open on certain routes, and to be able to talk through that has been big for him. He's really taken a huge step in route running, which I've seen.

Q. How confident are you that he can sort of fill Ricky's role that he had last season?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I think we have a bunch of guys. I think Tre has done a fantastic job. Don't get me wrong, he's a very talented player, but I think we have a lot of guys that can step up and make plays when we need them to. That's why I'm excited. That's why I was excited for today because we have a bunch of guys that can make plays.

Q. Then obviously you were on the other side, but talk about DJ and what he showed you today.

GRAHAM MERTZ: He's done that all spring. I think he's done a great job of when we're in scrimmage settings. It's cool because you see -- for me I look back and think back to when I was a freshman, when I came into spring and when you have your first scrimmage and your second and your last scrimmage of spring. It's been cool to kind of see him take that progression. I thought he did a fantastic job today. He made a bunch of throws.

I'm sitting on my sideline like because can I hear the plays that they're calling through the headset, so I'm sitting there watching him making his read. All right, DJ. All right, DJ. I can't be cheering for him right now. He's on the other team. I think he did a fantastic job.

Q. You've talked about having unfinished business here. Now that you're through the end of spring as we're heading into the next phase, what's giving you confidence after spring that you guys can accomplish that unfinished business this fall?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, we won five games. We know what we're striving for. We're here to win. There's no secrets here. We all know what we put out there, and we all know that that is not what Florida football is. That's what keeps us waking up every day fired up to get in here and work. That is the unfinished business.

It wasn't fun for anybody. Yeah, we took that one deep into our hearts with us. We know what we're working for.

Q. What's giving you confidence in that you can accomplish that, that things can change, either --

GRAHAM MERTZ: Things have changed. It's hard for you guys because we're in it every day. For us it's the constant messaging, the constant urgency that we have to have

every single day of what we're doing, how we're doing it, why we're doing it. I can see that every day.

I think that it starts from the Head Coach down, and he does a fantastic job every day reminding us of what we went through, being able to use that experience on a daily basis. If there's a day where you're tired, it makes it a lot easier to not be tired when you think back to sitting in the locker room after the Arkansas game, stuff like that. Going to Death Valley, losing that game.

Yeah, unfinished business is a big theme for us. It's not too hard to find motivation these days.

Q. Earlier in the week you had mentioned football is football, et cetera, like that. Then you used the word "understand" two, three times earlier today. Talk about how understanding -- what does that mean as far as understanding what the coaches want from you, understanding what the offense intends to do?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, football is football. It's kind of like you go into freshman math in high school, and you're like, all right, this is pretty simple. Then you can translate it to stuff. Then you're like, Hold up, AP Calc, no idea what's going on. That's a new foreign language. That's kind of what I meant.

Football is football where you have the base concepts, but every team has different details on how they do every single different thing. For us it's whether it's guys coming from a different school coming in here, it's kind of like learning the foreign language at the start. It's a whole new language of understanding what the coach is thinking, why he is calling it, what he likes in the situation, and what he wants me to do with the football.

For me it's been so much fun coming here and being able to use what I've learned in playing football at the college level and the experiences, the defenses I've seen. You come to a new place, and you translate all that to a new language. Football is football, but at the same time it isn't.

Q. So you would say you're fluent in the new language now?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I'm fluent, yeah. And Spanish. I've been fluent in Spanish -- no, I'm just kidding. I like to say I was, but I took Spanish for, like, three years. I couldn't say one thing in Spanish.

Q. Where have you seen Marcus Burke improve this spring?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I has done a fantastic job. We've



always known that Burke is so talented, but what he has done a great job of throughout spring is winning the contested one-on-ones. I think he's done a great job about going up at high point. You through a go-ball to him, and he's made the play I would say probably nine times out of ten when you look back at all of spring. He has done a fantastic job of going up and getting that and making the hard throw -- or making the hard catch. He's done a great job of that.

Q. He changed his habits too. How have you seen that impact him?

GRAHAM MERTZ: He's focused. He knows what he wants to do. He's taking care of his body, recovering. I think the one thing I see as far as habits is he is always in the training room. He's always in the cold tub just taking care of his body.

I think that's one big thing that I've seen across the board is the overall maturity of our team. When you've been on a team for a while and you get out of practice, and you look around and you are like, all right, I'm the last person here. We've been out of practice for 45 minutes.

Here it's like an hour and a half after practice and guys are just getting in the hot and cold tub because they just took another 45 minutes rolling out and stretching. Guys are doing it the right way. I think that's a contagious thing. When you see one person doing it the right way, it forces everybody else to follow suit.

I think that's one theme that I've seen throughout spring is on the off days guys taking extra time to take care of their body and say, Oh, what do you do? Let me take you through this. I pick guys' brains when I see them doing recovery and, okay, What does this do for you? Then I'll try it out. If it works, it works.

The big thing with that is it's contagious for people, and Burke has done a great job of that.

Q. When you came in, you said you and DJ were out having fun or something. What were you guys doing?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Oh, yeah. We had the Fan Day with Florida Victorious. We were sitting next to each other signing people's stuff and taking pictures with them. =

I said it when I walked in, I just love Gator fans, man. They're fricking awesome. We had a lot of fun.

Q. You seem unphased by DJ, the new toy, the five-star freshman. You seem unphased by all the hype that he is getting. You seem more like a teacher

than a competitor to him.

GRAHAM MERTZ: I don't know if you guys -- this was a while ago, but 2018, 2019 when I was coming out, it was a very -- if you don't know the story, I committed to Wisconsin with three offers, and after that it was kind of -- it blew up. Then we had Elite 11, All-American Bowl, and you end up with 35, and there are so many things that come with that where I kind of -- I went through a lot of the same things he did. Not the same scale or at Florida, but a lot of the same things where I kind of had those experiences.

For me it's being able to use what I've learned and impact the future of the team. I want this place to win for a while. Whatever I can do to help it out, I'm going to.

Q. What are you seeing from the guys playing star across from you, Sharif Denson and Aaron Gates?

GRAHAM MERTZ: All the guys playing star have done a great job. The biggest thing that stands out is speed and being able to -- earlier in the spring I was calling when they were bringing their pressures, and it kind of got you should their skin. They were asking, What are you looking at?

I started telling them what I can see. Hey, when you start creeping up and you give me that eye right there, I know you're coming. Now they start holding their stuff and are not looking at all and then they just hit it, and they can still get back there.

The biggest thing that stands out is asking questions and their just overall speed. They do a great job.

Q. The three guys, new guys, in at safety there: Asa, DJ, and Trikweze. Can you talk about what they're bringing in?

GRAHAM MERTZ: They're doing a great job. I think they're just overall knowledge of the defense kind of like I just said about the stars. They've asked me questions, and we're kind of picking each other's brain.

I had my sophomore year at Wisconsin. I had a bunch of guys that were veteran safeties. You probably don't -- you won't know any of these names but Collin Wilder, Scott Nelson. Anyway, they were great safeties. John Torchio. They were all at Wisconsin.

They remind me of them, how they're students of the game, and they want to understand what I'm thinking and where the quarterback is looking and how to mess with me. That's been a fun balance this spring is just the constant going back and forth with them and trying to just make



each other better. They've done a great job.

Q. Hard to throw it over the top of those guys too.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, we had a few today, but we got them today. I got them today on one.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

