

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, October 28, 2024

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Jack Pyburn

Press Conference



Q. Jack, being from Jacksonville, what does this game kind of mean to you and Pup and the other guys from that area?

JACK PYBURN: I can tell you for me it means everything. Since I've been growing up, there is not a Georgia/Florida game that I can't remember not going to. I've been to every single game since I remember what Florida/Georgia is.

Growing up in that environment and really truly knowing what this game is like, it makes or breaks some people's year for them. You know, it's a year of trash talk on both sides of the ball, your neighbor.

It's like the Florida State rivalry to a certain extent. There's a lot of Georgia fans in North Florida. There's a lot of Florida fans. It's a heated rivalry that truly is special.

Q. You're coming up on the one year that you had your knee injury. If you take time and reflect on everything you have put into being able to come back, how gratifying is it to really start playing at your peak right now?

JACK PYBURN: Yeah, I thank God, first of all. It wouldn't be possible without him. It wouldn't be possible without my family. It wouldn't be possible without this great university and the people that have stayed with me this entire time and pushed me to be the best version of myself and come back at a high level.

I am so thankful just for the opportunity to be back in a position where I can play the game that I love and do what I love most in the world.

Q. Do you remember Carson Beck when he played high school football in Jacksonville?

JACK PYBURN: I do. I don't remember what year exactly I was, but he played, and I remember watching his state championship team. I knew a lot of people who played against him. He was obviously a great player then. He's

still a great player now. I respect his game and look forward to playing against him.

Q. How important is it going to be for you guys to kind of make it a little uncomfortable for him on Saturday?

JACK PYBURN: Any great quarterback you have to get them off their spot and cause them to be under duress and get hits on quarterback. It's going to be a big part of our game plan to make him move out of the pocket, make him move around and have to make tougher throws and not be able to sit back there and have all day to make reads and become comfortable.

Q. Seeing Etienne again, probably not something you were hoping to have to -- a guy you were hoping to have to tackle. What's that like to see a former teammate on the opposing team now?

JACK PYBURN: At the end of the day the guy is my brother. Blood, sweat, and tears here together for two years. Came in with him. He's a great friend to me. He always has been. I have respect for him.

I'm just really looking forward to competing against him in the game. There's no friends on the field, but before and after the game, always buddies, always friends. Just looking forward to competing against him because he's a great player.

Q. Do you see yourself in the same position group now that you're a fullback, running back?

JACK PYBURN: No, not quite. Not quite.

Q. How did that come about, and how much did you embrace that fullback role? Did you even go seek it out?

JACK PYBURN: No, they came to me about it. They used me in a variety of ways. They use me on special teams. My defensive role, and now offense. It's been a package that we've had in for a good while.

We've practiced it. We've repped it, but just had to get the



right situation to run it and call it. I was definitely excited when they called it because I knew it was going to be a touchdown for sure. I was pretty juiced up about it.

Q. Did you ever play fullback in high school?

JACK PYBURN: I did. Yeah, I did. I played running back when I was in Pop Warner. Every kid plays running back when they're in Pop Warner. Who doesn't?

I played running back when I was younger and tight end and all that kind of stuff. In high school I was our fullback and would lead block for my buddy who plays at Air Force now. That was super fun. It was reliving a little bit of those experiences too because at the end of the day it's putting me on the goal line, letting me put my head down, and it's one-on-one with someone, and I like me over anybody, so...

Q. Fullback is kind of a lost art. What do you like about that position, that responsibility?

JACK PYBURN: I just feel like when they put you in at fullback, you know your assignment, you know your job. It's coming down to, Hey, Jack, we need to you blow up the edge. Okay, I do that pretty well on defense, so I can do that well pretty well on offense too.

I look forward to putting my face into someone and running through someone, if I'm being honest. I love contact, so...

Q. Speaking of blowing up the edge, I don't know if you saw the highlight that circulated on social media of you making some plays off the edge. How much have you taken pride in some of those plays that you have made at your natural spot?

JACK PYBURN: It's what I do, man. I love contact. At the end of the day you watch the best edges in the NFL, you watch the best edges in college football, the best edges are ones that set edges and set edges with violence.

Like I say, it's better to be the hammer than the nail because if you're the nail, you're the one that's getting hurt. If you are the hammer, you ain't going to feel nothing. So when I come there it's a mentality that I'm going to run through your face, and you're going to have to stop me. Hurts them a lot more than it hurts me. It's fun.

Q. There was one play where you went for the offensive lineman and ran past the running back with the ball in his hand because that was your responsibility. How much discipline does it take to do that?

JACK PYBURN: A lot. It's hard, especially in a situation that you see the running back, but at the end of the day can I make that play? Am I good enough? I think so, but if I don't, I just sold out ten other guys on defense. I think that's something that gets lost in today's age.

You know, at the end of the day you have to be a football player, play disciplined football and not just be an athlete. Sometimes when you try to make those wow, crazy plays, you end up hurting the other ten guys that have worked their tails off all week and all year to do their assignment, and you could potentially cost them the game because you decided to be selfish in the moment.

When I have plays like that, I read my keys, I know what I have, and I do my job. Most of the time if I do my job well enough, it allows me to make the play on top of it also.

Q. Sometimes your job might be just to force this play back inside where we have more people instead of getting out of my responsibility to try to make it for myself. Is that --

JACK PYBURN: 100%, yeah. At the end of the day if you are the edge, you set the edge, you do it to the best of your ability.

If you're the inside piece, you take on the inside. You cut off the blocks and force it to your linebackers and spill. That's just called playing team defense and elite defenses play team defense. If you want to be an elite defense, you have to play team defense.

Q. When was it first evident that you had that kind of mode and this attitude because a lot of kids when they start playing -- how young were you?

JACK PYBURN: When I first put the bobble head tackle football helmet on? Probably 7, maybe 8. Pee Wee or whatever it's called.

Q. A lot of kids at that age shy away from contact a little sometimes, and then you kind of -- where were you? Did you have the mode and love of contact at a young age?

JACK PYBURN: Yeah, I did. It was a funny situation. I do remember it. It was my mom -- or it's my dad. I forget which one, but they tell me about it. It might have been both of them.

They tell me all the time about it was right after my first football practice ever because I was the kid that would be in soccer and all the parents would come off the sideline screaming because all the kids would be kicking the ball in

the pile, and I would come through there and plow everybody over, and they would all be mad.

I remember after my first practice they came, and I was, like, So I can hit people and not get in trouble for it? They were, like, Yeah. I was, like, Wow, this is great. So ever since then I have just loved -- I just love being physical. I love contact. I don't know why. I guess something might be wrong with me. I don't know.

Q. Probably, but were you Tasmanian Devil around the house breaking things?

JACK PYBURN: Oh, yeah. I was the kid on Saturdays who you would be sitting there watching college football. I'm, like, stacking up pillows and holding the football and trying to truck pillows. Yeah, for sure.

Q. How do you view the current state of the rivalry? You talked about bragging rights. What do you think it's going to take to change or how do you players view that?

JACK PYBURN: First off, all credit to Georgia. I think they're a fantastic team. I think what their coach has done there over the past since he has been there has been great. They've built a culture of winning. They've established a strong prince amongst the college football world.

At the end of the day you have to come with a mentality that you're going to win every game. If you don't, you're not going to win the games. I think that's something that I have been trying not only me, but all the leaders on our team, all the coaches that, listen, we have the talent to play with and beat any team in the country, but you have to show up on Saturday with that mentality to do it.

Q. At the same time you have talked about having a chip on your shoulder type mentality here in a sense. How do you balance the two of feeling like you have a chip on your shoulder and also that you can compete with anyone in the nation?

JACK PYBURN: I feel like having your chip on your shoulder is a big reason why you feel like you can compete with anyone in the nation. I feel like when people lose sight of that they have something to prove and that they've arrived, that's when they're lost.

If you always feel like you've never arrived and that you always have more to gain, which is how every football player should feel, because at the end of the day there's always more that you can bring out of yourself and the game of football. There's always more you can learn.

There's always techniques you can learn.

If you approach everything with a chip on your shoulder, I think it brings the best out of people's character.

Q. Are you one of the guys who has attacked to some of the recent transfers? This program has added 30-plus transfers in the last two years. Have you talked to them about the importance of this game and what it means to not just to you guys as a program, but the fan bases and everyone else out there who is tuning in on Saturday?

JACK PYBURN: Yeah, I remind everybody how important this game is. Whether it's someone in EQ, whether it's someone in the training room, whether it's a player, whether it's a transfer, everyone needs to understand the importance of this game and any rivalry at Florida because this place is a special place.

The rivalries that have been built over the years have been built because of the great players that have come through there. We have to maintain that standard that those players have set and played for them and respect those that have come before us by playing our hardest we can every Saturday.

Q. Combined scores the last two years are 54-10 at halftime. Georgia has really put it away. How imperative is a better start, fast start for you guys?

JACK PYBURN: It's everything. From the first drive you have to look to impose your will on another team no matter what game it is. I think that is something that especially our defense has done much better in the past four weeks as we've been starting fast. We've been getting three-and-outs on the first drives. We've been coming out and getting our offense the ball early as well as our offense going down, gaining touchdowns earlier in the game, setting the tone.

I think at the end of the day it's going to come down to we have to come out there with the right mindset and set the tone early.

Q. You mentioned going to this game growing up. What was it like last year coming in and seeing all the tailgating, running out onto the field and just being a part of it?

JACK PYBURN: Yeah, it's been crazy the past two years because I know where my family sits, and knowing that there's hundreds of people there at that game to watch me play, and it's going to be even crazier this year. It's honestly kind of surreal.

When you grow up sitting in the stands your whole life and seeing the orange and blue -- or the orange and red and blue divided, it's crazy. But when you are on the field and it's sitting there, it's split down the middle, to me it's almost more of a home game than even here to an extent because I've been to that game my entire life. It's where I'm from. It's my home.

That game, I mean, it meant everything. I was one of the people that was riding around on little mini-scooters on Thursday or Wednesday at the game. It's incredible. I'm just really looking forward to getting back there and playing it again and performing for my university.

