

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Tuesday, July 30, 2024
Gainesville, Florida, USA

Russ Callaway Press Conference



Q. How are you going to put your spin on the offense?

RUSS CALLAWAY: I think really it's overall a team effort. When I got here a few years ago, I worked with Coach Napier in the past, Coach Sale in the past, and I believe, and we believe it's about getting your players in the best situation possible.

So I don't think I would necessarily put my own spin on it. It's really a team effort. It starts at the top with Coach Napier and Coach Sale and myself and all the other coaches we have on staff.

I'm just excited about the group we have. We've got a really good core coming back, and they've been working their tails off, and I couldn't be more excited.

Q. You've got some air raid elements and maybe bring a different perspective a little bit. Do you feel that maybe you do bring a little something?

RUSS CALLAWAY: I don't bring anything more than the next guy, to be honest with you. There are things that I believe in, along with Coach Napier. We share a lot of the same beliefs, which is why I'm here. But there are things that Coach Sale is good at, that I'm good at, that Coach Napier is good at. I think overall it's a team effort.

I'm just excited to be part of this journey.

Q. You talked about wearing a slightly different hat and how you're working through that with Coach Napier, you said that in early March. What have you come up with since then as you guys have been working through it?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Again, with Coach Napier, it starts at the top with him. Just like you do any year, we go back, and we look, here's what we're really good at. Here's what we've got to improve. Here's the guys that we think are the best with the ball in their hands, and we want those guys to touch it as many times as possible, bottom line.

I think from a holistic approach, we've done a much, much better job as an offensive staff, starting with Coach Napier, okay, look, here's the people that we trust. Here are the people we want to make sure are touching it X amount of times in a game, and we're going to design plays according to do that. I think we've done a really good job with that as a staff.

Q. How have you evaluated generating explosive plays, that aspect of the offense? What have you found, and what do you plan to work on this camp in regards to that?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Obviously you want to generate as many explosives as possible. Really that starts with really good players, to be honest with you. We do have a very solid core coming back. We feel really good about the guys in the room -- quarterback room, receiver room, running back room.

It goes back, again, week to week what are we seeing that they're doing defensively, and how can we get the guys in the right spot to make them the most -- the best chance to succeed?

Again, it's really more of a week to week deal. We do have things that we believe in from a core offensive philosophy that we think will naturally generate explosives, but I do think week to week you'll see different things and different elements, and that's no different than what we've done in the past.

Q. What's the offensive line's aspect in that too, in terms of more time to protect, deeper drops for Graham Mertz and so forth?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Our offensive line, Coach Sale, Coach Decoster and really our whole staff, they've done a tremendous job in spring, summer, getting guys in school, guys in the portal, guys that were here that we have developed.

Look, it's been all part of the plan, to be honest with you. We've done a really good job of recruiting that position, developing that position, and we're going to continue to do

so because in this league it's the trenches and we all know that.

I can't say enough about the offensive line. They've done a tremendous job so far.

Q. You worked under Chris Hatcher and so forth. What specifically do you take from him that is ongoing in your coaching philosophy?

RUSS CALLAWAY: That's a great question. I think Coach Hatcher, again, he coached me at Valdosta State. I played quarterback for him, him and David Dean, along with some other guys that are still coaching, and obviously I worked for him.

I think the number one thing I would take from Coach -- I've taken a lot of things. Coach Hatcher is a phenomenal coach, he's a phenomenal person. He would always say, and it's so true -- and he had his own way of saying it -- Hey, Russ, make sure your best players touch the ball as many times as possible, and it's really that simple.

He's really good at making things that are complex and making it seem easy for the quarterback, again, because I played for him in different positions. I think it's the same thing that we believe here, but he was really good at like, okay, determining here's the plays that are going to get these guys the ball, here's our best players, now go call them.

You'll find out more times than none, if you've done a good job in recruiting and coaching your guys up, that you're going to go out there, and it doesn't matter what play you call, they're going to make you right. It's a good thing to have your system built that way for all purpose answers and having good players to back that up. So I would say that would probably be the number one thing.

Q. Will it be a bit weird seeing him across the field?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Oh, yeah, very. He's an extremely close friend of mine, looked up to him for a long time, a lot of guys on that staff. I can remember the times we would go play the big teams, Florida State, which we played them really well. We played Louisville. We played all kinds -- I can't remember who else we played in the big-time opponents. Those are two that stood out while I was with them. Missouri, we played a couple times.

