

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Graham Mertz

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We can start.

Q. How excited are you to begin this season?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I can't wait. I can't wait. I mean, anytime you get to play that first game, all that pregame anticipation, you put in all the work for that. So definitely excited.

Q. What does it mean have the synergy of year two with Coach Napier as the play-caller, how can that impact the offense?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think especially you think about a first game of the season, you have a general idea of what the team's going to do. Everybody does work in the off-season, prep different things, tweak things. To be able to have that in our toolbox from last year, knowing how to react to things during games, prep for that, I think that's going to be big.

Going into a game, it's the first game of the year, like I just said, but going back and having that last year, all that experience of how to prep for a game, how to prepare with the guys, is big-time, so...

Q. In what ways are you better than when we last saw year?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I have a healed collarbone (smiling).

Q. What will we see that we weren't seeing last year?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I think we've been harping on the whole off-season the attention to detail, the execution in the crucial moments. I mean, we all know what happened last year and everything that went into it. It was a lot of situational football, small decisions, little tweaks, protections, just getting the protection check.

I want to go out there and put a complete offensive, well-executed game together.

Q. When you look back at your own journey to where you are now, talk about the journey itself, how much more confident you are?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, it is a wild journey. I mean, I think back to prepping for my first game ever. I was traveling. I was redshirting. We played at the Buck Stadium, played USF. I mean, that was a while ago, man. That was a while ago, 2019.

But it's been a great journey. I'm thankful for every step along the way. Every step has taught me something through ups, through downs, wins, losses, good, bad.

Yeah, I mean, I think for me, I don't feel any pressure in my day-to-day life because I've seen so many different things, I've experienced things, I've learned from it.

That's what I try to tell guys all the time. Look, if you're not happy with where you're at right now, whether it's the depth chart, if you're banged up, how you can always take a step back and look at the big picture and learn from it. If you don't learn, you're going to get swept under the rug.

I think the biggest thing I learned is, Look, regardless of what you're going through, I don't let my emotions dictate my actions ever. I let the facts dictate my actions no matter what. I think that's one thing that's allowed me to be steady through it, grow through it, learn through it. That's what I tell all the guys.

Q. What do you like about this offense when you think about its potential, what it does better than a year ago?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I love it all. I mean, I think that up front, I love the guys we got up there. They've done a great job this off-season. Really changed their bodies with Coach Miles in that weight room. You see it translate to the field.

I think about all the skill we have, young skill, guys that can step in and make plays right away. Honestly, I love this running back room. I think top to bottom, those guys can go. I think all in all, I mean, I love the offense. I'm excited for us to go out there and play because I've seen a lot



through all the scrimmages, the practices, off-season work. I know they're fired up, too.

Q. What is the challenge of Miami's front seven?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, for me it's, like, I played a lot of teams that have a lot of really talented front sevens, secondaries. For me I try to look at more the why behind what they're doing. I would dive into a lot of that. Say a team plays a lot of man, why do they play a lot of man? Why do they play zone? Learning the why being called on defense, not just the players.

They got guys up front. Their linebackers are really solid. Everything kind of runs through the linebacker. He's a great player. He was 51 last year, he'll be 1 this year. Still don't know his name (smiling).

I think the thing with them is they're very talented and they trust their guys. It will be a fun defense to play.

Q. Going out there with in-helmet communication, does that elevate anything for you on the field?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I think what I mentioned earlier about situational football and knowing what's going on, the why behind what calls are being called. Coach can be like, This is a two-down call before he calls the play. Little stuff like that. Knowing the reason why we're calling plays and what the situation is.

I think it's going to be really critical, you'll see it at the end of games, a lot more clean football being played in those situations.

Q. When you look at this team, five-game losing streak to end last year, Vegas doesn't think highly of you, you're picked 12th in the SEC. Does any of that fuel you guys?

GRAHAM MERTZ: No, no. I mean, like I said, I've said it plenty of times, we live by it. We're here to prove each other right. We know what we put on tape last year, our reputation was we were 5-7. That doesn't mean anything going into this year. It's up to us to make the choice of how do we want to write our story.

I think some people are motivated by external things and stuff like that, but I've never been that kind of person. I'm motivated by my people, everybody in this building.

Yeah, not really. Sorry about that answer (smiling).

Q. You said you have a good idea of what this team is going to be. What do you anticipate this team being?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I got a great vision of what I want it to be. I think like coach says all the time, we want to be a team of integrity that plays tough, that loves each other, that is dependable on each other. When you turn on the tape, that's what I want to see. I want to see guys flying around, making plays, competing their butts off to go win.

Q. Coach said you had a good last week of camp. How is that in terms of big plays?

GRAHAM MERTZ: As far as just...

Q. Long-pass plays, big plays.

GRAHAM MERTZ: You love the deep ball, don't you (laughter)?

Yeah, I mean, I think we have done a great job through camp. Like I said before, it comes down to everybody sees the deep ball, but what did you do to get there, make the right protection check, Mike to Sam, scanning back to four weak, get four weak if he comes, we're sliding this way, we got to make the play down the field. It's my job to give them a shot to go make a play, it's their job to make the play.

I think that's one thing the guys are excited for. We want to be explosive. We weren't as explosive as we wanted last year. I like the deep ball, too (smiling).

