

University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida 48, Kentucky 20

BILLY NAPIER: Okay, I think the thing I'm most proud of would be the resiliency of that team. This is a resilient group. Obviously been through quite a bit throughout the season.

I would tell you that it really matters to them in terms of how they represent the University of Florida. Obviously a big deal to play in homecoming. Had a ton of people back this weekend. Incredible weekend recognizing the '84 team.

I would tell you, this group they felt like they had maybe let the place down, let people down in terms of how we played earlier in the year. They took that personal and it was important to them to do that better.

The last couple times we been able to play at home I think they've done better in that regard. How hard we play and the way we compete and being a great teammate has got to be in our DNA.

These guys have proven that over time that that could be effective if we do those things, and every person matters. Not just what you see out there tonight. We have so many people contribute. About 250 people that contribute to what we do.

Tonight we won the turnover margin. We played really good on the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball. Thought the defense was really good on conversion downs. The momentum plays in the game, fourth down stops, and obviously Montrell being out, for Jadan Baugh to step up, with Graham being injured and out for the year for DJ to step up, and a really good defensive performance outside of the kickoff return and the flea-flicker, I thought those guys played really strong.

We played complementary ball. Again, I think we probably played our best football of the year, and I'm really proud of the resiliency of that group.

What do we have?

Q. You haven't had a ton of feel-good victories. This was in a way up there, top of the list maybe. Does that feel good for you given the struggles that you have gone through, this team has gone through?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think what makes me happy is when I see players who have worked extremely hard for a long time and maybe don't get the self-gratification of winning.

I think resiliency is essentially just being mentally tough and having the ability to overcome setbacks, to work through difficult times, to have an identity.

Look, that's what I would say about our team, is they continue to work. They were solution-oriented. Nobody pointed a finger. We went through a challenge last Saturday night. We had a locker room of guys that were hurt. We could have easily splintered at that point, but we didn't.

We probably got stronger and worked Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday as good as we have all year. We cannot forget what got the result that we experienced tonight. That's the most important part.

Q. You were without a quarterback with like 50 starts almost, a running back with 35 plus probably, two 19 year olds, one who just turned 19 last week I think, step in. What does that say just about them and the way they were prepared?

BILLY NAPIER: Uh-huh, first of all, both were elite players coming out of high school that we worked extremely hard to prove this was the right fit for them.

We had a vision for what they could accomplish here, person, student, and player, and a ton of people contributed to that.

Both come from great families. Both have humility. Their work ethic is second to none, and they've been able to observe veteran players that do it exactly the way you

would want a guy to do it.

So for Jadan Baugh to observe Montrell Johnson since January, for DJ Lagway to observe Graham Mertz, that impacted tonight as much as anything.

They're obviously talented, and we have a lot of other young players that are capable of the same things.

They stepped up in a major way.

Q. Just DJ, his big-play propensity, I think seven completions. I think he averaged 37 a completion.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, 191 quarterback rating I think, which is definitely winning football. Created some explosives. You know, maybe one black eye was the pick. Probably forced that one into coverage.

Made some plays with his feet, too. That gets overlooked. The read element in the run game, and then there are a few where they covered and he scrambled and was able to make some plays. He's only going to get better.

Obviously the work that he does between Sunday to Saturday contributes to what you see out there.

Q. Coach, three fourth down stops, three turnovers. Seems to be a pretty good month for the defense. What has continued to evolve, do you think, on that side of the ball? Is there even a chance for another gear with another open week?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we got good kids, man. I mean, that's at the root of all that. I could talk about the technical part, but it comes down to a selfless group that was solution-oriented, didn't point a finger.

Obviously disappointed how we played early in the year. The staff took ownership. We had really good leadership at the player level. There was collaboration there. I think in the open date we said, hey, but put the ball down, let's call it, and we got to work on our between-play process.

And then we just played better fundamental football. We played harder, and I think the players took ownership of that. Again, it goes back to what I said in here after game one. They were embarrassed. Were we were embarrassed. So we had a decision to make, and I think obviously just really proud of the players.

At the core, they want to do it the right way.

Q. Your players seem most excited about that pick six by Cormani McClain. What does that say about what

he's been through? Been pretty well documented.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah.