I remember always being in those meetings with him and the players. In reverse it's a completely different feeling and approach when you're on the other side. But he's taught me a ton, and yeah, it's going to be really weird, but I'm excited to see him and a lot of those guys on that staff

I've known for a long time.

Q. Following up on what you said about getting your best guys the ball, Coach Napier has made it very clear that you guys are going to get your money's worth out of Tre Wilson. Do you have a number in your head, what's the right number of touches for him a game?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, that's a great question. To say there's a number, no. We do a really good job, and we've done it in the spring, of tracking real time how many times Tre's touched it, how many times the running back's touched it, the other receivers, so forth, and so on.

I think it's one of those things it's kind of the flow of the game. If we're rolling and Tre's touched it five times in the first half, okay, we're doing really good spreading the ball around. Or if it's not going great, then maybe we've got to maneuver a couple of things here or there.

But to say there's a number, no, I don't think so. I think it kind of depends on the flow of the game to be honest with you.

Q. But you do go into games either with him at the top of the list or near the top of the list and we've got to get him the ball, find ways to get him the ball?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Absolutely, him along with a few others for sure.

Q. What's that like, as an offensive guru kind of guy, what is it like to create plays in different ways to get him the ball to keep defenses off balance?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, it's really fun. It's one of the reasons -- I was fortunate enough to be in the NFL with the New York Giants where there were some really good coaches, and that's the name of the game up there. It's where can we get this guy lined up on this matchup versus this coverage versus this look, whatever. It's a lot of fun.

To me that's -- the plays are the plays, and yeah, you'll have a couple new wrinkles here or there, but when you're in a room with Coach G and Coach Juluke and all of those guys a part of the game plan process, you can get creative, and it's a big reason why I do it.

Q. Not to compare him, but have you had chess pieces like that, like Tre Wilson in terms of that?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Absolutely. At the Giants we had Evan Engram, Kadarius Toney, obviously who played here, Sterling Shepard, Kenny Golladay were a few.

My time at LSU, we had a couple guys the 2020 year. Then relatively speaking, my time at Samford, we had some really, really good players. One of them actually played Florida here in 2021, Montrell Washington, he was an example.

Yeah, I think everywhere I've been, luckily I've had some guys that we've been able to do that with.

Q. Curious of your early impressions of the two guys you added to the room, Amir and Caleb, in June?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Look, we've got a really good room, and it starts with Arlis and Hayden, and they have done a tremendous job. Tony's done a really good job, Tony Livingston. Very excited about Amir and Caleb. They both bring different elements to the room. Amir being the freshman, Caleb kind of being the vet to come in and give you a couple of different looks.

I feel really good about our room, and most importantly, all those guys -- to me, this is the first time in that room and in this team that we can truly say we have the Gator mentality. I can look in that room and say, hey, he's got that Gator in him. He's got the growth mindset that we want. He's got the work ethic. I think ultimately that's the biggest difference, not only in our room, but our offensive unit, and I'm super excited.

Q. Coach stated he was a leader in that room. Is Caleb able to come in and not be shy even though he's only been here, what, two months?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Honestly, it starts with Arlis and Hayden. They've taken a step forward in the leadership role. Last year was really the first time playing, and they've done a really good job of, okay, first year kind of jitters are out of the way, taking a step back, and then reinstalling the offense with confidence. Being around those guys, they've proven themselves on and off the field, in the weight room.

Yes, absolutely, Caleb's been a great addition to that as well, and so is Tony, and looking forward to building that with Amir and the other guys in the room.

Q. To piggy-back off that, Coach, who do you see fitting into that H position behind Boardingham? Do you think Tony could play that, or could you count on Amir potentially this year?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, I think it's a little early to say that this year for sure, but Tony is a guy who can do both, Y and H. Then Amir is going to be able to provide a different element.

So I think it's a little early to say, but I'm very excited obviously about Arlis and Hayden, and like we said, Tony has kind of earned his way up throughout the course of the season and in spring ball and has done a great job. I'm excited to see him and Amir and a couple of other guys in the room to go at it.

