

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, October 28, 2024

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Okay, we'll keep it short and sweet here. Obviously kind of a next-challenge mentality for our team. Thought we did a lot of good things last week. Certainly the guys benefited in a couple days off.

Georgia has a good football team. Offensively it starts with the veteran quarterback and a veteran offensive line, just a multitude of skill players at every position.

I do think defensively they have an identity and it starts with the personnel, the height, length of the personnel. Certainly speed at the second, third level as well.

Then the kicking game. They've got really good specialists. Kicker, punter, snapper, obviously returners, and they have good variables there that can cause some problems for you.

The entirety of the team obviously makes this thing a challenge. I think for our team it's important that we zoom in on the parts of our process that can grow and improve. I think each individual player has to continue to focus on getting better.

One of the reasons we've been able to improve is we emphasized those parts of our team. We need to continue to play with really good effort. We need to continue to take great pride in how we compete.

I do think spending our time and energy on the things that actually can produce results and not wasting time on anything that can't. I do think that we've challenged our team to be very consistent, be an everyday guy. If we have a lot of players doing it every day we have a chance to be an everyday team.

This will require our best and we look forward to going to Jacksonville this weekend.

Q. Talk about bye week improvements. What did you see out of last week? Do you feel a similar sentiment or it was taken to another level?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, much of the same. You know, I think, yeah, our kids have bought into the concept that practice is the most important thing that we do. The attitude and the urgency and the focus, we have to be very deliberate about how we practice.

You know, to improve at this game you have to do it on the grasp it's a repetition based game. It's development. It's the quality rep from the start to the finish that matters.

I think we've bought into that concept. I'm hopeful. It was competitive and be no different this week.

Q. How important is it for this program to shift the narrative in this series a little bit? Georgia is obviously the pinnacle of the SEC.

BILLY NAPIER: Right.

Q. Dominated the series for a while now.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, these are all good challenges. I mean, I think Georgia has been doing it, I think it's the 9th year for Kirby here. Obviously he's established systems. They've got good processes across the board. The personnel has been built over time.

There is quality depth and identity, so you got to beat them. I think ultimately the things that I mentioned earlier will help us do that.

Q. Defense against Texas looked different than it had with Mykel Williams. What does he bring? Another edge guy that Georgia didn't have.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, he's one of the more talented defenders in the country this year and most years I would say. He's been that way for a while.

So, yeah, he can be a challenge. Obviously slippery on the rundowns. Very versatile in terms of where he rushes on third down as well.

So he's got the height, length, and the bulk to be an inside rusher and edge rusher. He's one of the better players in

the country for sure.

Q. The emotion of seeing Trevor Etienne on the other sideline and then game planning against him, your familiarity, the defense's familiarity, how does that play into the matchup?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, well, it's become the norm of college football. It's already happened a handful of times this year that we played against players on the other side that were on our team in the past.

Look, feels like there is a story each week about scenarios like that. It wasn't the first and won't be the last, unfortunately.

Q. Was that one different because did it hurt more because you maybe didn't see it coming and maybe obviously one of your better players on offense? How much did that one hurt when he dropped that news?

BILLY NAPIER: Again, I think for me, it's gotten to a point where you just move on to the next one, you know. I think we've done what we needed to do to be productive at running back. Obviously Jadan, Ja'Kobi; Montrell has been very productive for us this year.

That position for us is at the centerpiece of our offense and I couldn't be more proud of the guys that we have there. And Coach Juluke in particular has done a nice job.

But we identify players. We fit them into our blueprint there for that position and they produce, they have success.

So, yeah we'll be handing it to somebody this weekend.

Q. 54 to 10 is the combined scores at halftime the last two years against Georgia. How imperative is it to get off to a good start from a confidence standpoint?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Part of starting fast in general in the game of football is really important I would say. It's a contributing factor from an analytics standpoint. If you took a deep dive into that you would see starting fast is very important.

These games are no different. That game will be much like every game we played this year. The key is that we are ready to play from a fundamental standpoint so that we can win some of these one on ones. These games are about point of attack wins and then you have to have a certain mindset and mentality and be ready to go.

This one will be no different than the ones from the past.

Q. Speaking of point of attack wins, you touched on their offensive line. I mean, line of scrimmage, both sides, how better equipped do you feel like you are than -- compared to earlier in the season or even last season?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we have some players that have developed nicely over the last year. Coach Chapman has done a good job and certainly some of these guys that got significant experience for the first time last year, they've improved.

But much like I've said before, in this league if you want to be a consistent team, you want to be a contender, you got to be good on the line of scrimmage and on the edges. That starts with the evaluation and recruitment of the personnel. Once they arrive have to do a good job developing those players.

You have to have an identity there that allows for them to be productive. So we've made progress in that area and we need to continue to do that to be productive.

Q. You've known Glenn Schumann since he was at Alabama as a GA. What has it been like watching his rise as one the top defensive coordinators in the nation? What are some of the staples of the defense that you got to look out for?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, Coach Schumann is an outstanding coach, good human being, works extremely hard. No one works -- this guy is a football guy. Been in the trenches with him. Respect him. Certainly be a great challenge for our players and our staff.

So again, they got height, length, personnel is really good. There is depth, there is quality depth, and there is variables. Front variables, pressure variables, and coverage variables. It's a combination of all these things that make it a challenge.

Again, we understand that. We'll be ready for it.

Q. Not to take anything away from Graham because he's been everything you wanted for two years, but how much of what we're seeing can DJ is the Billy Napier offense? Having that guy running the show who has the entire playbook at his fingertips and can give all the different looks.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think in a perfect world we would have a guy that's a capable runner, a guy that is a factor in the read elements, and then also obviously the ability to push it down the field.

DJ, we were very fortunate to find him early in the process and have been blessed with the opportunity to coach the guy.

More importantly is just the makeup of the kid just from a character perspective. The humility and the work ethic. And Graham being around has been huge. That will be a big factor going forward for DJ the rest of the year.

Q. You touched on humility and those traits. This will be his first big game. He started two games. How do you think that can translator is going to handle that kind of atmosphere do you think?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think they're all big, okay? We tried to build in this concept of, hey, you are one play away. The urgency that you need to feel going all the way back to January relative to, hey, you're preparing as if you're going to have to do this at some point.

Playing them in every game has made for a preparation that becomes real, like I'm going out there. He's been able to do that each week. Yeah, so I think that helps. We played several top 10 teams so far this year. Obviously last week was -- two weeks ago was his first SEC start.

Then Georgia, you know, we all understand what comes with that, so hopefully the first of many for him.

Q. Forgive my ignorance on the recruiting process with him, but when did you identify him? When did you notice he had something different mentally in terms of fearless attitude he brings to the field?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, he was here our first spring. I think he came to spring practice our first spring. I can remember being on the stadium. We were at the stadium. That's back when a facility was over there and we were all on the third or fourth level there, offensive staff.

He sat in on the quarterback meeting. We walked over together from practice. At that point he was kind of an unknown to some degree, so that's when probably my first memory of meeting him and spending time with him.

We had a common relationship. The quarterback trainer was a guy that coached one of our quarterbacks at Louisiana. Yeah, so that part, I do think probably the spring game was where I would say, just seeing him kind of raise his level that day in that environment.

You kind of felt like he stepped up to the plate and performed really. Made some big throws and seemed like no big deal. He's a great competitor. It all comes back to he's got a foundation there. He has a set of values. A

faith. A family. He kind of knows who he is.

So that allows him to compete freely. I think he turns into a great competitor on game day. I think that's one of his best traits.

Q. Pretty good bond with both his dad. How would you characterize your relationship with him?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, just a healthy respect. For me, I think watching him handle his recruitment is ultimately when I gained the most respect for the kid and the family. They went from a -- I just think they stuck to who they were. Very grounded. Stayed in Willis, Texas.

Guy could have went anywhere in that Houston footprint to be the quarterback and kind of stuck there in their hometown. Did great things with that high school there that was uncharted waters.

Then obviously just stayed focused throughout the entire recruiting process.

