

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

Sunday, October 6, 2024

Gainesville, Florida, USA

## Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida Gators 24, UCF Knights 13

**BILLY NAPIER:** Okay. I think today was a product of a lot of hard work the past two weeks. I think we made a ton of progress in the open date. I know we talked specifically about that, but I can't compliment the players and the staff enough in terms of their attitude towards the work we've been doing the last two weeks and then I thought that carried over.

I think defensively, to hold this group to 108 yards rushing and to have really got after the quarterback a little bit, two big fourth down stops and we were really good on third down, you know, so I think defensively, took some steps in the right direction. We played a good half of football on offense. Felt both quarterbacks were really sharp. We had good balance. I thought that overall played some good situational football before the half and then we sputtered a little bit. They had the ball quite a bit in the second half and I think we had three real possessions and we struggled to move it.

A few undisciplined penalties that we need to clean up I think on offense, but overall I think the kids showed up with a mentality tonight and I'm very thankful for our players and how hard they've worked and for them to take that momentum we felt to the park tonight and play the way that we would want them to play and the way they want to play, right?

Now, we are still a work in progress. We've got a lot of areas where we need to continue to improve. We need to improve the football, and we need to continue to improve our mentality and approach. We had a lot of people throughout the entire organization that contributed. I think our scout teams did a great job, offense, defense, special teams. We got a lot of players that contribute during the week and I thought they did a really good job, so good day and we'll enjoy this thing tonight. We'll turn the page and get ready for the next one.

**Q. Staying on the defensive side, players were adamant that this would be a different defense we**

**would see tonight. It obviously was, 273 yards, five sacks as you alluded to. Other than the extra work, was this a little bit of a buy-in on the defensive side? A different, you know, confidence level for them?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Well, I think you have a staff that has worked extremely hard trying to come up with solutions. Really a lot of quality control, a ton of research in terms of -- because we felt like we anticipated being better, to be quite honest and we just didn't quite put it together in a couple of the games, so I think they did a good job, but more importantly, I think on the player end, there was a ton of ownership in terms of, hey, look, we can do better. What is the solution? And I think they collaborated. I think we did a good job in all parts to get to a solution there, but I do think the open date ultimately was where the flip was switched I think Wednesday after practice during that open date is where, again, I told you that was one of the best practices I've ever been a part of and I think it showed up. So we need more of it and certainly with a schedule we have we're going to have to play complementary football. And we know at some point around here if we're going to be a contender, we have to play championship level defense. And they know that, right? They know that. That's a part of our formula and I'm hopeful we can continue there.

**Q. Billy, another one on that, what specifically was effective with the run defense? I think that was the third lowest Gus has been held to since he's been at UCF.**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Well, I think that we played with better gap integrity. I think we got after it up front. I thought we tackled. There was a lot more pursuit, gang-tackle, knock back. I think we're on the same page and ultimately we played well on all three levels, I think got to do that if you're going to play good run defense. We're close to playing even better. There's a handful plays where the ball kind of rolls off the table or breaks contain. We could have definitely play better.

**Q. You said that the mentality the team showed up with. What was the kind of genesis of that besides just one practice on Wednesday. It's got to go deeper than**

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that.

BILLY NAPIER: Well, look. You guys obvious understand. These kids have been beat up pretty good here the first month of the season, you know. Ultimately I'm consumed with trying to put the players in the best position so that -- I've been watching these kids work since the beginning, the offseason, right? And I want them to have the gratification of the work that they've been doing, so we're looking to push every button.

Ultimately what we did is we said hey, let's call it. Let's put the ball down and let's compete. We divided the teams up differently for three days in a row based off production and performance, shuffled the deck and scored every single rep, created a ton of situations, played some move the field.

I think, again, it goes back to that between the play process for the defense. We just said hey, screw the scripts, call it live. Real play clock, let's work on that part. I think ultimately that's where -- and then it became very competitive, right? So, yeah, I think just the competition, the competitive experience, the practice environment. I think we leveled up a little bit in practice and I think that helped.

**Q. Two weeks ago you guys were booed off the field against Texas A&M. Today very different story. A lot of fans cheering. Obviously you've talked about not taking it personal hi with the fans but just how does it feel seeing all those happy faces and just a much better morale in the stands as you exit the field tonight.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, man, I think two things motivate me a lot. Ultimately my obligation, our obligation as a staff and organization to the players, you know? I want them to experience success. I want them to have the gratification that comes with playing football at a high level. I want to teach values while we're doing that, and then I would say I've always felt strongly like they pay you to do a job, you know?