Q. I know you're yet to get on the field for real, but what's it like watching OTAs and hear how the offense has been playing and just some of the stuff you got to see?

RUSS CALLAWAY: To say, honestly, we've gone out there and installed some great play or had some great -- it's really not about that. To answer your question, the thing that stood out to me the most is we come up here during our official visits in June and we look out on the field on Saturday not expecting anyone to be here, and both of those practice fields are full of our team, offense, defense, completely voluntary.

I looked at a couple of our coaches, and I said this is the difference in the team this year. They want it. They got that Gator in them, and that's kind of what we've been preaching. To have that mentality and what we're looking for, the work ethic on and off the field, I really think this group has it.

I think that's what stood out the most. They're going to do everything that you ask them, but this group has proven to do extra on a consistent basis, and to me that's been great to see.

Q. Arlis and Hayden combined for, I think, six touchdown catches last year. What do you want to see in their continued development as receivers in terms of how they play in that offense?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Both of them have improved tremendously in both aspects. Hayden has been traditionally a run blocker, but he's gotten a ton better in the pass game. And then Arlis is traditionally a pass catcher. He's gotten a ton better in the run game.

So it's a unique combination of both, how they've kind of come together and improved their craft. It's a testament to them. They say, hey, this is what we've got to work on, and here's what we've got to do to get better, and they've done that.

I think just continuing to build on that and using different -- whether it be different ways to get either one of them the ball per game defenses that we're seeing, I think will kind of dictate that.

Q. What kind of options does Arlis give you? Tight ends evolved over decades to kind of more his style in some ways.

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, obviously, he's a really good route runner. He has really good hands. He has improved, like I said, in the run game dramatically. Not that he was bad, but he's made it a point to get better, and he has.

It's the ability with him to, okay, when he's in the game, if you're 11 or 12, what personnel grouping are they in? Are they in base? Are they in nickel? Whatever it may be. Again, that's a week to week game plan thing. Okay, who's their nickel? How does Arlis look, match up against them? Who's the base guy? However it may be.

He gives you different things in the intermediate passing game and in the vertical passing game that I think we can utilize week in and week out.

Q. You talked about all the guys that are here on the Saturdays and so forth like that. That's obviously a change in the football culture. Would you talk about how you see that evolving?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Look, it's no secret. Last year we had a lot of close games at the end of the year, and we were very, very young. We've got a lot of people coming back.

I think we made the decision at the end of the year, not just as a coaching staff, but our players, and they've done it. They've lived it. They made the decision, hey, we can't expect to give just all that we have to give when we're here. If we want to go above and beyond, we're going to have to do something a little bit extra. We're going to have to get uncomfortable, understanding that you grow in those situations where sometimes you fail.

They have understood that. They've bought into the Gator mentality and the growth mindset, and it's, okay, here's what we've done. Here's what we can do to improve. Okay, we're going to go up there when the coaches, when we have to for practice and weights and everything, but when we've got a couple hours on Saturday and Sunday, let's go the extra mile. Let's not let this slip by.

I think it starts at the top with the leaders on our team, our senior leadership and Coach Napier, and they've done a tremendous job.

Q. How is the helmet communication going to help or work? Just kind of thinking a veteran quarterback kind of helps there.

RUSS CALLAWAY: It will be interesting to see how it works. We're kind of still working through the kinks of it with camp because this is the first time that we've done it. I do think there will be some benefit with different ways that people get in the play calls.

However, there are certain backup plans you have to have in place if something were to go wrong with the headset on GameDay. Sometimes it will go out for a drive, maybe get you cut off. You've got to have different ways to get the play in.

That's one thing we've obviously very closely studied and monitored and called upon guys in the NFL and have developed a system of our own. We're going to kind of give that a trial run in camp and scrimmages and kind of see how that plays out.

Q. Do you like it?

RUSS CALLAWAY: I do like it. I think it's a good deal. There are some things that are going to be a little bit different working through from a -- you know, whether you're signaling or how are you going to get the play in? What are you going to say?

But, yes, I do like it. I think there's a couple different ways you can go with it, and we've got to see what fits really our quarterbacks the best because at the end of the day, you've got to give them what they want to hear. Sometimes it may be too much information. Sometimes it may be not enough. I think per quarterback per team it could be a little bit different.

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