

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Billy Napier Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Man, it doesn't get any better than this. It's great to be back in the building. It's great to be around the staff. Certainly we had an opportunity to be with the players last week, but just something a little bit different about training camp and this team in particular.

There's a few things that are really important when you start training camp, and I think it's critical that we establish expectations for the players and really for all parts of the building.

I'm getting ready to go in this team meeting at 10:30 today, and I'm going to talk about making an impact and being the difference, and we want every single person that's a part of the team and the organization to feel as if their role might just be the difference and for them to come to work every day and to take pride in their role and how they can make an impact.

This camp will be the most competitive camp that we've had since I've been at the University of Florida, and we have more competitive depth. We have more experience. Certainly we have a challenge in front of us that we look forward to.

We're excited about the opportunity. I know you guys got a lot of questions, so let's get to it.

Q. Camp, you've done the hotel before. Now you're doing Tolbert Hall. I'm just curious, is that more efficient or just a different experience for these guys in year three?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's good for our guys to experience something different. I think it provides an opportunity to be around your teammates each day during training camp. I think there's an opportunity there to build some character to some degree and maybe create some gratitude.

Ultimately that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to create an old school feel to training camp where they appreciate when they move back into that nice apartment here in a couple of weeks.

We also pair them up with unique roommates. We try to create crossover relationships. We've got them all in one spot so we can check curfew every night too. We typically don't have that issue.

This group embraces that. It's one of the things I appreciate about them. Just talking to the leadership group a couple days ago, they were quick to ask if we were going back to the dorm and looking forward to it. I think that's the healthy thing about this team. I think they are excited about the opportunity and the challenge that's in front of us.

Q. How do you evaluate training camp year to year, and do you tweak things each year? How do you view it?

BILLY NAPIER: We've got a model that we've used throughout the years. I do think that we have adjusted. I think we have access to more information now. The sport science piece, the wearable technology, just the information that we have on each individual player.

Then our partnership with the NFL has been critical. We actually had Dr. Sills here on campus going back in the spring, and we specifically talked about the format of training camp and how to do that in a competitive fashion but also in a safe way as well.

We'll expose the players at different times of the day in this training camp. We'll practice at 10:30, 2:30, and 6:30. We obviously play some flex games where we'll be on the field at all three of those times. Obviously some morning kickoffs as well, three in particular on the schedule. I think it will be healthy for our players to experience all that.

Obviously we practice in the afternoon once we get to the season.

Q. This is your third August. Could you talk about how the football culture has evolved during this time? How much of that is just experience, and how much of it is just the total change in culture?

BILLY NAPIER: That's a great question. I do think that in particular this spring, I thought we took a step forward in both areas. I do think we're in year three of our system and doing those things here at the University of Florida in this league against this competition.

So I think we continue to adapt and evolve, but I do think from a football perspective, we just have more experience. We have 17 starters coming back. We're fourth in the league in returning production. We've got 41,000 snaps of experience coming back.

And I think the character makeup of our team is different. I think we have credible leadership. So culturally -- you know, I heard a guy just this past week. I was listening to a guy talk about culture, and it's really how do the players behave and go about their business when maybe the authority figure is away? I think we found out a lot about our team this summer, by far the best summer we've had.

I think you guys spoke with Tyler earlier today. Yeah, we're just in a different place, and I think partly because of that culture element. I think there's just a different level of leadership and accountability right now.

Q. What's the next step in Graham Mertz's evolution?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, number one, Graham Mertz has had a phenomenal off-season -- mentally, physically, emotionally, the leadership element. I think he started in a different place in January. There's a different level of confidence.

Then his place on the team, you know, it's his team, and he proved it on the field last year with how not only he produced but also the way he competed, the toughness, the grit.

I think that that's going to produce the next step. I don't necessarily think the next step is how he plays in the fall. I think he's been working on that next step, and that will prove to be what will get him here is the work that he's done up until this point.

I think we're going to play better around him, I have confidence in that. I think we have a better group up front. I think we have an experienced tight end group that we didn't have last year, and I think the receiving corps, there's a ton of competition in that room, and I think we'll end up in a good place.

So play better around him, and then the work he's done going all the way back to January will provide that next step.

Q. Coach Callaway talked about getting the best guys touches. Mark followed up with your comment on how you're going to get your money's worth out of Tre Wilson but you have other guys. Do you feel like there are more pieces?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, and I think it's to be determined, to some degree, but I'm excited about what I see. We get a chance to be on the grass with the players. We've executed 14 OTAs this summer, so we're around them consistently. I do think we have other weapons, and I think some of that, some of those roles are going to be earned in this training camp.

But we're always going to be intentional about who we get the ball to, Tre Wilson being at the top of that list for sure.

Q. When we talked to Tyler, he said that one of the things he wanted to see from the players is them be more accountable, you guys instituting penalties for them showing up late, having to meet a weight goal every week. Can you take us through the decision to feel like you could do that with this team and how that has helped them this off-season?

BILLY NAPIER: The good thing is I think the players wanted it. I think the players were vocal about it. I think that -- again, I go back. It's the best thing about this team is the voice that we have at the player level. I think that their willingness to give feedback, to talk about issues and present solutions.

