

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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## Coach Billy Napier Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Okay, a lot of good Saturday. Obviously different level of competition. We all understand that. But I think overall, the mindset and the attitude of the team I think was in a good place.

Ton of appreciation for the leadership the players showed, I think in particular the last few days of the week. Sometimes you play those games and you worry about your team and how they're going to start.

I thought we were ready to play.

So rookie quarterback obviously making his first start. I think that we challenged all the players, every position group, to kind of raise their level of play and rally around him.

I think we did that, and certainly he did his part and had a heck of a day. A lot of good. I do think there are areas to clean up. We have to continue to become more efficient. We have to control the things that we can control. We have to continue to develop our team, right? Fundamentals have got to continue to improve. The communication was better, but I think there is another level out there.

And overall, we were fortunate we got to play a lot of players. We do have a bunch of young players that I think are talented enough to be a factor and make our team more challenging as we go throughout the season.

So SEC play starts this week. A&M and Coach Elko has a good football team. Has always done a really good job on defense. Extensive history of having a really salty unit there. This one is no different.

Very talented in all levels of defense. Couple marquee players in the front. The running back group is talented and the quarterback is a veteran player who has arm talent. They got a big group up front. They have height, length, and speed and good specialists, so they can do things on special teams that can cause problems for you.

This will challenge all parts of our team. It's great to be back at home, and I know our players are anxious to get back out there and play again. Much like every week in our league, this will require us to be at our best.

**Q. How does DJ's performance and the element he brings to the offense change how you're going to handle routes and things at practice? I doubt he was taking many first team reps for example before the Miami game.**

BILLY NAPIER: Right. Well, I think our intention the entire time has been to play DJ in every game. He gets a little bit more experienced each week, and certainly for him to have the opportunity to be the starter, prepare with the ones and then go play, and the way he did that, the poise, composure, it shows that he's ready to do what we intended to with him going forward.

So it's a blessing to have two really good quarterbacks, and certainly one with a ton of experience and one without, but there is no doubt both these guys will make us harder to defend. We intend to use both of them.

**Q. Have you had that situation as a head coach? Looking back, at least your seven years, but even maybe as an assistant where you had to kind of like manage some reps? Looks like Levi in 2018, like 500 yards passing, and that's the most you had with a backup.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, and that year Levi was a freshman and we played him, we made a commitment to play him a certain amount in every game. It proved beneficial because in year two, three, four he was the starter and we won a lot of football games.

So he was talented enough and different than a starter in year one at UL, and I think that he had presence about him and the ability to affect the team, inspire confidence and helping the team very similarly to the way DJ goes about it.

I think it's a good comparison, and certainly I think we were committed to that. Not only because it was the best thing for that team, but also it was the best thing for the future of

the team.

**Q. You mentioned the game management piece for DJ, an area you want to see him make strides. How would you assess how he handled that Saturday, and is there another level you would like to see a little bit more out of him moving forward?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think he did a good job in the two-minute before the half in terms of understanding the situation. Not a ton of stressful dynamics in terms of where the score was at, the third downs, some of the things that happened in the red area.

For the most part a lot of normal down concepts. We protected him well, both in five, six, seven man pro. Moved the pocket. He played pretty clean.

I do think coach to player helps in that regard. Overall he did his part. He was lights out in the Friday walk-through. Graham did a great job with him in the second half of the week. Had some walk-throughs with him himself I think at the hotel on Friday night.

It's awesome to see those guys working together as teammates to help do what's in the best interest of the team, so he was really sharp.

**Q. Jadan Baugh real quick, just giving him other opportunities after that early recall fumble, what was your message to him after an unsavory play like that?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, it's a simple fundamental. It's what we call a stumble bump scenario, star drill. These are things that we drill sometimes daily during spring ball and training camp. It's a situation where he's off balance, guy puts his helmet on the ball, he's got one hand on the ball, the wrist is below the elbow.

So he's a young back. He is obviously talented. He did a good job in the game. He turned the ball over, right? So he has to learn how to play with those fundamentals in the heat of the competition.

But he has to keep his head up. He's a young player. A lot of football in front of him. I think you saw the culture in that running back room when you saw all five of those guys go to him on the sideline.

I think that group, they've got a good healthy dynamic in that room. Coach Juluke is one of the best in the country at that position. He'll be better for it. It's probably good that it happened to him when there wasn't necessarily a ton of consequence.

It's important to him, and you can see that with his demeanor and how he approached the rest of the game.

**Q. Is (indiscernible) actually cleared now?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think there is one more step we have to go through. So I think today he'll be -- this is his noncontact practice and then we'll have another punch list to go through there.

**Q. Another year of coaching in the SEC. What do you think you learned from your first two years in the league, and how much do you present to your team also as a reset, that that's a goal to chase?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, every team can beat you; you can beat every team. I think the big thing is like every team has a handful of players, different positions, that are elite, that are mismatch issues that are unique. You have to neutralize those players, find the weak areas, try it attack those areas.

And ultimately you got to minimize error. The margin of error is really small and I think it's important. You can't give the other team anything. Got to make them earn everything, and certainly A&M hits that category. They have a bunch of explosive players. It's a big, tall, long, fast, twitchy team that can create issues for you.

**Q. The casual fan looks at how DJ played the other night and says, why is Graham still going to be at starter? Help us understand the thought process there.**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think that there has been a lot of these dynamics over the years in terms of having a veteran player who is accomplished, had a good career, coming back in a leadership role. Then you have this young talent. We all knew he was very talented from the beginning of his recruitment.

So, look, we're going to do what's in the best interest of the team. I think both these players can make our team better. I think that's what we intended to do. The great thing is there is a great relationship there, confidence, humility from both guys, and a healthy respect from the team and staff for both players.

**Q. Do you think there is a benefit in playing DJ series or plays? How did you do that in 2018? Did you break it down?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, yeah. Well, I think that's where the gamesmanship is. I don't want to put the playbook on the streets here, but ultimately the guy is one of our better

players. We're going to give him an opportunity to impact the game and contribute to the team.

That's our intension.

**Q. ...what type of dynamic does that create in this matchup. His familiarity with you and yours him?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, first of all, I think Coach Bateman is a good football coach. He's had a tremendous track record as a coordinator and you pair that with Coach Elko, the makeup of that staff, their identity as a defense. They're very sound in what they do. I think they force you to execute, and I think they take away the easy stuff and then obviously defend the deep part of the field at the same time.

So a little bit of a chess match there. For the most part, good fundamental football matchups, much like I see every week in this league.

**Q. How did DJ handle check downs Saturday knowing he's coming into a game like this with Elko who is considered pretty much an elite playcaller on defense?**

BILLY NAPIER: So, yeah, I would think that's an area where I felt DJ, outside of a handful of plays, did a good job. I think he forced one into coverage. We ended up getting a DPI on the play, but I think there was an area there where he could continue through the progression.

For the most part he was clean. I think he had one mental error on the day. Forced one into coverage. You know, handful of things from a game management standpoint. For a rookie, overall good day.

**Q. Did he exceed your expectation?**

BILLY NAPIER: I was impressed with the vertical pass game. I thought he was very accurate down the field. Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately that's probably the poise on Friday and then just his ability to throw completions, to do what he's been coached to do, take what the defense gives him, and when given an opportunity to make an explosive, he was able to do that.

Credit the protection and the skill routes in getting open. I think we did it all well and the point of emphasis worked. Hey, look, rookie quarterback first start. Everybody has to raise their level of play around him, and I think we did that for the most part.

**Q. How much will that play into the evaluation process going forward? Again, I think 14 plays of 30 or more all year, and Lagway had 6 on Saturday night.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think there is something -- all of this is part of the dynamic, right? I think if we played the Chicago Bears Saturday be a different story. That's no insult to Samford.

Another poor choice of words there. So I guess what I would say is, look, I'm ecstatic. We have a good young player in the building. We all know he's very talented, so I'm hopeful that he can do that on every stage against any opponent. That would be the hope.

Again, I go back to what I've always told you guys: got to play good around the quarterback. Got to protect him. Got to get open. Got to have balance. Got create a plan that they can execute.

We did that Saturday. We have to do that over and over and over the rest of the year.

**Q. What element does Elijah Badger bring to the offense?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think he's getting more confident, comfortable in the system. I think just reality that he can do it. He's made some plays. I think he's getting into a little bit of a routine. Yeah, at receiver I think confidence is huge, right?

And then going back to work. I think Coach Gonzáles has done a good job. Billy G has done a great job detailing up his game. I think that was a big point of emphasis week one to week two with all receivers and tight ends. Just the precision and the detail and all the route running.

I thought it did. The he ran -- sometimes at receiver you play 40 plays, you catch three balls, you run 16 routes. Are all 16 of those routes precise with detail? Did you get open? You may not have got open, but are you at the right step, depth? Ran a good quality route and I think he's getting closer.

He has to continue to take a few more steps.

**Q. How has Kelby Collins progressed at interior defensive lines, and what are some steps he can take to increase his usage and continue to thrive at that position?**

BILLY NAPIER? Kelby is still young player. He got only playing time last year. He made the position move to F to end. I think that he's getting used to playing in a position to where he's getting doubles; fundamentals; the little things matter; playing with your hands; being able to anchor; transition into secondary rush. All those things matter.

I think he's in the process of that development, so we're hopeful he'll continue to improve and get better and ultimately practice in a way that translates to the game.

**Q. Assess the defense as a whole. Rough week one, but looked to be improved in week two. Just overall, schematics and communication, after watching the film, did that show up on tape as well?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's very similar to what we've discussed about all parts of our team. I think we'll learn as we go. Again, I think the fundamentals are good. I think we were on the same page more often this past week. The communication was better. I think we ironed out a few wrinkles.

Ultimately I think we have the height, length, speed, and experience to have a good unit. We've got to defend the run. We've got to limit the explosives and then do a good job in the situations. Conversion downs, red area.

Again, I think we've got a chance to be a good unit as the season goes. We definitely need to improve for sure.

**Q. Looking back at your career as an assistant and through head coach, have you had a quarterback with the kind of arm talent that DJ has had that you can compare to?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we've had a lot of good players. I think this guy, he can put you down there. There is no doubt. The accuracy is what impressed me.

You know, I think it's one thing to be able to throw it. It's another thing to be able to throw it into small windows in the vertical part of the field.

Yeah, I think pretty special. Obviously to do it multiple times in one game I think was good for the offense. We need that.

**Q. Is there one you compare it that you had on your ball clubs?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. No, I mean, this guy is unique. Jalen Hurts was a runner. You know, maybe developed more as he went as a passer. Coker, we won a lot of games with him, McCarron. You know, Clemson we had Tajh Boyd, we had Charlie Whitehurst.

Anthony Richardson, I think he's from a different planet. No, you saw that throw that he made Saturday. That's a whole different world. Anthony is still a young football player, right? I believe that that guy, the more football he

plays the more he's going to make highlights like that every week.

So, yeah, Anthony Richardson can throw it. I've never seen a guy that can throw it like that. Look, let's not get out in front of ourselves here. This is a team game. For us to go where we want to go we need every part of our team to continue to grow and develop and play their best football this week.

**Q. Speaking of the players around the quarterback, you mentioned the competition along the offense line. Austin Barber can be in for a higher amount the snaps. The rotating against Samford, was that still in a desire to assess your options around the quarterback there?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we're still trying to figure out what the best lineup is there. Look, we need to get better. That group has to play better. I think we took a step in the right direction. We practiced better.

Obviously the competition level was different, right? So this week we'll face a huge challenge and that will be a big part of the game. Up front on offense can we answer the bell and show up and play a certain brand of football. When we have to protect, we have to do our job in that regard.

The offensive line needs to continue to grow and develop and improve as the season goes for sure.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, they're all must-win at a place like this. Look, we welcome it. I welcome it. I think it's part of the challenge. You come to a place like this to compete in this league. You dream of it.

So, yeah, you spend an entire off-season getting ready for it. I love every part of it, so bring it on. That's part of the business. Part of the profession.

It's what makes the week fun. We got practice today. We're preparing to compete against another team. So that's part of the leadership challenge and navigating some of those things on the outside. That's part of it.

I think you got to know who you are independent of football. That's key. I think you got to have a set of values and conviction you believe in, and you got to do your best for the team.

Ultimately that's my responsibility, do the best job I can for the team.

**Q. I know you address injuries on Wednesday, but how confident are you in some of the reserve defensive backs there?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, we're hopeful to get a few guys back. I think that's part of it. So obviously you know, I'm not commenting on injuries at the current point in time. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday night, then 90 minutes before the kick you'll get an assessment where we are.

Hopefully get a couple guys back and have some depth there. We'll have contingency plans, who's the next best corner, safety, much like we did last week. Just might be a different guy this week.

**Q. You mentioned DJ. Did you plan to use him against Miami and the game got out of hand? How do you prevent that for Texas A&M or do you say, hey we're going to get him in early and get his feet wet in case something happens?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, there were other things that contributed to kind of how this first half went, you know, in terms of DJ, but all that is secondary. Look, that's in the past. This is a new week, new opponent. These what we're focused on. We can't do anything to change what's happened in the past.

Got to spend all our energy on the current competition and game as we prepare this week.

**Q. ...added to the offensive game planning. I know he's in the booth.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, ton of experience. I think he has knowledge of this league, the coordinators in this league, the type of football that works in this league.

Yeah, just a great, great person. No ego. Has conviction. Will give you an opinion, say what he thinks. We all want that as leaders and coaches, and he certainly has done that.

Very accomplished if you look at his career. Been a head coach. Another good resource in the building. We're thankful he's here.

**Q. Did he basically replace the role from...**

BILLY NAPIER: That's been a couple years ago. No, I mean, I think he was a guy that we had an opportunity to add to the staff. You know, much like a lot of those analysts across the country, they have different contract scenarios. Live nearby, and loves ball, wants to be a part of a staff and contribute to a team. I think Dan loves

football. Loves being a part of a team.

We had some common relationships and it worked out.

**Q. The fact that he had worked with Lefever, one of the great dual threat quarterbacks who ever played the game, did that play into hiring him?**

BILLY NAPIER: Really just Dan's expertise. He coached a lot of the great quarterbacks. Called a lot of good plays. I can remember when he was at Arkansas back in the day and they were a handful. There is some system carryover because he's been in Alabama in the past. Just the overall year-round plan, how we do things, the familiarity there.

So he's coached, just like you mentioned, there has been a lot of great ones. He's done a good job. Made our staff better for sure.

**Q. Obviously when Nick Saban speaks people listen. He kind of insinuated the culture here needs to improve. Is that off base, or do you think there is a little bit of validity to that?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think big picture-wise, you know, I think that we need to experience some success on the field. I think ultimately, I would say that's where we need to take the next step.

I think once we do that, much like any culture, it is -- it's being built until it gets established. Hey, it works, it's working.

I think sometimes, yeah, ultimately we're in year three and there is an effort to establish some expectations and culture. I think we're closer. Ultimately winning helps kind of galvanize that in terms of belief and hope, players having success.

We've been close. I think ultimately that's what we got to go.

**Q. Jaydon Hill come backs. You didn't have to coach against your former players back in the day, right? They transferred. You could block where they transferred. Is that part of it now, that you're going to face guys that used to be on your roster? Etienne; Ole Miss has a few this year.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we had a couple at Louisiana that we played against in the past; other schools, too. Just another day in college football, right? Used to be just coaches, now it's players, too.

Look, it's part of the dynamic. Happens in the NFL. Heck,

probably happens more in high school football than college football or the NFL.

It's every level of football. So it is what it is.

**Q. Nick Saban said this before the Samford game now, but said he didn't know that Florida had an elite quarterback or elite playmakers, what would you say to that?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, it's to be determined. We got to go prove it. I think that's who we are. We got to go prove it. We have a lot to prove, and certainly going to have every opportunity to do it.

This will be the next opportunity, Saturday at 3:30.

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