

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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## Billy Napier

### Press Conference



**BILLY NAPIER:** Before we get going, obviously wanted to say that our thoughts and prayers are with Ricky Pearsall and his family. Obviously a difficult thing to go through there. But we are glad that he's feeling better, that he's stable and on his way back to a full recovery.

A little bit of a summary of the Miami game. I want to thank our fans. Our fans showed up and did a great job. We need to do our part so that they could have been more of a factor in the game. Certainly we contributed to that.

Offensively we didn't block 'em very well in the run game, certainly struggled in protection at times. We lacked precision in the throw game. I think conversion downs in the first half, obviously 0-for there. That was critical. We couldn't sustain drives. We lacked consistency. We need more plays where we've got 11 players doing exactly what they should do.

Defensively two critical penalties that led to touchdowns on those possessions. They played ahead of the sticks. I thought they did a good job. They had balance. We struggled to affect the quarterback. The pass-rush was not much of a factor.

I do think he made some plays, the quarterback played a heck of a game, played some plays on some extended plays. We had a few missed communications in the back end in man coverage. Two led to touchdowns.

I will say this. Defensively there's a lot of good things on the tape. Although they did score a bunch of points and move the ball, I do think that the players played extremely hard. I felt that they played tough. I thought that they played with good fundamentals. But we've got some things that we need to clean up. We just have to be a little more consistent. We'll have a player make a mistake that keeps a drive alive.

Special teams was the bright spot. I thought all six phases of the kicking game, the film was really impressive. Probably the best I've been around as a head coach, to be quite honest.

I do think the team is in good condition. There was not a ton of loafs on the tape. I think the reality here is that execution wins. We did not do enough to be competitive in the game. We got to go do it when it counts. That's reality.

We'll get another opportunity this week. Obviously a Samford team that has a history with Florida. Chris Hatcher is a great coach. I think this is year 10 for him.

Samford is one of the more competitive FCS programs in the country. He's done a good job of building a program. They've continued to invest there. He's got a good mix of players. He's got some portal players, and he's also got some good high school players.

They have a history of being competitive in these games. They played several of these throughout their time. I've got a ton of respect as a former FCS guy. These games are important to programs like Samford.

One thing that we're going to do this week is we're going to punt all the injury questions until Wednesday. We're working on our in-house process as far as the SEC injury report. We'll have some information for you on Wednesday officially. We're kind of bulletproofing our process in-house.

What questions do we have?

**Q. There was quite a bit of rotation along the offensive line. What led to so much changing, especially with guys like Austin Barber, who performed pretty well, didn't get to play much?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Well, I think we made a commitment and a decision to play guys in rotations based off of how they've been practicing. Devon Manuel had had some good days. And Austin, it was competitive there to some degree. I think we played Devon the third six (indiscernible) series, something like that. Not the entire game, but a commitment to play a guy who took all the reps in spring.

Now, obviously all those things change week to week,



right? We go back to square one. We've got some evidence from the game there that some guys can do better.

**Q. Do you have to have DJ ready to go on Saturday as the starter?**

BILLY NAPIER: We'll, it's to be determined right now. I think we're moving our way. You're talking specifically about Graham is what you're saying?

**Q. Yes.**

BILLY NAPIER: I think obviously we are checking boxes in protocol. Regardless of the injury that he has, I don't have that answer today, right? We're going to go practice today. Obviously DJ will be taking those reps.

**Q. How confident are you in him based on what you saw on Saturday? If he was to start, his readiness and so forth.**

BILLY NAPIER: I think we would play a brand of football that reflects his experience and his strengths, right? No different than we do each week.

But I've got a ton of confidence in DJ. We've had him since January. He's a completely different person and player than he was when he first arrived. He's got a really good knowledge of our system. I do think coach to player helps a young quarterback, right? There's an advantage there that maybe you wouldn't have had a year ago.

Do you have something else?

**Q. The way Saturday shook out, does that make you question the roster construction methods? Miami obviously was much more aggressive in the portal and has been. Do you feel you could have improved the roster faster doing it more similarly to the way they did it?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, a lot of things contribute to those decisions, right? It's not necessarily like, Okay, this is our philosophy, this is how we're going to go do it.

I think there's a number of factors that contribute to your ability and strategy in terms of how you build a roster, right? We've got our fair share of success in the portal, as well.

I think ultimately, specifically the quarterback I would say is the main difference maker. We've been in that situation before. We went and got Graham Mertz.

**Q. How are you dealing with the negative reaction? How are you weathering that?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, again, we've got a responsibility to represent this place, and we need to do it better. I keep it very blunt. I think as coaches we need to do our part to help the players. Obviously we have a handful of players that can play better, as well. Yeah, I mean, I think it's part of the job.

Ultimately I would tell you that whether it's failure or success, you're always managing that part of the job, regardless of where you're at.

I think it's critical that you set the tone from a leadership standpoint. You've got to be a really good example to the players. You try to keep it technical. You try to make 'em realize, When you do it right, you get a good return. When you make mistakes, when you're playing a really high-quality opponent, the margin of error is small, you get exposed. I think that's the message.

Look, here's the tape. Here's what you need to do better. Here's what we can do better to help you. I think we got to take all parts of the building and take ownership.

Yeah, I mean, it's part of the job.

**Q. How hard is a bunker mentality in 2024? When you had a staff of nine people, two GAs, there wasn't a lot of people. A huge staff, a lot of young guys on social media, devices out 24/7. How do you have a bunker mentality these days?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think you'd be surprised. I mean, it's the world that young people grow up in today. When it's good, it's good. When it's bad, it's bad.

I would tell you the season is probably a little easier than the off-season, to be quite honest, because you have a task that's right in front of you that you can focus on. You have an immediate opportunity to go maybe change the result.

I joke around all the time. I think young people are more resilient than the adults are to some degree. They're used to it. Maybe we're not.

But yeah, I mean, you're going to get criticism when you perform the way we did Saturday in certain parts of our team.

**Q. Technical sounds easy, I'm sure it's not. Is the emotional part for you hard to try to maybe flush that stuff and present the side that you want to present to**

**the team?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it is probably one of the bigger challenges you have as a head coach in terms of turning the page. How do you filter the results? How do you evaluate the game, especially when it's negative?

I would tell you one of the other big challenges. When you do win, but maybe you were sloppy and you didn't play well, that's another big challenge. They're all happy-go-lucky.

Reality is, I can remember standing up here when we beat Utah the first year. Look, I know everybody thinks we're going to win the Super Bowl this year, but we have things that we have to clean up as a team, right?

I would say this. There is no better learning experience than game experience. I mean, there's an old military line: We can have a lecture about bullets flying, and we can talk about that for years, but when you're in there and the bullets are flying, I think that's the scenario where the consequences become real.

I played on championship teams. I've been a part as a coach on national championship teams, SEC championship teams, conference and division champions. Very rarely did we win every single game.

I think ultimately a loss early can be a blessing if you don't waste it.

One thing I can say is we have a group that's working hard. I do think that we have character. We got to go to work on the football part. I think we got to become a more consistent team and we have to execute better.

If we can focus on those things and not necessarily what some guy in his basement is saying in rural central Florida on social media, then we got a chance to get better, right? I think that's the key.

Sometimes you deserve criticism. I think that's one of those things I would say I have no excuses, right? We got to go get it fixed.

**Q. Anything you saw on film after analyzing the film that was uncharacteristic from what you'd seen in the fall?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I just think offensively we weren't very clean. We weren't very precise. I think we pressed a little bit. I think overall every position group, the running back group had a solid day, but I think all the other position groups can be much better, in my opinion, based off what

I've been observing in practice.

**Q. Route running, depth, things like that?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, 100%.

**Q. You said a loss early can be a blessing if you don't waste it. What gives you confidence this program cannot waste this one?**

BILLY NAPIER: I just think we've got the group of players that we have. I mean, I think observing them. We had almost the entire team came to the building yesterday when they were off, right? I think that's a good example of the type of group that we have here.

Yeah, I mean, look, they're embarrassed. That's reality, right? I said it postgame. I think they know they're capable of better.

Look, got every opportunity. A lot of football left here. I think that's what we got to do. We got to focus on the next opportunity.

**Q. Did the result cause you to look at any of the specific game prep process? Changes that you think you need to make immediately? What were your thoughts on how the week leading up went?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think offensively I was a little surprised, to be quite honest with you. I thought we'd play much better. That's just the honest truth.

I do think defensively there's a lot of good on the tape. I think Miami, the quarterback's a really good player. I think he played a heck of a game, made some exceptional throws. He's a challenge. They got a good group of skill. They did a nice job protecting him.

I do think the kicking game was impressive. We got work to do.

**Q. What is DJ going to have to do to accelerate his readiness this week?**

BILLY NAPIER: You would like to think that he just finished preparing as if he was one play away from being out there. I think ultimately that's what we try to do for the backup, is create an environment where every day is a challenge, just like you're going to have to run out there and be the starter the entire week. That's what we've always challenged the backup to do.

Look, you got to start your week as if you're going to be the guy, knowing that the entire building is going to be



depending on you when you get that opportunity. Really that applies to all backups.

I think you want a culture where the backup is working consistently as if he may have to play because this is a game where players get hurt. I think the depth you have at every single position - not just quarterback - it's key that you got that type of culture and how you prepare them for the game each week.

**Q. You said no excuses. How would you evaluate yourself from a play-calling standpoint first four or five drives in the game?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think offensively as a whole, the entire approach there, every part of our building is being quality controlled every day. I think that part is obviously part of the equation, right?

I think in general here, this is no different than the itinerary from Friday, Saturday, what we can do better from a travel perspective. Every part of our building is being evaluated.

**Q. What would it mean for DJ to get a full game? How would that expedite his maturation?**

BILLY NAPIER: Just the fact that he got to play a couple possessions the other day. Then to see him realize like, Okay, now I know what it's like out there. I think we dealt with that a little bit with some of the freshmen that had to play last year, right?

But yeah, I mean, I was a player. I can still remember the first time I ran out there against William & Mary on the road as a redshirt freshman. We got control of the game. I'm out there playing. There's no substitute. It's imprinted in your mind.

Side story. I got a concussion in that game, too (smiling).

I think there's no substitute for that, right? I think in particular at quarterback, I think it's just really valuable.

**Q. How did the dynamic work with Russ up in the box?**

BILLY NAPIER: Russ has done a good job leading the offensive staff. He's taken some things off of my plate. He's a bright young coach. Certainly it's been good to see him be more involved. I think definitely a positive to have him up there and have his eyes, for sure.

**Q. Is he calling plays at all or a collaborative effort?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think all of that is going to be determined

based off of how we perform. I think his role, we want to give him a bigger piece of the pie. We've done that. I think each week we evaluate that accordingly.

**Q. How would you evaluate Pup Howard's play?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think Pup did a lot of good things. I think Pup has leadership traits. I think he's mature. He's big, range-y. I thought he played well.

I think the linebacker group as a whole did a lot of good things. We've got to be a little bit better in some of our zone coverage drops. That was one of the issues that we had in the game.

Pup has a bright future, for sure.

**Q. How do you evaluate safety play? Did it come together the way you thought it would?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think that overall there was some good there. I think some of our issues, we had some man-to-man miscommunications. We had some underneath zone coverage communication. Some of the extended plays where we need to stick on guys when the quarterback extends the play.

But again, I think it's never as good, never as bad on defense as you think. I think they played well. The quarterback I think is an exceptional player. But I think we've got a chance to have a good unit on defense. I really believe that.

**Q. How was the communication on that side of the ball?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think we played clean. I think the execution part, I don't think we had any issues there. Coach to player was smooth. I think the tablet on the sidelines was a huge benefit. I think we executed the game day weekend. I think overall it went really well.

Got to play better.

**Q. A lot of concern about Montrell in fall camp. To see him perform the way he did, how much confidence does that give you going forward?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, he's great. Obviously had a minor scope. It's one that people have overcome. No surprise that he came back quicker than most. His self-discipline, his work ethic, his toughness. The guy's just an experienced player. I think he went over 2500 yards Saturday. He's one of the best leaders that we have in terms of his example. I mean, he's what you want.

that.

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**Q. You talked about previous experiences in your coaching career. Is there any that you can point to where the initial game just wasn't really great, but as the season progressed things got turned around? Is that something you can recall and draw from?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I mean, we had a handful of losses. Alabama in the first half of the season. I think that gave you a chance to kind of recenter just from an urgency standpoint that I think allowed us to get the most out of our team.

We had a number of times there where we slipped up early in the year, and it ended up being a positive just because I think it got everybody's attention.

I think the same at Louisiana. We had a couple of losses early in the season that makes it real. Hey, look, we've got to be at our best or we're going to face the consequences. It kind of puts your back against the wall a little bit in terms of long-term, some of your goals.

Again, there's no substitute.

**Q. Can you point to one particular key that really drove the message home?**

BILLY NAPIER: You (indiscernible) the truth. I think ultimately player ownership. Certain parts of your building realize that, Hey, look, I got to pick it up. My piece of the pie maybe didn't come to play. So my contribution to the staff, my contribution to the team, like, I need to go to work and do my job better, right?

I think 'all hands on deck' in that regard. If you're doing it right, everybody contributes and everybody feels as if they can make a difference, right?

What I would hope is happening right now, no matter if I'm the equipment guy or I'm the strength coach or offensive line graduate assistant, I'm thinking about, Man, in that 10-day prep, what could I have done better that maybe would have affected the outcome to some degree?

I think it's just a challenge to each part of your building, each person, not only football players now, we're talking about staff members as well. You got to use it. I think that's the key.

**Q. NFL fines its defenders for roughing the passer, late hits on the quarterback. Are you at that point where you're able to fine these guys for that?**

BILLY NAPIER: No. We technically aren't allowed to do