Q. I know we'll get an update on Wednesday, but how is Jason doing after the bye or maybe some of the guys at corner that if he can't go you're looking to step up?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we'll have an update for you Wednesday. 8:10 pm I think it is.

Q. ...improvements you've seen over the last month especially, what do you attribute to those two and is there something more you would like to see out of that unit for the final month of the season?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think we settled into a lineup there. I think the competition has helped, and then ultimately I think they've just gotten the experience and improved. Some of them were relatively green to this league, this level, whether that was Brandon or Knijeah; Damieon played a new position. Obviously Barber and Slaughter have experience, but really Slaughter played half the year last year.

I think they gained experience and some confidence and gotten -- I think the practice environment has helped. I think just going against good personnel every day. You know, getting into a little bit of a rhythm in terms of how to prepare during the season.

Experience matters. I think it's an important part of the game.

Q. Carson Beck been a little up and down lately. What

is the challenge of defending him obviously?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, we don't buy into that narrative. This guy is elite. He's an elite quarterback. Been fantastic throughout his career. Really seen a lot of football. Their practice environment, number of variables he's seen from a front pressure coverage standpoint, and he's a big, tall, athletic guy that can throw it all over the park.

Any player that you play you have to anticipate them being at their best, so he's highly regarded for a reason.

Q. You have a good time to see your secondary really beginning to emerge.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it'll be a big part of this game and every game going forward. Again, there will be a ton of matchups in the slot, outside. These games, they come down to point of attack wins. You got to have point of attack, one on one wins and have to do that consistently.

Q. What kind of progress do you think you're seeing in the program year three to two at this point?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, mindset has shifted a little bit I think. I think the makeup of our team, you know, I think we're in a lot better place in that regard.

Look, I mean, it's a production business. We got to do it on the grass. We played better the last few weeks, a little bit more like we anticipated playing as a team, certain parts of our team in particular.

But, yeah, I have a respect for the attitude and the effort of the group, the resiliency of the group. That's the term I would say that's impressed me the most.

Again, these things I talked about, the performance, character of the group has improved, sure. There is a noticeable difference in the effort, the intensity, and the execution of the football.

More importantly, there is a moral character that allows them deal with the criticism and the noise and to stay loyal, stick together, to be solution oriented, not splinter, point fingers, to continue to -- I think that takes some character to do, especially in today's era.

I'm hopeful that will pay off.

Q. ...DJ's personality, who he is, his physical attributes of course, but the game management aspect was something you talked about you wanted to see a little bit more out of him coming into the season. Over the last couple weeks how have you seen him improve

in that regard and what areas are you still looking to see him take the next step?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's all reps. It's experience. It's not only experience in the game, but experience in practice. We did quite a bit of situational work last week and then we had a pretty exhaustive remedial session on all the situational football, verbiage, all these things that come up.

I think you get a lot of work with the ones and the twos throughout but some of the situational work is very specific to the first unit, so we're just trying to get him caught up there.

He has no trouble processing. It's just a matter of time, repetition. And there is no substitute for living it, you know, and living the success, but also with the consequences of making a bad decision.

Q. Seems to have a connection with Elijah Badger. Did that start when both of them were running with the second team in fall camp?

BILLY NAPIER: I think our skill worked together throughout. I think Badger is an easy guy to like, you know. If I'm playing quarterback, I think I would try to connect with him, too.

But no, Badger has improved. His game has really taken another step. I think the detail in his route running has improved. Receiver is a skill game. The release part of the game, the top of the route separation, the hand selection, and then obviously the coverage, there is a football IQ element there.

But I think Coach G has done a good job with him. He's a very durable, consistent player, so he's got some play strength.

Q. It's been an up and down season for Trey and he's been banged up. What have you seen from him in the bye week and maybe how important is he going to be the next five games?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, it's unfortunate. I think the injury bug is part of the game. We've got to -- every team, I mean, you think about each team we've played, it's more about the players that are available each week and what you do with that group.

That's when it's hard, is when you're getting into the middle of the week. You're building the plan in early part of the week and you're unsure who is available. I think we have done a good job adjusting in that regard, but that's part of the equation.



Q. He getting a little closer to full speed? What was the bye week like do you think?

BILLY NAPIER: We've done quite a bit of work with him. I think obviously we're not commenting specifically on injuries, but, yeah, I think the open dates are good in that regard. We're able to get a lot of guys healthy.

Much like a number of guys on our team, we're hopeful we get a couple of these guys back.

Q. Last contest was a big one for Jadan Baugh. Montrell Johnson's status up in the air for this week. What do you anticipate seeing from Jadan going forward, against Georgia, and the rest of the season?

BILLY NAPIER: We're hopeful we get some guys back at that position. Jadan will get better. You can see he's getting comfortable. I think early in the year you saw there was some ability there, but just the overall, what's it like out there performing at that level. I think he's improved in his pass protection. He and Ja'Kobi both need to continue to grow in that area.

Yeah, played well with the ball. And he's a big guy. He's slippery. Obviously he has showed to be very productive. So we're hopeful he continues in that direction.

Q. Lagway and Jadan worked really well together last week. You also have a lot of the strong talent in the receiver room. All freshmen, redshirt freshmen, true freshmen. What do you think this spells out for the future of Florida's offense to have so many young guys contributing like this?

BILLY NAPIER: I think you got to take what you have available each year and try to make the most of it. I think the world we're living in now it's literally one team at a time to some degree.

Now, if we're doing this the right way, then we're building quality depth, experience, we're able to retain players, and we can build in that fashion.

But there is nothing to say that it will work out that way. You got to take each cycle relative to acquiring players and do the best you can for the team.

Once you get through that spring portal, coach what's left, right? That's what we've done.

Q. A little bit away from this weekend's game. Wanted to talk about Ricky Pearsall's game last against the Cowboys. He did really well for the 49ers. How did

that make you feel seeing him do so well after that traumatic injury?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, we're proud of Ricky. Obviously been through some challenges and adversity there. First of all, we're glad he's healthy. I think that paints a picture of perspective that we all got to evaluate practice.

But Ricky did it right when he was here. I think he was a great teammate. He did things with class. Prepared the right way. Was a very productive player and leader for us.

And got better every day. His work ethic was second to none. He'll be a great pro. Obviously now that he's back in the lineup he'll get better each week. There is no question about it.

Q. Without going into specifics about Asa Turner's recovery, what have you seen from him behind the scenes and serving as a leader to some of the younger defensive backs? How difficult has it been for him this year not going the way he envisioned?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, injuries are challenging, man. It's one of the more challenging things for the players. And coaches as well, I think. Asa has been a very steady player and person/leader. He's provided some veteran kind of good work ethic, example, how to communicate, go about your business.

He's done a nice job in that regard. And even when he's been absent there are some things he's done to help the squad as a whole. He's another player that's on a long list of hopeful to get him back.

Q. I think Jadan's first offer might have been Georgia. One of the reporters there was telling me. What kind of recruiting win is it to get a guy out of Georgia for one? I know I wasn't the most highly rated guy, but he is obviously extremely talented.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think we ended up beating Alabama at the very end. Yeah, I mean, I think Jadan first of all went to school in January and we were evaluating the guys at linebacker. That just goes to show how much we knew. But we knew he played running back.

He was a kind of hybrid Wildcat quarterback. He played receiver. Just to see how big he was, you know, you are watching the tape and you meet him and you're like, okay, this is a little bit different cat here.

My brother actually played their team in a scrimmage and at that point he was committed to Arkansas and he picked

up the phone after that scrimmage and called me and said, hey, you need to get on that Jadan Baugh guy. We turned it up after that scrimmage.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, I think that's one of the things that was impressive about him. Loose hipped and could change direction. To be 237 pounds, I think he's unique. Incredible kid and family. Just he's got it. I mean, you can tell going to that school that day.

He's a really good basketball player, too. Point guard in a basketball team. Well-rounded. Parents are phenomenal people. Very ground. He's the right kind. You take that one every time.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports