

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, October 7, 2024

Gainesville, Florida, USA

RJ Moten

Press Conference



Q. We haven't talked to you since you moved to linebacker. What was that process like for you? Was it something you wanted to do, or did they approach you and say this would probably be best for you?

RJ MOTEN: I have always wanted to play linebacker actually, but I think I knew going into the next level I was definitely going to move to linebacker, but it was just one day where Coach Armstrong was, like, You're getting too big.

I think it was a time in the winter like I was, like, 230 at one point. He was, like, Okay, we're not going to put you in the post anymore in the SEC. It was like, How do you feel about moving to linebacker?

I think that was just God's way of telling me, Look, this is your opportunity. Just go run with it, so...

Q. Was your dad happy?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, yeah, he was very happy. I think too it was kind of just like now it's really, like, I'm really following his foot steps. I came to this school. I was playing safety at first, but now it's like I'm playing linebacker. My dad played wheel. I'm playing wheel now. He was for sure happy.

Q. What kind of pointers does he still give you about playing the position?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, no, I don't talk to him about playing the position because it's too different. They had a whole bunch of stuff going on, and football is way different now. Any time he tries to tell me, I'm just like, Bro, just chill, just chill. So, yeah.

Q. A shout-out to Miles there for the weight gain?

RJ MOTEN: Yeah, shout-out to you, Miles, for sure. I've always been heavy. Even like I think coming here when I first transferred here, I was like 228 at one point, and then Coach Armstrong was, like, Look, we have to keep you

down and get you down.

I think I played last year at 225-ish, 220-ish. Then every day it was just like -- I'm not eating like bad stuff. I'm just hungry, so I eat, so yeah.

Q. Can you walk me through your sack? It seemed like the defensive end tackle kind of just cleared a path for you, and nothing much but green in front of you and KJ.

RJ MOTEN: Yeah. So basically shout-out Jaden Robinson really because I wouldn't have been able to do it without him because he's got to occupy the center in order for me to give him that little push.

Kind of just I was just -- we ran it all practice, and I think every time at practice that we ran it, I wasn't the one getting the sack. It was always like the Mike linebacker who I'm picking for.

Yeah, basically just got the pick, and then it wasn't like a shock or anything. I just came off the center, and now it's like, go get paid, so yeah.

Q. So how excited are you to be playing a larger role? When you got here last year, I don't know if things went the way that you were expecting, but now you're a key contributor in this defense. How exciting is it for you to be playing a larger role?

RJ MOTEN: It definitely is exciting. I think last year there were ups and downs. Obviously broke my hand. Had five pins in my hand last year. That was, like I said, God's way of saying, Sit down, it's not your time.

That's kind of something, like, playing college football I had to understand, especially coming from Michigan and everything like that. That's kind of something like I try to tell some of my teammates as well. If it's not their time right now, just be happy for the guy in front of you.

I was genuinely happy for Bryce. Bryce ended up playing real early last year. Shoot, Miguel, Jordan, all them. Just being able to watch them chase their dreams. I knew my

time was coming. This year definitely I am a lot happy. I am a lot happier than I was last year. I just like playing ball, so...

Q. What's the challenge of Tennessee's tempo? We know that you had have a third week in a week playing tempo. What do you see with them?

RJ MOTEN: Really it just comes to us executing. I think we have to do a better job. Sometimes tempo can get a little chaotic at times, but really it just comes down to us really getting the call, communicating at a high level, and just getting our feet on the turf and just executing the play at that point.

Q. Tennessee is also a physical team. They're going to want to run it. Just building off what you guys have done the last two weeks, just how prepared do you feel like you are for kind of the physical challenges with this team and teams coming up?

RJ MOTEN: I feel like we've been prepared, to be honest with you. I feel like there were times where we weren't clicking as a unit, and when we do click as a unit, it's like, oh, wow, oh, wow, this, that, and this. I feel like we've been preparing and we're headed in the right direction, especially coming off the bye week as well. I feel like we're up for the challenge.

Q. Jordan Castell said that Tennessee's tempo is like nothing you've ever seen. They were the fastest team you played last year. Is that accurate?

RJ MOTEN: Yeah, 100%. I think the closest tempo that we've gotten this year was in practice for Mississippi State because we knew that they were going to have tempo, but the way that they ran the tempo at practice was unbelievable. So I think that's the closest we get, but Tennessee definitely has the fastest tempo.

Q. When you go to a place like that, 100,000 some, they average like 46 at home, what's just the challenge of that? I'm kind of asking the same question, but how do you kind of keep the focus and keep your wits?

RJ MOTEN: At the end of the day it's us. All we have is us going into a hostile environment. To be honest, the crowd really just -- it really isn't anything. It's practice just with a lot more people watching.

I feel like we're not making it bigger than what it may be. It's just a game on the schedule, and we're going to go and compete and hopefully come out with the win.

Q. You played in The Swamp, the Big House, and now

this. You're playing some big crowds.

RJ MOTEN: Yeah, for sure. It's definitely one of the biggest. I think the biggest I've ever played in front of was 115,000.

Q. (Off microphone.)

RJ MOTEN: When we beat Ohio State in '21 at the Big House.

Q. You guys did a lot of work in the bye week on your presnap, getting lined up with tempo. It didn't seem like UCF challenged you guys a lot in that aspect. Was that your perspective? Do you feel like -- were you surprised by how much they kind of slowed the clock down?

RJ MOTEN: No, yeah, definitely. I really thought, especially watching on film, that he were this going to hit us with a lot more tempo, and especially Mississippi State before they hit us with a lot of tempo.

I mean, I was surprised, but obviously the defense wasn't surprised. We were just like, all right, let's keep going. You feel me?

Q. Do you feel like that work that you did during the bye week will show up in Knoxville, and you will get tested with tempo there?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I feel like the biggest thing in the bye week too was that competition. I'm sure a whole bunch of people have already said it before me, but the way we competed, the way we just going back and forth, you know, the offense hitting the defense with tempo, we're slowing them down.

We had crowd noise going, music going. Coach putting the ball down on the goal line, fourth and one. Whoever doesn't win, got a gasser. Especially just seeing how we came together, and I feel like we are starting to click at the right time.

Q. Are you guys are using the same blueprint that you had last year for Tennessee just to prepare for their tempo? It seemed like it worked really well.

RJ MOTEN: I personally do not know so that is a question whenever he comes up here for whoever you guys will talk to next, but I don't know. We haven't even had meetings yet, so...

Q. You talked about the ups and downs last year obviously with your hand and everything like that.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Your former team also won a national championship. I'm just curious, did you reach out to any of the guys or how did you feel about that?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, yeah, I was happy for them. You know what I'm saying? Like I was saying, I made the decision to leave, and knowing that, you know what comes with it when you leave another school.

I reached out to them after they beat Alabama, and I said, Look, you guys got it at this point. They still call me actually. They called me after the Rose Bowl when they beat Alabama. They called me after the national championship. I was happy for them.

I know my roommate, one of my closest best friends, he was a main factor in that national championship game. Now he plays for the Titans.

It wasn't no jealousy, no anything like that. I made a decision to leave, and I was very happy for them.

Q. On the season, do you think that open week and what that did to the defense will be seen as a turning point? Is that something that awakened the defense? People are saying, Wow, it wasn't the same defense out there. (Indiscernible) a totally different mentality out of this. We saw it satisfied every Saturday as a result. It's one thing to do it against UCF, but we need to see it against Tennessee. That's what the test will show.

RJ MOTEN: I feel like that bye week Coach really told us in the team meeting he wants to hone in on certain things, and he wants the players to hone in on certain details that they can perfect through that bye week. I know for the linebackers, the coaches, they made a cut-up of all of our zero grades plays, ones, twos, and threes and really we spent a lot of time on the zeros and ones.

We spent a lot of time on the small things as a defensive unit. We spend a lot of time focusing on communication, getting our feet on the turf when we're forced with tempo.

I just feel like we knew what we can be. We just haven't shown it yet. In practice when we showed it, we were, Yeah, like, we one of them. Now we just carried it on to Saturday, and we're going to keep on carrying it.

Q. When did you break your hand last year?

RJ MOTEN: I broke it the Tuesday of Vanderbilt.

Q. You had a huge club on your hand.

RJ MOTEN: Yeah. Actually it was, like, right here. I had snapped this right here, and I had surgery that bye week, and then they told me I had -- like I woke up out of surgery, and they were, like, You got five pins in your hand. I was trying to play, but it was definitely difficult.

Q. What was the challenge? It was a huge club it looked like that you had on.

RJ MOTEN: Definitely. Just limiting taking on blocks and obviously catching the ball, but the most thing was the physical part. Every time I would hit somebody, I would feel a pin like kind of pinch or something like that. It was kind of just like -- but I chose to do it, so...

Q. Were you ever 100% last year after that?

RJ MOTEN: I would say I was 100%. The trainers, they were, like, No, just rest it and everything like that.

Q. Like you said, you just get bigger. You don't eat junk, but it just happened. What is the cutoff for a safety versus a linebacker, do you think? Were you ready to move?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, yeah. One time I got up to 230 at Michigan and started off camp at 230, and I was, like, No, I'm not a fan of this.

Q. Is it like a wrestler that has to make weight?

RJ MOTEN: It's kind of like that. Cutoff I think -- I don't know. The game is changing now, so now you see a lot of lighter linebackers as well, a lot of heavier safeties, block safeties. I don't know. Maybe like 220. I'm also, like, barely 6-foot, so 230 is a lot on me.

Q. How much do you weigh now?

RJ MOTEN: 228.

Q. Are you in a weight loss program last year?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, no, no. During the season last year?

Q. Like offseason. Like Tyler Miles had you check in with Tyler and Jake and check in every Friday.

RJ MOTEN: We definitely had like weigh-ins, but I was never on a weight loss kind of -- no, I was just one day I woke up 230, and they were, like -- that's when Coach Armstrong came to me and said, You're constantly weighing in at 230, what's going on? I was, like, I don't know (laughing).

Q. Are there any favorite foods you have to give up during the season?

RJ MOTEN: Oh, no. I still eat junk. I just had some Doritos. I was just saying I don't eat it like -- I probably won't get like pizza every night for dinner or something crazy.

Q. Are you a Philly cheesesteak guy?

RJ MOTEN: Yeah, definitely a Philly cheesesteak guy. I haven't had one in a long time, though.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports