

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Okay, guys, obviously after reviewing the video I think kind of verified what we saw Saturday night. You know, I think the team fought extremely hard. Was an incredible effort. You got give the players and the staff obviously some credit relative to a great week of prep and being in the right mindset to compete on the road in this league.

Obviously the tale of the tape is we weren't able to capitalize on a ton of opportunities we had in the first half. Couldn't quite overcome that when it came down to it. You know, there will be opportunity here for our team to learn and to respond, and I know they'll do that.

Before we get going here, just in terms of injuries, I want to go ahead and declare Graham Mertz has torn his ACL and he'll be done for the season. He'll have surgery next week.

It's only right for me to say how much I appreciate and am thankful for Graham in terms of all he has brought to the table on our team. Not only his production on the field, but also just his impact on the team as a whole, his leadership, the work ethic, the example, the self-discipline.

I would say it's been awesome to be a part of his growth and development and to see him get to the place where he's been here lately.

So Graham has meant a lot to me, but I would also say he's meant a lot to this program and certain the University of Florida, and he has a sincere care for this place and all it has done for him. I know at some point he'll make a statement and follow up on that.

But this weekend presents a great opportunity, obviously homecoming. There will be a ton of activities across campus this weekend. Gator Growl, the parade, ton of things going on. We're excited about the '84 team coming back, 40 year anniversary of a team that accomplished quite a bit.

And then certainly punter Chas Henry will be back and is getting inducted into the UF Athletics Hall of Fame. It's

going to be Gatormade week for us as well, so we'll highlight our player development program, which I would argue is the best in the entire country.

Obviously be trying to create awareness about that program and how it has impacted our players and how others can get involved and contribute to that. But we do have an incredible staff there of four full time members that help and really 24/7, 365 work on life after football and trying to equip and empower these guys and prepare them for their future. Savannah, Steven, Diane, and Spikes obviously have done a great job there.

So this program has an endowment that continues to grow. It's created by former player Mike Ricketts. We are so endeared to him for all he's done and very grateful. Serves as an ultimate showing of leadership to continue to pour back into our young men in terms of their future, not only this team and these players, but future teams and future players.

Kentucky has a good football team. Regardless of the record, when you turn on the tape you see a team that has height, length, and speed, and certainly has an identity in all three parts of their team and can create a ton of issues for you.

Strong defensive unit that has a bunch of veteran players. Obviously an offensive unit that has improved every week. And special teams, they've got dynamic returners that can cause some headaches.

So Coach Stoops does a really good job. Have a ton of respect for him as a coach in terms of what he's accomplish and the consistency in which they played. So Kentucky is much better than their record says, and obviously this will be a big challenge. We're excited about being back at home.

What do we got?

Q. Montrell Johnson, I know Wednesday is the injury report, anything with him? Is he going to be out this week?

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BILLY NAPIER: We don't anticipate it being a long-term issue.

Q. As far as the situation with Graham, just what kind of blow is that to the offense? Also, getting DJ prepared for the pressure of every down in the SEC.

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I would say I think there is some excitement in terms of DJ and what he's been able to accomplish thus far. You know, I think he'll be much more prepared having start a game, but also having played in each game this season.

So we'll be a little bit further along because of that investment, and I do think that he will benefit from taking all the first team reps the entire week, and then Aidan Warner will be the backup and will take the reps with the twos.

So I think we'll be a little bit further ahead than we maybe would've been if we were just playing one player.

So it's going to be -- DJ has this innate ability to rise to the occasion and step up in big moments. I'm confident he'll do that in this situation.

Also think it's a great opportunity for the team as a whole to kind of raise their level all throughout the team, every position group, unit. We need to do that.

Q. Do you have to be cognizant the depth you have at quarterback? Taking nothing away from Aidan, but he hasn't played a lot. Do you have to be cognizant of that when you're game planning and how much you can run DJ?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we've been in similar situations in the past with Anthony. Yeah, that will be a factor. Some of that we'll have to take into consideration, and a little bit more for DJ in term of how to approach some of those situations.

Yeah, Aidan just got here in January and was injured in the spring, but he has impressed us with his -- has really developed quite a bit and showed promise since coming back off the knee and being available for all of summer and training camp.

Q. DJ, how does he change the offense? You see like spurts of it.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think you guys been watching him play. Yeah, I mean, I think obviously explosive arm talent. The ability to escape, extend, the running element. Yeah, I think ultimately you have had a chance to observe him play. There is nothing that he can't do. I think he's proven

over time that he can operate all the situational stuff, all the protection stuff, all the combos.

He can handle it.

Q. ...his performance a microcosm of him where first threw the interception, that first... and you struggled, and then when you had to have it, third and 19.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think he's got that in him. And I would say obviously it goes back to his high school career. I think his senior year he just -- some of those performances he had for that program and what he was able to accomplish within that team, and in the spring game we saw it a little bit.

So the week that he was the starter he put on a show. Look, I think we've got a -- guy is a rookie and it's his show. I think he's going to work extremely hard. He's been preparing as if he was one play away from being the guy the whole time.

I think we tried to -- that's been the message and the mentality since the very beginning. So the work that he's done since day one I think will all pay off, if that makes sense.

Q. How quickly does he pick up stuff?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, there is no limits there. I think like most learners think repetition, but I've been impressed. Look, I think O'Hara does a good job. His ability to start with him on the first day upon arrival all way throughout the game week Saturday to Sunday.

Yeah, and then his ability to observe Graham, kind of that whole process I think has been beneficial.

So and their connection, humility, confidence, they've done that the right way. I think that's ultimately been beneficial for both.

Q. How do you expect Graham to stay involved? I assume he will heavily.

BILLY NAPIER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Met with him this morning. He'll be in the facility. I think that's just who he is. He's going to stay connected and do his part for the team.

He wants to do that and he definitely will be doing that.

Q. Does the nature of his injury, sort of the noncontact, sort of the add to the heartbreak of this whole thing?

BILLY NAPIER: I mean, injuries are a part of the game. You understand that as a coach. You certainly understand that as a player. And you never know what contributes to these things, right?

So, yeah, ultimately I think when you put one of these helmets on and put that jersey over them pads and run out there, I think that's part of the game.

But I think there is opportunity that comes with injury. I think you can learn toughness. There is a mental and physical toughness. There is also a self-discipline component, and on the other end there is an appreciation of the game and what you miss about the game.

If you use it the right way it can be beneficial for you.

Q. Coaches always second guess themselves after the fact. Do you have any second guesses about not going for two there and maybe even the fourth down run the end of round on that play?

BILLY NAPIER: Sure. I think you're always -- look, we rolled the dice there and kind of had our play and went with it. Then they called timeout and we felt like maybe given the next one, given the dynamic of our team -- I think a lot of it is the game, how the game has went. Where do you feel like your team is at, how you're playing defense. Those types of things I think contribute.

If it was 47 to 47 maybe it's a different approach. But just think defensively our kids battled their tail off and played a heck of a game. You felt like you were in pretty good shape there.

Obviously didn't go the way we wanted it to go. You're always going to have that perspective. The end of round play is just an incredible play by one of their secondary players. It was well blocked. It was a great decision.

In terms of the execution of the play, the guy just made a phenomenal play, if you'd have told me that was going to happen. So I think it was a really good football play by their corner.

Q. What is your philosophy of being in shock down on fourth and inches? You turn that into a four, five yard gain.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we sneaked it earlier in the game underneath the center and obviously converted that. At that point in time we felt good about the play. We had a good play.

I think it would be different if maybe the checkers weren't

where we wanted them and we got what we wanted and their player made an incredible play.

Q. The reasons you were in a bind at the end of the first half with the field goal situation was because you guys were out of timeouts and there were a couple dead ball ones. For that to happen in week six, how frustrating is that? What were some of the issues that we know on there with regards to maybe not...

BILLY NAPIER: No, we just had a couple -- we had some misalignments. Had to use them. I think ultimately felt strongly in that moment in time that we had to do that relative to the D&D in the field zone.

Yeah, you love to have some timeouts at the end of the half. I think looking back at it, those were alignment errors that we have to take ownership of.

So it is what it is.

Q. What would your message be to the fans about some of the game management issues? There is a lot have frustration out there.

BILLY NAPIER: In terms of the...

Q. In terms of timeouts and obviously the illegal substitution penalty at the end of the half with the field goal. What would you tell them?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we made a substitution error. You know, I think ultimately we know exactly what happened, why it happened. It was a mistake. You know, so got to take ownership of it.

Q. Do you think playcalling takes away, Billy, to game manage stuff like that, having that on your plate? I know playcalling thing has been ongoing. Does it detract in keeping things aligned, running smoothly?

BILLY NAPIER: In terms of which situation?

Q. Just the game management things when you have injuries or misalignments, stuff like that, any of the sloppiness that people talk about. As a head coach, does that...

BILLY NAPIER: Even if I weren't calling the plays, if a guy is misaligned and we were about to get a penalty, we're going to call a timeout.

Yeah, if anything, you're probably a little more tuned into it to be quite honest. So, no, I don't think this takes away from that part of the job.



Q. Coach, talking about Kentucky, giving the record between Kentucky in the last four years and also the season as a whole, how much would a win mean to you personally and just Florida as a whole?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, it's the next challenge. It's the next game. In particular for this group of players I think we've made -- I think the way they performed this past week I think kind of reflects what's taking place within that locker room, their attitude, their motivation, the passion they have for trying to get it right.

You know, the big game in this league is the next game. Regardless of the opponent and the location you got to treat it that way.

They key is you got to get consumed with the process rather than the result. If you go about that the right way it can help you be in the position that you want.

And certainly given our team, the record, you know, I think one of the most important things is that we depend on our values and that we use that to kind of align with our behavior, or self-discipline, the way we treat people, make decisions. I think all those things contribute.

So we got to get ready not only football-wise but we also got to get ready from the mindset standpoint to compete again with the same intangibles that we had last Saturday.

Q. Can the players find motivation from the last two games against Kentucky, the way they maybe -- got run of the field last year pretty early.

BILLY NAPIER: There is no lack of respect here for Kentucky, I can promise that you. They've got a good football team. They've had a very consistent program, Coach Stoops has done a good job.

So that's not an issue at all.

Q. How do you go about Montrell being injured? Could you get some guys back this week?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we're hopeful we may get a couple guys back. Now, that's to be determined as we speak here. We're in that process of evaluating a couple of those guys that have been out, so we'll have a better idea the next couple days.

Some of those guys are trending in the right direction, Montrell being in that group. We'll know Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. There will be 100% clarity once we get there.

Q. You talk about consumed with the process. Is that how you process like a bad loss like that, just a tough one? You got to be thinking -- does it kept reflecting on it? How do you keep going forward without letting that gnaw at you?

BILLY NAPIER: It's part of the challenge. Look, it's on both ends. If you find a way to win that game then you're sitting there coaching the mental part of, hey, it's time to move forward to the next opponent.

Look, at this level, these jobs, I mean, it's the ability to be consistent, handle the praise, handle the criticism. You have to learn independent of the outcome and then you have to also work independent of the outcome.

If you don't then you have to chance for consistency. So yeah, it's part of the challenge. Then obviously we got 250 people that contribute to our team each week, so it's not just me. It's every individual that contributes to our team.

You know, that's the dynamic that we compete in. I think ultimately you can see it all across the country. I think in our league maybe there was one significant win. Every other game was a touchdown game, a field goal game. So all these games are very competitive.

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