You were brought here to do a job and you want to do the job for the people that believed in you and gave you a chance and then once you arrive you meet people, you continue to meet more and more people that care about this place that had special experiences here that want the place to have success and want to be in contention. And I've met so many great people that have great intentions that are passionate about this place and we want to do our job. That's what we were brought here to do, so both of those things motivate me. And I think ultimately allow me to keep perspective. And while we're doing it, we're going

to try to do it the right way.

**Q. A lot of contributions from younger players on defense, LJ McCray, Pup Howard, Bryce Thornton, his first interception. How encouraging is that to see and how have they taken advantage of their opportunities during practice and during the course of the season?**

BILLY NAPIER: Sure. Those guys continue to improve. They're very talented. There's so much to learn, you know, there's not only a physical component, you have to get bigger, stronger, you have to get in condition. You have to learn fundamentals and technique but there's also tons of mental to this game and I think those guys, it's starting to make sense. They've gotten some experience. They're starting to acquire reps. Those are adding up and then all of a sudden, they get out there and they make the most of their opportunity.

So there will be a compound effect to that. Now that they've been out there and had some success, they'll want to work harder in the future, so we, I don't know, we had a ton of young players that play for sure, but, again, I think we have 20 seniors maybe, so there's a bunch of players out there that are in their first, second, third, fourth year.

**Q. Billy, obviously you had DJ come in about every third or fourth drive today. Just talk about how you thought the two QB system worked throughout the game in the first half and the second half.**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think that we started fast. I think ultimately what a great drive. I think Graham made a bunch of plays in that first possession. We had some balance, a lot of conversions and then I think that if I'm not mistaken, DJ, we had to punt and maybe DJ comes in and two plays, the double move went around on the backside there, the slugger seam. Great throw, great catch, great route.

You know, I think we stuck with our plan. I do think that UCF gave us some game plan pressures. There was a lot of variables out there. There was a lot of new stuff, so I think they handled that well, but there's some plays that we would like to have back. I think both of them would tell you that, but if you look at the statistic, both of them were very efficient. The QBR numbers are really good. I think we could have done a better job on third down. I think we ended up 50%, but there's a handful of plays there where we can help them as a staff, but, yeah, I think both guys continue to get better and the leadership that they show and the way they work throughout the week, again, it's a very healthy dynamic for our team.

**Q. Coach, with the redshirt rule, there's been some**

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**opt-outs this week in college football. I think they had four or five. I don't think you had any. What do you attribute that to?**

BILLY NAPIER: I think we got a hungry team and I think these players, their time is consumed with how do we get better? What do we need to do to improve? I think they -- this is a group that has worked extremely hard and obviously they were very disappointed with some of the earlier performances so I think ultimately, this group is consumed with getting better, how can I do my job to make the team better, all levels of the team.

So, look, it's a product of our current system I think ultimately. So I have a ton of respect for the players on our team. We got a good group and I would just say any time that we waste on stuff like that is a waste of time. It's a distraction and I think we got some guys that don't want to be a distraction. They're here to work and improve.

**Q. Also, can you speak to the fact that anything can happen the rest of the season? You had Vandy beating Alabama today, Arkansas beating Tennessee. There's a lot of season left.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think it's one thing I've learned in my career, I think the cream will rise to the top. I think ultimately there's lots of things that happen early in the season. The key is can we stay focused on improvement? Can we bring the right attitude and focus and urgency and mentality to how we prepare, how we practiced? We have the self-discipline to hit the reset button when we wake up tomorrow and work as if we didn't have success. Sure we have some momentum but you have to have the right mix of humility and enthusiasm. Sometimes when you struggle you struggle to keep the enthusiasm part. When you have success, you need more humility, so two in a row, I'm hopeful this group will stay grounded here and certainly we know going to Knoxville next week will be a great challenge.