Q. You play for each other, have this bond. Do you play for the coach, Billy?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I play for everybody in here. I play for those two back there.

Q. He's been under some fire, a big season for him, for this program. Does that resonate with you on any level?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, he gave me a chance. I took the chance. I think ever since the day I stepped foot on campus, he's done everything he can to help me grow and help me develop.

I've said it before, I feel like I owe this place everything, I feel like I owe him everything. That's for the rest of my life. I wake up every day, it's everybody in the building. Everybody's unique, but they all matter.

Q. How important is it to have guys like DK that came from Wisconsin?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Big-time. My golfing buddy, Scramble partner. No, not anymore.

It's been big. I think the transfer guys we brought in, the older guys, you think about Joey, Asa, Trikweze, Chim, all these guys that went to another program, they grew up at another program. That's kind of all they knew. Then they come here, we kind of mesh everything together.

Chim and I had the Wisconsin experience together. We can share things like in the off-season this situation happened, how did we handle that at Wisconsin, stuff like that where you can bring in different viewpoints.

It's been great. Older guys with leadership that make plays, push the standard every day, that's all you can ask for.

Q. Sounds like there's a potential for a lot more offensive targets, a number of guys capable of catching the ball.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, you want everybody to touch the rock. You want to make the defense cover every blade of grass on the field. We got a lot of guys that can cover a lot of grass. That's fun, too. A lot of targets. A lot of guys that are hungry, ready to make plays. They're excited.

Q. How do you change your body? You look like you have.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Appreciate that (smiling). I look big?

Q. Clearing 315.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Close, 295 or something like that. Not that big (smiling).

Q. How is that going to translate for you? You talk about the offensive line.

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I mean, I'm going to answer the more specific question.

I don't know if Coach Miles or Coach Napier have talked about it, but the total numbers of how guys have changed their bodies, with the amount of speed that guys have gained through that, has been insane.

For me personally, you're in your sixth year of college football, look, my max squat for the past four years has been this. You kind of feel like you almost hit that landmark. For me, it was cool because I saw myself getting stronger in every category, getting faster, getting a

little more lean.

Yeah, I feel great right now. I appreciate that (smiling).

Q. How does it translate? Put more zip on the ball, durable, quicker in the pocket?

GRAHAM MERTZ: It translates to everything.

Q. All of the above?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Better athlete, better football player. You've seen that across the board with everybody.

Q. How have you seen Aidan improve?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Dude, Aidan, when he first came in here, he was known as the burner, the fast guy. He was always a little bit smaller than everybody. The biggest thing with Aidan, he's combined his speed with finishing the play. If it's a contested catch, he's going to go make the catch. You can see him, like I said, guys putting on weight, being a little bit stronger. He's stronger, finishing those plays. He's done a fantastic job.

Q. When you look at where you were last year, how instinctive is the offense now compared to where you were?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Very. Very. I mean, I think the biggest thing, I'd say this to any quarterback, learn the why behind the plays, not just the plays. Talk to DJ about, all the guys in that room. Really any quarterback I ever talk to, if I'm back home in Kansas City, know why the coach is calling it, not just the play. That's where I've grown. Now I know what to expect, I know what checks are coming based on the weaknesses of the play, how to attack the weakness of the defense every play.

Q. When you see something now that may have last year been a little bit like, Uh-oh, now it's you know exactly what you're going to do?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah.

Q. Curious about your thoughts on the expanded College Football Playoff, maybe one loss isn't going to kill the chance?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, I think it's going to be awesome. I mean, you think about any of the past years, the teams are right on the edge. A really good team that was right on the edge not making it.

I think this year having that, knowing it's going to take the

entire year to get there for every single team, it's going to make it more competitive during the season. Obviously, a lot more competitive. I think it's a great idea.

Q. Do you ever thinking the résumé Florida can have, learning along the way, can't afford any hiccups, you can recover and get there?

GRAHAM MERTZ: I don't want to afford any hiccups (smiling).

I think you go into the year, you're prepping. I've said it plenty of times: If you're a competitor, you want to win. I want to win every game. I think every Florida fan wants to win every game. That's the mindset I'm going to have, that we're going to have, yeah.

Q. Obviously you have played in the Swamp. The Miami-Florida rivalry takes it to another level. How are you making sure your guys stay calm, cool and collected?

GRAHAM MERTZ: Yeah, that's a great question. I think you play this game for these experiences. You play 'em for the big game, the big one at home, the big away one.

I think back to any game I've played that's a big game, it all comes down to what team is going to execute. You can go in there with all the emotion, but that's not going to go out there and make you execute. If you go in there with the mindset that you're going to execute, that leads to emotion.

Coach has talked a lot about, We go out and execute, that place is going to be rocking. If we don't execute, it's not going to be rocking.

I think being able to simplify it in your mind. I got a job I got to go do. My team is depending on me to go do it. That will lead to all the emotion and excitement and the result we want.

Q. Have you learned anything about the Florida-Miami rivalry?

GRAHAM MERTZ: They don't like each other? Florida and Miami don't like each other (smiling)?

I think the first week I got down here I saw a Miami fan and a Florida fan getting into it on Twitter. Really into it.

Q. Are you aware of this...

GRAHAM MERTZ: Last time they were here was 2008?

Q. Yes.

GRAHAM MERTZ: It will be fun.

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