

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER. ...one of the things I was able to do last week, had an opportunity to get involved with the Fixel Institute on campus. My dad passed away I think last week would have been seven years ago from ALS, Lou Gerig's Disease, I became aware and familiar with the Fixel Institution committee after meeting Lee Fixel who's a grad and investor.

So becoming more familiar with that. I think it's one of about a dozen elite centers throughout the country that does incredible work on these neurological diseases, whether that is Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, ALS, there is a number of categories there.

Was involved with a fundraiser, and tremendous amount of respect for the work they're doing on campus here. To know that's five minutes from here is pretty special. Thankful for that opportunity, and hopefully they continue to grow and there is more opportunities for research and how to improve care.

Really impressive place.

I do think our football team got better. We had three really good practices Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I think the staff and the players did a great job competing. I think they competed; all three days were very competitive. One of the better open dates I've been a part of. I think we're hopeful we improved in a lot of areas that can help our team going forward.

This week is a big week. UCF obviously in-state opponent right down the road that's recently made the jump into the BigXII and P4 football.

And they have a very established staff. You know, I think Coach Malzahn just a tremendous amount of respect for his career, all that he's accomplished as a head coach and offensive coordinator.

Their identity as a team reflects that. He's a really good coach. Their rushing attack, the quarterback run game, the three level shots, the complementary plays, really a

challenge there for our defense.

And I think Ted Roof has been around the block and got tremendous experience as a coordinator, and I think they have good personnel on defense.

Special teams, very much a game plan outfit. Can cause some headaches for you. I do think they have an explosive returner, so got a good football team coming into The Swamp on Saturday night.

We're looking forward to competing with these guys.

What do we get?

Q. Another sellout At the Swamp. The importance of maybe capturing that, getting off to a quick start, how important is that going to be for the team?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think starting fast is critical to playing winning football. Certainly when you play at home, if we're able to get the crowd into the game, it's a big piece of puzzle.

There is no doubt that will be one of the keys to playing winning football Saturday night. We got to start fast and get our fans involved, and I think that we did that a little bit better at Mississippi State. I think that was a big part of the game.

Q. What were some of the fingers that you think you put your finger on defensively during the bye week that you feel like you addressed and got fixed?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we were a little closer the last time we were out, but still I think between-play process, I think playing against tempo, I think that overall, that group needs a little bit more consistency.

I think our ability to do it down in, down out; did a good job on third down at times. Like we talked about before, there is four, five possessions in the game where it's like we disappear. Whether it was the tempo possession where they scored in the first half and the two-minute possession right before the half.

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Those are two examples of where we are playing really good defense for a half and two possessions where we kind of fall apart.

So all the research that we did in this past week, alignment, assignment, techniques, fundamentals, those are the areas we spent a lot of time on this past week.

Q. How close are you to getting your team healthy again? You had stated that the bye week would be good for that.

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's to be determined a little bit. I do think we got a couple guys back. I think given the current format of injuries and availability reports and all that, we're not commenting specifically.

I do think it was good for our guys to have a couple days off. We didn't coddle them. I will tell you that. It was real in there for three days.

So we worked extremely hard Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday in full pads. We got after it. I think committed to giving them Friday and Saturday off, and then we were back in the building yesterday.

So I think we're closer. I think obviously we're not commenting specifically about injuries, but I do think it was a good week for us.

Q. Your involvement with the scout team and maybe on the defensive side, do you continue that? Ramp it up? Maybe set the tone and back off and see what they do?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think we'll be intentional about making sure that that environment is what we want it to be, you know, and really just support the players. Their opinion matters, and I think, you know, no matter if it's right or wrong sometimes, you got to listen.

I think the big thing is some of the things that we emphasized helped our team. I think we have to continue to do that. So there will be even more of that.

Ultimately, we have a very specific plan in terms of how we think we can come up with solutions for some of those things.

Q. Making changes personnel-wise, are there some -- a couple guys that maybe popped in the Mississippi State game?

BILLY NAPIER: You know, I mean, I think a guy that I

thought has been very productive, Jack Pyburn has had a lot of production. I think he played in that game well.

He would be a guy that would be at the top of the list in my opinion.

You know, I think some of the young backers are good players. You know, they continue to get a little bit better. We saw those guys take a step in the right direction last week.

And then we have to generate some form of a pass rush. We have to find a way to affect the quarterback and I think that's an area where we are evaluating all the personnel that we're trying to use, especially on third down.

And then we got very technical things that we're working on, scramble drills, you know, I think just in general some situations.

Overall, I think the personnel is always up for evaluation.

Q. You mentioned kind of putting extra emphasis on listening to the players. Anything in particular that you heard from them that maybe you didn't expect or that kind of jumped out?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I mean, I wouldn't say there is -- we always have great dialog. I meet with this group at 1:30 today. I think we got a smart, aware group. I think ultimately they understand and they want to come up with solutions, too. I think they take a tremendous amount of pride in what they do.

Overall, I think it's a part of leadership, is just you're trying to empower your people. I think at all levels, staff included, right? I think ultimately.

So we'll continue to do that.

Q. How many do assignment and alignment issues on defense force to you simplify in terms of scheme trying to fix those things at this point in the season versus retraining and establishing what you already had?

BILLY NAPIER: I think it's a combination of both. I think you're spot on. There is some of that maybe less is more, but also I think there is a teaching element to that and then there is an application in a game setting.

I think how do we recreate the game for the players? I think we been doing that. I would just say on offense. For example, that's one of the things we do extremely well. Our scout team environment resembles the game in a lot

of ways.

Justin Posthuma is the in-house defensive coordinator, so he's in charge of recreating the game for the offensive players throughout the week. I will tell you he does a phenomenal job. We are trying to do the same things for special teams and defense.

Q. You talk about not coddling them last week. How much do you challenge this team physically with a run heavy team in UCF?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I would tell that you it was extremely competitive last week. It was a lot of fun to be quite honest, and I think you'll have a chance to talk with the players they can give you more insight into that.

Yeah, thought it was phenomenal. Physical. It was fast. It was game-like. It was very competitive. It was scored. It was graded.

I mean, it was a lot of fun to be a part of. Hopeful that we got better. I feel as if we got better last week.

Q. You guys played KJ Jefferson, who gives that you look on the scout team?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I don't know that we can replicate 6'3", 261 pounds, but, yeah, I do think we have made a cutup of that game, those scenarios that we were in, just the physical challenge of getting the guy down.

Not only when he's a passer that's extending the play, but also when he's a design runner. He's a big man and there is a certain -- it's part of the challenge of playing against a player like that.

So we definitely have made cutups and are trying to teach and anticipate that from the player as standpoint.

Q. UCF seems intent on and capable of running the football. What have you seen from them on tape, and talking to your guys about the important of your run fits and keeping them condition contained and in front of you?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, the quarterback is involved in all the elements of the run game. That's the ultimate challenge. Gus does a really good job. It's almost wing T/option blueprint here in terms of dive quarterback pitch, all the read elements, whether it's zone read, power read.

And then they have a series of perimeter plays that go with that. I think the three level routes, there is a ton of eye discipline. Got to be sound on the edges. It's typical.

Coach Malzahn does a phenomenal job. There is a lot of the conflict and that's going to be a big part of the week. Narrowing our focus a little bit, making sure we're all buttoned up and ready to go.

Q. Anything you can take last year from the Arkansas game and KJ in terms of tendencies, or different offense, different scheme?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, it's different, completely different world. I mean, the issues that he can create because he's a big man, ultimately I think that's what you take away from a that game.

A lot of the players on our team now were out there in those situations last year. So we have a ton of awareness.

Q. You had a great running back in Harvey, who can hit it on the inside and get that second level and then boom, he's gone. How do you deal with a guy like that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, he's very similar to a player that we've had here in the past I would compare him to. This guy has a low center of gravity. He is elusive. He has some bulk to his frame. He can make you miss on the second level.

You know, I think he's got really good instincts and vision. He's patient. When he does get loose, he can really set you up. Does a nice job jump cutting. Good player.

They have got several backs. They got a multitude of backs. You pair that with the quarterback element, and that's ultimately where the challenge is.

Q. Were you able to watch any of the Alabama-Georgia game?

BILLY NAPIER: I did, I watched it.

Q. When you see that, do you get like a fan in anyway, or from a coach do you just analyze X and O? Is that daunting in a way to see the level where they are and how close do you think Florida is to getting there?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I mean, I think both of those rosters are very talented. That's evident. I think we played against Georgia a handful of times. We're familiar with them. All these players we have a pulse for because we evaluated them and tried to recruit some of them.

So, yeah, I've spent five years there. Going and playing there on the road is a challenge, much like a lot of the places in our league, much like coming to our place and

playing.

An open date is good for a lot of reasons, right? You get a pulse for college football, and you also quickly realize everybody has their own set of issues.

So I think the key is we got continue to improve who are we going to be as we go through the rest of this thing. Can we get better? Can we fix some of our solutions? Can some of our players play their best football? Can some young players come a line? I think we have a couple players improving that can help our team down the stretch.

Q. 30th game here at Florida. Where do you feel like the program has made the most strides? And I know the results aren't what you wanted, but what is it going to take it flip that script a little?

BILLY NAPIER: Ultimately, I think we have built a lot of good systems in terms of in-house how we operate, overall the workflow, everything is up and running. Maybe that wasn't the case when we first got here.

I think we've done a good job adjusting to the landscape. For every six months we were here in the beginning it just continued to change. But, yeah, I think we've got more depth. I think the makeup of our team, just don't have a ton of headaches day in and day out relative to their decision making, character.

I feel really good about that part. But ultimately I think we've had this conversations many times. We got to go produce on the grass. Twice this year we didn't play up to our potential in my opinion.

We need to continue to focus on what is going to help us perform better. I think ultimately, any time we spend on anything else is a waste of time. We got to get consumed with things that will get the result we want and try to be process oriented. That's what we're trying to do.

Q. Is player experience, something you didn't really mention, but the improvements there with housing, parking, meals, recruiting visits...

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, that's part of it. I think much like anything you take over, you come in, you do your homework, try to improve your product. We're not only trying to improve the player experience. We're trying to improve the product we recruit to.

All these things add up. I do think the administration has done a great job in a lot of areas to give us better facilities, resources. I think we have infrastructure. I do think our team is deeper and we're still -- I think we're very much a

work in progress.

And I don't think that's changing. I think it's always going to be that way.

Q. For decades it was the big three: Florida, Florida State, Miami. Is it the big four now with UCF? Are they on a level playing field with you guys?

BILLY NAPIER: I think they're in a transition. Ultimately, you can't help but respect what they've done. The coaching staff they have, they've done a good job recruiting. I think the portal helped benefit in a lot of ways.

But just overall the level of commitment, the BigXII is a good league. I think ultimately, they're in position to continue advancing. Ultimately the winner of that league is going to get a place at the table, right?

They're in position to do that.

Q. You talk about recruiting. Orlando has been a pretty fertile area. The importance of that game from that standpoint too, and just what Orlando means to the Gators in terms of recruiting.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think every part of this state a critical, in particular a place -- I mean, they are producing a consistent number of players. Some of our better players are from that area.

We got Gators down there. They're everywhere. Ultimately, all these games are important. When you play an in-state team, there is a ton of eyes on you and I think that caliber of football that you put on display is very important.

This is a big one, no doubt about that.

Q. On defense, what can you guys do within the scheme to stack the box more, shore up the run defense, especially against a team like this?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think the key is that we align correctly, everybody knows their assignment, and we go execute with the right fundamentals and techniques. Ultimately that's what we learned.

Obviously done a ton of homework having a little bit of extra time in the open date. Look, sometimes you're playing coverage and you got a light box. Sometimes you're playing post safety and you are short in coverage.

There is weaknesses with every defensive call. I think the key, that's part of the chess match, right, guessing right

and then understanding where your weaknesses are and then the players got to play to their leverage, help, and I think those are the areas we got to get better.

Q. Two quarterbacks obviously highly effective at Mississippi State. Did you learn more about that as you progress, I don't know if it's new to you, but it's unique.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, ultimately I think, yeah, Graham had a phenomenal week and that translated to playing really good in the game. DJ did a lot of good things too. Lead two scoring drives and two of them from backed up.

So, yeah, it's healthy. That's what I would tell you. I think they got a great relationship. It's fun to go to that room every day. Fun to be on the grass with them every day to see them work together, to prepare together.

You know, literally, they were just in -- they're going to be in this room here in short amount of time, right, doing work on this screen.

The big thing is the character of both guys. Their humility, selflessness, the confidence they have, and the way they affected their teammates in a positive way. That's the big thing. This can easily be a distraction or issue, but it's not because of the makeup of both players.

And like DJ will continue to get better. The more reps he accumulates in the game the better, and all of a sudden you're preparing a little bit different way.

I think it's healthy.

Q. How much is that going to continue to be the gauge and how does that make them both better, too?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, sure. Well, there is a competitive element to it because I'm watching them closely every week. You know, in terms of how they practice, how they perform in practice.

So and then how we decide to play the players that week. I think each matchup is a little bit different. Ultimately, each week of prep is different.

You know, so I think both players got better last week. I think they both took reps with both groups. So we're going to stick to our plan there. I think we'll do what we think those players are capable of doing when we call the game. That's an important part.

Q. ... I think it was ninth drive for DJ, is that knowing Graham doesn't have to look over his shoulder if he

had a because first drive, that they know what their plan is for the game? Is it frustrating when DJ goes in second play, fumbles, and he lost one of his drives?

BILLY NAPIER: We adjust. We didn't count the possession right before the half where we handed off an outside zone. You know, I think we start the half with Graham.

So we're going to adjust based off what we think is right. But I think week to week we'll set the rotation. I think ultimately for me, what I don't want is a guy to be playing cautious. I want him to do what he's supposed to do, have confidence in the play, be aggressive, and then they're working together and not looking over their shoulder worrying about if I screw up.

I just don't think that's good for either player. Now, if they were very similar in experience and age, you know, then -- and it was a true competition, then I think we probably would treat it that way. But we would make that decision in camp.

I think here we got a very unique dynamic. Got a guy who is one the best quarterbacks in the country. Then you got it young player who undoubtedly brings a level to the team that I think can help the team be better.

Q. You mentioned RJ Harvey, somebody you had a running back like him. Who was that?

BILLY NAPIER: He's playing at another school right now.

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