**Q. Billy, how close was Eugene to playing tonight? And then what did Aidan have going on and with those guys out, what did you think about the Tank stepped up?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think it was a big story line. Burke actually got banged up in pre-game and wasn't available, so here we go. Tank's running out there on the first play and he made some plays. I think he showed that he belongs so he stepped up in a major way. We do feel really good about Trey and Aidan's progress. I think we're just sticking to the protocol, the medical side, the sports science side there. Definitely looked great in pre-game. There was a part of me that said man, that joker looks like

he's ready to go, but a little bit of asymmetry there, but we anticipate him being available and we'll give you a -- there's no hiding anymore. Wednesday at 8:10:00 p.m., you'll have the information.

**Q. And the play of Bryce Thornton, the pass break up in the endzone on the first drive and the game sealing pick.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, Bryce has had a good couple of weeks I think obviously earned the opportunity to start, played a lot as a true freshman last year, I think just all three levels of the defense played better. I'll watch the tape and let you know what I think, but I think it's evident that we took a step in the right direction on defense.

**Q. After Montrell's touchdown there heading into half you called a time-out, trying to be aggressive, get the ball back. I think the fans enjoyed you getting fired up there after the running into the kicker call. What was your view on that and what were you trying to tell the referee about your opinion?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's a bang-bang play, right? It's a new rule this year with the rugby punter, they're trying to do a little better job, it's a very common play in our game. They're protecting the guy, so if he's not outside the pocket, then you can't rough the guy, right? Whereas -- and I think it's sometimes that can be very gray, right? Is the guy in or outside the pocket? So rugby punter we felt like maybe was outside the pocket.

So, you know, look, those guys got a hard job. We have a hard job. You have a hard job. Probably need to show a little bit more poise and composure there, but I was here to compete tonight, right? But I do think that it will be great to turn that in and ask for interpretation and those guys do a fantastic job, but, yeah, I think it is what it is.

**Q. Coach, how much did KJ Jefferson's performance last season against you guys, was that something that they took note of that was probably one of his best games last year, really had a lot of success, was that something that the guys really took note of and wanted to make a point in this game?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, familiarity with him as a player definitely was a factor. His ability as a runner and then when he is a passer, his ability to escape and extend. You started talking about stopping that offense, it starts with him. His -- the read game, all the elements, whether it's the zone read, the power read, him as a pure runner, as a Q draw game and then when he is a passer and you get an opportunity to finish on the guy, you got to wrap up and finish and do that with multiple players, so we did that well.

Thought the staff had a good plan and the players executed.

**Q. You mentioned the offense sputtering a little bit during the second half. Without going back and watching the film, just what did you observe that maybe led to that and was it anything that UCF corrected there at halftime?**

BILLY NAPIER: No, I think when we look back at it, there'll be some things we can clean up. Some of it is execution. Some of them we can help them as a staff. I think with got to some good stuff as we went there.

We had I think second and one in the red zone and we got a holding penalty. Ultimately I think we shot ourselves in the foot a little bit. I think ultimately when we look at it that's what it's going to be. And we only had it three times, right? So they really chewed up the clock and had some long possessions.

**Q. How much did you feel like the bye week's competitiveness maybe sharpened play along the lines of scrimmage. You guys had five sacks but also you didn't allow any tonight which was significant.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think every part of our team got better because of the intensity of practice, just to be very blunt. I mean, it was competitive, right? And I think it needed to be. It's different approach to an open date unlike any approach we've ever taken in the past. I'm not sure I won't do it any different in the future and, look, we took some of those same parameters and applied it to Tuesday, Wednesday in the good-on-good sessions and that was very competitive.

So this is a developmental game, it's a habit-building, practice environment game and I think ultimately we've learned a lot and I'm thankful for our staff and our players.

**Q. Billy, I'm going to piggyback a off of his question a little bit, the fact of your offensive line tonight. Your quarterback's only missed on four pass attempts and they didn't get sacked, so this is kind of an apples to oranges question, but how do you look at this offensive line performance tonight, this year, maybe the three years here at Florida?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we've gotten better. I think that it's a combination of the players' hard work and effort and I think our coaches have done a good job. We settled into a little bit of a rotation there and I think we're also I think schematically doing some things I think maybe they do a little bit better. I think a lot of things contribute to that. But look, now, let's be honest here, there's bigger challenges

ahead, right? We have to continue to improve all parts of our team and that part in particular.

**Q. Treyaun Webb didn't play. What's going on?**

BILLY NAPIER: Wednesday 8:10 p.m. (Laughter) But, no, obviously didn't play, so we'll give you the information on Wednesday. There's others, you missed them. Okay. Thank you.

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