Q. To see that out of him and how he's progressed since he's been here. Just how exciting of a moment was that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, when Cormani was on the scout team early in the season he would intercept a couple passes every day. I would just tell the staff like hey, this guy is down here, he got here mid-summer. Doesn't know as much but he can play man coverage.

Ultimately Jason goes down and then ultimately here we go. We're down Ja'Keem and here we go, Cormai McClain is on the field.

He made an incredible play down here in this corner, the end zone right there, that PBU. So the guy, he's got a long way to go. Let's don't put the crown on the guy's head right now. But he stepped up.

Guy got injured and he was able to go in there and do his job in a critical moment. He's got great instincts. I think there is more room for growth. That's what I would say.

I think ultimately he's matured, cleaning stuff up a little bit. He's a rookie. Yeah, ultimately got to continue to do what you're supposed to do and good things will happen.

Q. And the early prognosis on Jason? We're not going to get an availability report from you for a couple weeks. Any early indication of what that was and also Devin Moore, just how is he? I know he was able to return to the contest.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, we'll have an injury report for you. It's going to be a while, right? We won't play for -- be another ten days or so before we'll get you one. But we'll get it to you when we get there.

Q. (No microphone.)

BILLY NAPIER: No comment.

Q. The score was 13 to 6 before the goal line stand and then you guys score on the ensuing possession. How critical that was stretch right there?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, those are the momentum plays in the game. I mean, if I'm not mistaken, maybe after the interception, too. If I'm not right. For them to put the fire out after the takeaway, I mean, that was where the momentum shifted a little bit.

They had it. Definitely could have been a tie game there. They go for it; don't get it; we're able to turn it around.

And for DJ to bounce back and overcome that, that's part of it as well. That's the kind of complementary football, we got to be that type of team for sure.

Q. And then they come out, score on the opening drive of the second half to make it a one-score game. Then your defense, I think three (indiscernible) run downs in the fourth quarter on the pick six. How do you think they responded to that touchdown?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, we had trouble getting off the field on that possession. They converted on a couple third downs, fourth down and one. A really nice play call on their part leaking the tight end out.

But, yeah, we were in position. I think in that possession we had a couple chances to finish on the quarterback. We didn't quite get it done. Couple scrambles.

So, yeah, I think in this league, man, you better be ready to go. Every possession counts, so definitely that was a big turning point. Those fourth down stops are huge.

Q. Earlier this year you mentioned that one of the things that really frustrated you was the inability to establish a run game. To be able to do that against this defense, how much of a relief is that to kind of get it going, especially against such a good team?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, our guys up front continue to get a little better. I think we're playing good around them. We settled in. We ran it good last week, you know. I think here for a couple weeks in a row -- look, it comes down to having a good plan, having a hat for a hat, and then got a ton of people this contribute to the run game.

Not just the offensive line. The tight ends, receivers, obviously the quarterback in the middle of that as well. If we're going to be a contender we're going to have to be really good up front on both sides.

I think we're seeing that last two games in particular against good personnel and competition. So we need to continue to do that. You got to recruit the height, length, athletic ability. I think we worked hard to do that. We got the body types in here. Hopefully they can continue to play well.

Q. On day one you talked about wanting to play complementary football here. You mentioned that a couple times tonight. Is this kind of what you

envisioned?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we fed off each other to some degree. We stepped up for each other to some degree. When I say complementary football, I'm just saying in this league, each part of your team is going to have to go blow for blow.

Every matchup is different. There is certain spots on your team where maybe you're at a disadvantage or certain parts of the team where you're at an advantage.

I thought we fed off each other at times tonight. That's an important part.

Q. Defensively you guys have played lights out on third down. What can you attribute that to this last three weeks?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, we mixed it up a little bit. We played a little bit more zone tonight. I think we guessed right. I think the staff had a really good plan.

We did meet our goal in conversion downs, third and fourth downs, so that was a big piece. And look, we're close to even more. You know, I think ultimately the rush and the coverage are starting to work together a little bit better. We're landing. We're starting to affect the quarterback.

I mean, how many times tonight did we not sack him but made him move around? We flushed him. So we're covering him a little bit longer and experience the rush plan is working and it's landing quicker. I think a combination of those two is what you're seeing.

Q. Cam Carroll was able to get into the game late tonight. Just as a coach and seeing what he's been through, his injury and setbacks and the whole rehab process, what does that feel like to see him go out there and not just run on to the field but get some carries, too?