Look, Tyler and his staff did a phenomenal job. Jake Sankal, that whole strength and conditioning, sport science, the nutrition area, the training room, that whole performance team was next level both training blocks that we had. I think, when you're administering work, that environment is critical to creating discipline and accountability, attention to detail, urgency, certain level of focus, and I think they did that.

I think ultimately the best thing about it is the players embrace that, and they really pushed that agenda. I think it's one thing to have a culture where maybe the coaches are pushing that agenda, but it's another thing when you have leadership amongst the players. We have that currently.

Q. The bleed over into the off-season, we hear Russ say that he'd come out there on Saturdays and you guys would have recruiting stuff, and they'd be out there working out, both sides. Do you think that's unique from the summer, and do you think that's stemmed from that?

BILLY NAPIER: I told the story at Media Day. It's Saturday, I don't know if it's January or February, I bring the boys over here, I'm trying to do some work, they're running around. We've got -- I look around, and I think there's 70 guys in the building -- recovery, skill development, some hypertrophy work, and ultimately time together.

I think there's a brotherhood element to that. That's the player going to his position group, his unit, his class and saying, hey, let's get in here on Saturday. There's an opportunity to get better.

We've been really close. I think we have experience. We've got a core group of players who are coming back. They've tasted it. They've been right there in those four quarter games back-to-back years. Down the stretch we haven't quite finished quite the way we'd like to.

And I think ultimately that's the motivation behind this is they know it's just right there and what helps us get over the hump, and they've been seeking out those things. I think they've done that in all parts of life.

So we built good character. I think we built good intangibles. I think we have good examples walking the halls here. Now it's time to go play football.

Q. Joe Houston was in here a minute ago. What kind of impact do you expect to have on this team, both because of him personally and also the rule change regarding analysts and allowing him to do more?

BILLY NAPIER: I think we guessed right, and I think ultimately we felt as if we needed -- one of the ways we felt we needed to adapt is we needed another layer of expertise in the special teams area.

Joe and I had a relationship from a while back. Obviously he was in a little bit of a unique spot with Coach Belichick's situation. We were fortunate to hire Joe, and he's done a great job.

We're third in the league, we're looking at all these rankings statistically and kind of setting up objectives for the training camp and the season. Composite ranking last year in our conference, we were third. I think Georgia was first, Alabama was second, we were third.

We've had organizational issues that obviously is well-documented. So we needed to get better in those areas, and I think Joe has provided a good sounding board. His working relationship with Coach Couch and now the fact that those guys, the gloves come off and they're on the grass and can give instruction on the field I

think is going to be a huge advantage for us.

Q. Is it a sign that your culture has really taken hold that you've got guys wanting the discipline? They're not only coming in and doing the extra work, but they're coming to you wanting that extra discipline, wanting the accountability?

BILLY NAPIER: I do. I think experience is -- that's a result of experience is what I would say. I think we went through a little bit of a youth movement year two on certain parts of our team, and we're reaping the rewards of that to some degree now.

That's not just when we play in the fall. I think it's been -- you know, you have a motivated group coming back. They came back with purpose. I think we've added some really good pieces, not only talent, but I think leadership and character.

Yeah, I think that -- the best compliment I can give this team is that all parts of our organization that work with them independent of football just say it's a different group -- the academic staff, the equipment staff, the training room, the GatorMade crew, Florida Victorious, the cleaning staff, the people that take care of the building. I'm walking out of the building just the other night, and a guy walks up to me and says, hey, Coach, I don't know what's going on around here, but this group, I've never seen that locker room look like it looks right now, and I've never seen guys engage our staff, the food service staff.

So it's healthy. Now it's time to go execute, right? We've got to get football specific.

I'm a firm believer that better people are better football players. I think we'll prove that this fall.

Q. Your thoughts about having another fan day at The Swamp and kind of show Gator Nation early on in terms of maybe create a little enthusiasm for going into the season?

BILLY NAPIER: I think that it's one of the things that we benefit from here is we've got the best fans in the country. They have passion. It's the great thing about this challenge. We're 15 years removed from a championship, and we've got a group of fans that are hungry to get back.

I think our team understands that. I think we accept that responsibility. I think ultimately that's part of the challenge.

Q. Detailed some of the gains in the strength and conditioning program, some of the speed factors. Where do you hope that shows up come game day,



that stuff? Is it going to be a play at a faster pace? Is it going to be better in the fourth quarter, finishing games, as you mentioned earlier?

BILLY NAPIER: I just think it leads to a level of belief. That's what I think. I think ultimately you create adversity throughout the off-season. It should be challenging. It should be very difficult. You're trying to create leadership opportunities, mental toughness, attention to detail, discipline, focus, urgency, and those things apply to football.

Then go back to what I said earlier, we're really close. I think we've got a core group of veterans that know that.

Finish is a word that's been used quite a bit this summer, and I think that element is one of the areas where we can pursue that difference. I think how we train might just be the difference. I think that group has been trying to create an environment and a culture where their role will make an impact, and it might just be the difference in the end.

We've got to get in these competitions in this league and get to the fourth quarter and create that opportunity.

I would go back, if we do things with integrity, if we have togetherness, discipline, effort, and toughness, if we can do those things consistently -- and hopefully we built those values in how we trained this off-season -- then when we get in that position, we have a certain level of belief and confidence and we can finish.

Q. You implemented in-helmet communication back in the spring with the expectation that it was going to be approved, but how much more work do you think needs to go into that over the next month to hammer down the details so there's no issues?

BILLY NAPIER: It's a big item on the checklist here just to bulletproof all those processes. We started early in the off-season, but we actually got the real gear just this week that we will wear with the coaches and the players. We've been simulating that prior.

We've got quite a bit of time in the bank here in terms of what we've been working on, but now we get to do it consistently day in and day out. We'll try to recreate the game in a walk-through setting and in a scrimmage setting, practice setting, but that's a part of this training camp for sure.

Q. There's always been a lot of talk about you being on the hot seat, that kind of thing. Do you block that stuff out and go about your business, or how do you handle the whole thing about this being a make or

break year?

BILLY NAPIER: I think every year you've got a set of problems, whether you lack momentum or you have momentum, whether you've had a great off-season and you're coming off of a fantastic year or maybe you struggled and didn't quite perform the way you'd like. You've got to view each team as its own entity, and you've got to try and be objective about how you make decisions.

Look, with leadership comes tough decisions, right? I think every good movie, every good story has challenges. We're right in the middle of this one. I'm hopeful that the things we've done to make change will help us perform better.

But I'm going to tell you, I'm a firm believer that sometimes you need to go through struggle, and we've done that, and I'm hopeful that it will be rewarding when we do accomplish some things of significance.

One thing about this game, I'll tell you, just big picture here from a perspective standpoint, this game, like most careers, are conditional. I'm a person of faith, and there's an unconditional element there to life too. I think it gives you some perspective at the same time.

Q. You're losing your chief of staff to a rival days before camp. Not a big deal? A big deal? Far from ideal?

BILLY NAPIER: Look, Mark did a good job for us. He's a good person. It's an opportunity, a promotion in his field, more responsibility.

I've got a lot of respect for Mark. We've known each other for a long time. He's closer to the family. It is what it is. We've had no issue attracting quality people here. We'll go find someone to do his job here.

Q. With all the stuff that's been going on with the roster limits and all this settlement, is 105 scholarships necessary? I know you want 105 players plus maybe, but is 20 more scholarships necessary?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's one of the things that we've had. It's probably been, amongst coaches, it's probably been the biggest topic of debate. I think we ultimately were entering uncharted waters to some degree.

But there was a day where we would go to training camp and we'd have 105 players. They increased that number to 110. We're going to practice tomorrow with 120.

I do think that we've done the homework and the research, not only myself and our organization, but I think we've been

able to work with other coaches and staffs throughout the country, and I think there's an element of our game from a development standpoint, we don't have the ability to acquire a player. So injuries, redshirts, there's all types of scenarios here, depth at certain positions, where maybe 105 is the number.

I do think that it's a new game as a result of that. That's another adjustment that will be made relative to how you allocate revenue sharing, but also how you practice. So, yeah, I think -- look, that's probably a two-hour discussion. I think we've went back and forth with conference leadership, with administrators.

For me, I'm going to play by the rules that they present. When we get to 105, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Right now we've got 132, and 120 of them are going to be out there tomorrow.

Q. Does it make you want to maybe recruit more guys that would be like, for lack of a better term, a three-star guy that needs developing or say I'm going to save this, it gives me more room to go after people in the portal? Does it affect you either way like that?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it affects every part of player allocation. We have a number at each position within the 85 scholarship players. Just think of it as take three more specialists, now you're down to 17. There's probably about 10 positions on your team, so you're one or two more at each position group, if that makes sense.

I think the big thing will be how you develop players, how you practice, what do you do when you get into -- you're going to need some contingency plans in terms of how you practice. You may get into tough spots late in the year at certain positions, in terms of how you end season practice when you're in the playoff and you have some portal movement and all of a sudden you've only got a certain number of players at a position.

We went back and forth about this. I think you can get in the weeds. I think right now I'm trying to get ready for this challenge in front of us and focus on training camp.

Q. Is there any one area offensively going into year three, having reviewed everything you've done in the last two years, that you want to see a step forward? Is there one thing that you're targeting that needs to kind of make that leap this season?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we've got to go execute our formula. We haven't quite done that in all parts of our team. We've got to attack the ball and own the ball. We've got to create more takeaways on defense. I think the

turnover margin is critical.

We need to play the situations better, right? There's situational football that we can improve at, and we'd like to work hard and become situation experts.

We need to go master our craft and continue to improve fundamentals and techniques. I do think having veteran players who have been in the system will help in that area. We've got to develop the other parts of our team so that we have competitive depth so that the scout teams are more qualified.

I think we need to be aggressive and try to overwhelm people in how we play with the number of variables that we present and the aggressive approach and how we call the game and how we play the game, and we need to finish. That's the last part of the formula is how we finish. So that's what we're going to focus on over the next month.

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