

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Ron Roberts Press Conference



Q. They've described Aaron Chiles as an alien. What have you seen out of him so far?

RON ROBERTS: I don't know if I'd go alien route, but he is a tremendous athlete coming in. He's physically ready as a freshman to do anything you want to ask him to do, and he's at the top notch. He's an elite player.

Q. Every defensive philosophy or offensive philosophy has its roots somewhere. Where did the creeper come from? What were the roots of that?

RON ROBERTS: It was the ability to bring an off-the-ball guy, again with stemming somebody who's not one of the designated four down or three down, whichever one you're in. It's to bring a guy in the rush. It started out fire zone concept. You bring in five, and you're down a guy in coverage. So it's a way to get the same type of pattern, maybe not the add-on backer, and play traditional coverage behind it.

So you can still force the ball, you can still create the issues on some of the run blocking schemes, but play traditional coverage behind it.

Q. It seems there's a little Joe Lee Dunn in there somewhere?

RON ROBERTS: Yeah, Joe Lee was a good friend, yeah.

Q. I think you were talking in the spring, I missed it, where you were saying we weren't where we needed to be, but we're moving on and learning from it. There were a lot of issues on defense. You could go down the list. But where did you kind of begin? Where was your focus to kind of get things turned in the other way?

RON ROBERTS: It's first going to start with the simplest things. You go in with the fundamentals of the game, striking blocks, knowing which keys you read, knowing the techniques and the fundamentals of the position. A lot goes into also the kids' understanding to take it to the next

level.

Coach Napier does a great job of talking about a 4D Gator, being a four dimensional player. Not just knowing your job, but knowing everybody's job in the room, and expanding on that to understand all 11. The next part is how is offense trying to attack us?

So a lot of that was going back to just making sure we fundamentally, technically we were sound. I think our players are good enough. I think we've got great players. I think, as long as they know where they're supposed to be and what their assignments are, they can go out and execute at a high level.

Q. What's the common thread, when you look back, there was a lot of youth and things like that for sure?

RON ROBERTS: A lot of that's going to go into it. You can say there's youth, yeah. There was a lot of youth. There was a lot of inexperienced guys hitting the field their first time in SEC football. Then you go back to the fundamentals actually of that, it needs to be worked. Tackling wasn't done at a high level.

But some of that goes into a kid also. The more comfortable I am, the more relaxed I am, the more confidence I am in my ability to do my job, they tackle also at a higher level.

Q. The gains in the weight room with Coach Miles and others, where does that kind of play into that?

RON ROBERTS: A tremendous job. Across the board, our players are all bigger, faster, stronger, more flexible, more balanced. Hopefully what we're going to see is a reduction in injuries as well. That's a side part of it. Bigger, stronger, faster is a big goal, but the big goal is to keep all of these guys on the field. When you've got to go down to the two or three, it's not the same level of guy on the field.

We're trying to push it from the bottom up and get everybody on board to make sure they can contribute in some way or fashion, but you've got to keep your key

playmakers. You've got to keep them healthy and keep them on the field.

Q. Curious on your thoughts about the NCAA allowing analysts to provide on field instruction in practices and games? How much can this benefit the program?

RON ROBERTS: It's a huge benefit. We've got guys in this building, again, they've got a great understanding of what we're trying to get done, and it's just another voice in there that also your players can go to. Sometimes we're in meetings, we're at camp, but hey, they can always meet with the QC or the analyst, and I think it's going to help our program tremendously.

Q. For young coaches looking to gain more experience, what can that do for them in progressing their careers?

RON ROBERTS: Obviously that's a sidebar of it because a lot of times, when you're recommending a young guy, but he's never coached, so what do you know? You're kind of playing hit or miss. He hasn't ran his own room. He hasn't ran a meeting. You haven't seen him on the field having an interaction with a young man.

So that's going to speak some volumes. Guys are going to be able to speak in confidence about some guys, and hopefully it will open up doors for younger men.

Q. What do you like about the depth at the linebacker position?

RON ROBERTS: We've got a bunch. It's going to be a fierce competition as we go through fall camp, but I feel really comfortable that we're sitting there six, eight guys that are all big, fast, can run, physical. It's going to be an opportunity to bring out the best in them in this competition.

Q. Who are some of the players that stand out?

RON ROBERTS: I got a roomful of them. I think it's a really tight race, it really is. It probably starts with Shemar and it goes down. Whether it be Pup Howard or Chiles or Myles Graham or R.J. Moten has done a tremendous job, moving from safety down to linebacker in the spring. Obviously Wingo, his leadership, his knowledge, his experience in the game has proven valuable for our group when they're out there.

Q. Helmet communication seems -- does it seem to benefit the offense more? Or it seems kind of convoluted on defense.

RON ROBERTS: It's going to create some added

dimensions to that ability. It's not a quarterback on the field making the check, it's the guy in the box. So a lot of times we would get down -- previously you would say, hey, I want to, we're going to stem, move, change the front because I want to play this game versus a 20-year-old quarterback. I don't want to play the coordinator. I want to play against him.

So you've kind of taken an element of that out. You're going to see, I think, how offenses -- it's new. So what are the ways they get to use it? Are they comfortable? Do they have a system to get that communication down the field to the quarterback as soon as possible?

Q. How does it help the defense?

RON ROBERTS: Yeah, it can also help us put a player at ease. It can put -- you know what I mean? Talk to him about what he's expecting. It's a way to get communication on the field to another position. Say, hey, remind him of this. Think of this. Hey, if they get in this formation, remember this is what we want to be in.

A lot of it defensively, it can be a last-minute checklist, reminders. You're giving them what they can expect coming out.

Q. The communication will be with the same guy all game?

RON ROBERTS: We're obviously going through fall camp. We're going to work through that. Yeah, there's some rules. Obviously there's rules in that you can only have one on the field at one time. If not, you've got to change the helmet out so there's only one dot allowed on the field at one time.

Most of the time, we did some spring work with some safeties. Then majority of the time, it's been with the linebackers. That's probably the direction we're going. Again, we're still working through that.

Also, some kids can't handle somebody talking in their ear, they just can't. They can't handle it.

Q. Can Shemar handle it?

RON ROBERTS: Yes.

Q. Is he a guy you want on the field every down?

RON ROBERTS: Yes.

Q. You don't want guys changing helmets to get on the field?



RON ROBERTS: No, you don't want them changing helmets.

Q. So you're trying to avoid that at all costs?

RON ROBERTS: Right.

Q. You discussed tackling earlier. What are you looking at from a physicality standpoint from the fall camp and kind of setting that tone going into the opener?

RON ROBERTS: Usually we'll evaluate that on a daily basis, obviously grade it, work it. When we play in games, I'm usually looking for something in the single digits. You talk about missed tackles, if you were playing a game, if I was playing 80 snaps, we'd want that to be 10 or less.

So the biggest thing that I think helps that a lot is guys knowing where their help is. So I can overplay a guy. How can you do that? You've got to understand properly how to leverage a ball carrier. I think a lot of those things just how you drill it and how you work it, you can eliminate a lot of the one-on-one situations.

Q. You were brought in to help fix a lot of problems here. How will we see your imprint on this defense? When all is said and done, how will they say that was a Ron Roberts' defense?

RON ROBERTS: I think a lot of it goes to we have a great staff. We've got four guys on our defensive staff that have been coordinators at some point in time or another. So it's going to be a collaborative effort going through this thing, I want to say that. Again, it would not be in my best interests not to listen to everybody in the room.

So I think we're going to do that, and it's going to be a collaborative effort. Looking forward to that. But we want to be fundamentally sound. We want to be technically sound on defense formations. And hopefully what we need to be able to show is to our fans, the Gator Nation, that we are relentless pursuit to the football.

Q. What do you like about what Will Harris and Chatman have been doing with the secondary defensive line?

RON ROBERTS: Done a great job. Not only just commanding their players, the effort they're demanding from their players, expectations they have for their players to play at a high level, but their interaction with them on a daily basis is really good to see the respect our players have for them and how they conduct themselves.

Q. You've been coaching a long time at many levels. How do you view the changes brought on by NIL and the transfer portal? It might take you a while to discuss that, but if you could succinctly address the changes brought on by NIL and the transfer portal.

RON ROBERTS: Year to year that's a -- it's a changing game. It seems the last two or three years there's rule changes, there's changes in open window, when does that occur, all those things.

I firmly believe that it's still going to be -- it's the players you recruit and you develop will still be the core of your football team. You can plug a hole with a kid, but you can't build a program off that on a year-to-year basis to be able to sustain and play at the level we want to play at.

So who you recruit -- just like it's kind of like NFL, the draft, and who you draft is going to be pretty important. You can get a free agent to plug a hole, maybe because somebody's not developed yet, he's not ready to step in, but overall I think it's still going to come out in how good we do recruiting and developing young men.

Q. What have you seen from the defense during OTAs and just how they perform just from what you've heard and what you got to observe?

RON ROBERTS: I really like our -- just how they approach day-to-day basis coming in. They're hungry to learn. They want to be good. You think sometimes that's taken for granted, and you can't.

From the extra work they come in or the extra meetings they come in to get answers to make sure they're ready to perform at a high level, I think that starts with the whole talk -- I know Russ and them were in here talking about the same thing. It's an emphasis.

You talk about Gator mentality, what is that? It's wanting to be at your best. It's having a learner's mindset where you're coming in to grow. The 4D stuff all comes into it. They understand that. It's not just about individual players when you're talking about at this level, and guys understanding the game can be huge.

So I think we took a huge step forward on that, and that goes with experience too. The more experienced they are, the more they can handle, the more they're ready to do. I like the way our guys have approached it on a day-to-day basis coming in here.

And I like working with them. They come in, the majority of our kids are bright eyed, big smile, just a pleasure to work



with.

Q. At the star position, do you feel comfortable as a staff with all the young guys there? Do you think that DJ and Bridges could potentially move to nickel at any point?

RON ROBERTS: Yeah, we've done that, yes. They've both been working in there. We've got a couple. Asa Turner has worked down there. But Sharif is a really good player. Gates is a really good football player.

We've had a couple other guys working in that position, probably for situational football and some things like that.

Q. 22 sacks and only 3 interceptions last year. How does from your standpoint -- your defenses have always been high sacks, high interceptions. How do you get this team to change from that? Is it a philosophy thing? Is it a change in scheme? What is it that has to happen?

RON ROBERTS: It's a little combination. I think it starts with your ability, can you rush the quarterback with four down and affect the quarterback? In our conference, you're going to see three or four of the top quarterbacks in the country, and they're NFL caliber quarterbacks.

So your ability to affect a quarterback, where it's not just sacking him, but it's hitting him, it's getting close to him, it's making him rush throws, it's making him throw before he's ready to throw, it's making him throw the ball in tight windows. So it's all together.

It's not just -- sometimes it's got to be the coverage being tight enough where they make him hold the ball until they can get there. So it's a combination of a lot of things. Some of it is schematics, some of it is execution of fundamentals and techniques about how to rush a quarterback.

I think we've got really good edge rushers. I think we've got talent in that room. I think we should be able to affect him with four, but if we can't affect him with four, we've got to bring in somebody else.

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