BILLY NAPIER: No, Cam is one of the best human beings we have in the building. He's been unbelievable from day one. He still has a voice on our team. He has a leadership role. He affects our team in a positive way.

And again, the toughness that he showed on his road to recovery I think has been -- look, there is still more for him to accomplish in terms of his recovery.

Cam is as good as we got. I'm proud of him in general. I know his teammates, it means a lot to his teammates as well.

Q. Some really nice wrinkles, unbalanced line, DJ under center, Jack Pyburn at fullback. How much of that is the development of DJ going from last week to this week and maybe just a natural progression there, or how much is some tweaks to try to change some things up?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, well, we used to tackle over stuff in the low -- in the red area, right where all of a sudden is becomes a man-to-man games and you're trying to create an extra gap.

Then obviously given what happened to us last week, I think we felt like -- you know, we carry those type of plays each week. We just had those scenarios tonight. Look, Jack was lights out. You know, I think it's a factor. Pyburn, he's made our team better.

We got some guys on our team that the Slaughters, the Pyburns, the George Gumbs, Sapp. We got some guys that are very vocal have character and have showed good leadership. Pyburn is in that, and he has a future of as a fullback if he can't play on the edge.

Q. Billy, couple field goals early. Patience, patience, very important. Then you hit them with a couple long bombs to Badger. How important was that to get those long passes opening up the run game? I thought that was a very key factor in what you were able to do offensively.

BILLY NAPIER: You know, we felt going into the game that maybe there was a lack of respect for the deep part of the field. It turned out to be true.

I think obviously Badger had an unbelievable day, some elite catches. Finished one off there on third down. But just his ability to make the contested catch, the vertical threat, and then obviously DJ laid those in the basket.

Those were elite throws. We knew we had that. That was the plan going into the game was really challenge them with three-level shots. We didn't land some early, but then it started to work. Definitely contributed to the run game.

Q. Obviously big win tonight. A lot of momentum going into the bye week. From here it's not going to get easier. A lot of ranked opponent coming up. How are you looking to build on what you saw tonight in terms of the positive performances and keep the momentum alive?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I'm excited about the open date being here and our opportunity to get healthy a little bit. I think we been through the grinder a little bit. We're beat up

a little bit.

So it'll be great for our guys to -- some of these guys that weren't able to play tonight to kind of turn those guys around and get them in the return to play and those guys to be available. We were a little thin in some spots out there tonight, but ultimately this open date comes at a good time.

In this league you better have depth, and down the stretch I think the open date will provide opportunities for us to work with some of those players that are going to be critical pieces relative to that depth.

Q. How would you evaluate DJ's progression through the offense since compared to the start of the season now that he's seen some of the top defenses from the SEC, just from reading the defense and making the right decision with the football?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, he gets better every day. I mean, he learns something every day. I think if we just -- I mean, I think we probably should put it on paper. Like what that guy -- what those quarterbacks do from Sunday to Saturday, the amount of time they spend preparing.

This is a game that's about preparation, especially when you're a signal caller and you're processing every play, making decisions every play. But I just see his growth has been -- I think he's improved fundamentally. I think his football intelligence has improved. I think he's become a really good communicator.

And he has a knack. He's a competitor. You got to be tough minded. You got to be willing to continue to show up. I think he's obviously done that. He'll just keep getting better. I believe that.

Q. Devin Moore, a lot of injury issues. Tonight he sure didn't look like he was full speed. Just everywhere.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah.

Q. What has his process been like to get to a night like this?

BILLY NAPIER: First of all, Devin had an unbelievable off-season. He's been injured since he got here. I think he renewed his commitment to the off-season, changing his body, addressing some areas where he's been banged up.

And then he's been available. He's played. So he's gaining experience. He has elite traits. I think he's 6'2" and three quarters, 195, 200 pounds, and a very bright kid. He makes the most of the experience.

So yeah, we're definitely better when he's out there. But he's a tough dude. This guy last week, he did some things to return to the game, you know, and then ultimately sucked it up. Critical block on some of the punt returns. He just continues to show up. He's a good one for sure.

Q. You ever had a guy score five touchdowns?

BILLY NAPIER: I don't think the Gators have had a guy score five, right?

Q. Tied the record.

BILLY NAPIER: Pretty good company there I would say.

All right, guys, thank you all.

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