Q. On that note, would you ever want that game moved from Jacksonville?

JACK PYBURN: No.

Q. Why not?

JACK PYBURN: You just can't replace that game. For the fans, for us, the atmosphere. They call it the largest outdoor cocktail party for a reason. I mean, you think the game is packed. There are hundreds of more thousands of fans outside of the game everywhere.

When you go to RV City on a Thursday night, and there's 40 Georgia buses all lined up wrapped with Georgia wraps, and every single one is a Georgia fan. Then you go the next street, and it's all Gator fans, the exact same. It's just special.

Being at a middle ground between North Florida where a lot of Gator fans can come to and a lot of Georgia fans can migrate to, I feel like it's a great venue and great spot to play one of the greatest rivalries in the country.

Q. What do you think the high school kids think about with that game being there in terms of recruiting right now? Are there a lot of Georgia guys or a lot of Florida guys? Were you recruited by Georgia?

JACK PYBURN: No, I wasn't. I do remember that their coach had brought up that point in the past that they want it for more recruiting. I can see that to an extent, but at the end of the day when you become a player and get to play in it, you kind of forget about things like that.

I wouldn't mind if they made it better to be able to have recruits on both sides. Kind of make it a home and home for recruiting for both teams. I think that would be -- I don't know if they do that now. I'm not really sure how it all works because I was obviously just at the game as a fan all

those years, but I just think the uniqueness and the experience of it is irreplaceable.

Q. When did it hit you that you were going to play in a game that you went to as a kid and running out in the tunnel? Was that part of the motivation in a sense to come to Florida to play in this game?

JACK PYBURN: Oh, it always has been to play in these rivalry games. Growing up watching Florida play against these teams, and I was one of those people where this game would make or break my year, make or break my week. It was bad.

We would lose to Georgia, and I would be out some money betting with some of my buddies back in the day, and I would be having to do some crazy stuff because I lost a bet. I was one of those people, so I understand how much this game means.

For me this is why you come to the SEC is to play in these kind of games, these unique experiences that you don't get in some other conferences and playing against the best team in the country.

Q. What's the craziest thing you had to do for losing a bet with your guys?

JACK PYBURN: I'm not going to say the craziest one I had to do, but I lost, like, \$100 one time. I remember I had to pay for my buddy's lunch for two weeks one time at school. That sucked. Those are off the top of my head. I'm not going to say some more personal ones.

Q. A lot of coaches and players kind of say it's a nameless face, it's just the next opponent. You have kind of spoken to how important rivalry games are. Is that something that the team feels this week? Not to take anything away from a Kentucky or a Stanford, but does this week feel different being Georgia?

JACK PYBURN: Yes, 100% especially how good of a team they are. I view everything as opportunity. You know, not only a rivalry game, but if we want to be where we want to be as a team and put Florida back where I believe that this university deserves to be, we have to win games like this. We have to be competitive in games like this, and we have to show up in moments like this.

That's something in the big message that I have been harping to the team all week and I think all the guys have sewed in their head is that this is a game that we need to come and play our best ball at.

Q. Did you have any fullbacks that you grew up

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

watching or admiring? Were you a Mike Alstott guy?

JACK PYBURN: No, I'm going to be honest. Not really. I was always paying attention to defense.

Q. Michael Williams, being an edge guy, what's your familiarity with him on Georgia? Do you know of him or not?

JACK PYBURN: I don't think so, no.

Q. I wanted one more question on Trevor, though. Just the way Georgia uses him, what challenge does that pose? He's caught 15 passes the last three games in addition to running it a dozen plus each game.

JACK PYBURN: I think a big key for this game is going to be ID'ing where he is on the field. You have to pay attention to what they do, watch a lot of film, and be detail-oriented. It's like any week.

Georgia is a team that's going to do what they do because they execute at a high level. They're going to have some tricks and some trades here and there, but they're going to line up, and they're going to play physical. They're going to come at you, and they're not going to shy away for four quarters. You need to understand what your assignment is and understand what kind of game it's going to be.

ID'ing where he is on the field and trying to contain him and get after him all game is going to be a big part of success on Saturday.

Q. Since you do have a background as a ball carrier, will you be lobbying for any fullback dives?

JACK PYBURN: Always, always. I mean, you always want to be selfish as a player and get the ball, so...

Q. Did you have any in high school from that spot?

JACK PYBURN: We had some plays installed. Kind of the same thing in high school. We didn't end up running them because pretty much every single time we would just run power and we would score because I would tray one or two guys, and we would just score. So what was the point in changing something that ain't broke? If it ain't broke, don't fix you.

Q. But if they need you?

JACK PYBURN: I can do it.

Q. The offensive line picks up the running backs when they score. Do you think that would happen if you had

a fullback dive touchdown, like Austin Barber picking you up?

JACK PYBURN: It would probably take an extra lineman to do it, but they would probably try. It would be pretty cool. I would probably be running around too much and too hyped anyway for anybody to grab and pick me up, so I would be running around like my head was cut off, but it would be hilarious, but it would awesome.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports