

University of Florida Football Media Conference

Monday, November 4, 2024

Gainesville, Florida, USA

Head Coach Bill Napier

Press Conference



BILL NAPIER: On behalf of the entire football organization, we want to wish men's and women's basketball best of luck as they start the season tonight. Coach Golden and Coach Finley obviously have been incredible since I've been here and really are very thankful and appreciative of the relationship I have with both of those coaches.

So we have moved forward and begun our prep for Texas. Obviously Texas is a very talented roster. I think from top to bottom in every position. It's elite height, length, speed, athleticism.

I do think that they have a veteran quarterback, and they have a rebuilt skill group around him and a handful of offensive linemen that have really good experience as well.

I do think the returners are dynamic in the kicking game and just in general of the athleticism and the philosophy that they play within the kicking game presents a number of issues so we will have to buttoned up there.

Defensively I'm really impressed with the overall makeup of that group. They're explosive at every level... first, second, and third level. They have an identity. They have a blueprint. I think they do a good job playing situational football as well. The makeup of the team going on the road to play at their place, obviously the early kick, and given where our team is at, our ability to recenter and begin our preparation will be really important today.

I thought we obviously answered a bunch of questions about the game Saturday after the game, but overall anything you've got about that as well, we would be more than welcome to talk about.

Q. How is DJ just handling this situation? He's heading back to Texas to play in front of his folks and all that, and now that's not going to happen. I saw a picture of you guys kind of embracing. He looked upset.

BILL NAPIER: Yeah. Injuries are one of the more challenging parts of the profession, coaching and playing,

right?

The good news is we've had positive information on that front. That is the positive there. We do think that injury is less significant. We do think there's a pathway for recovery and a return. We did find that out yesterday evening. So a lot of good on that front.

So less significant than we anticipated, and he's been doing well so far this morning. We have not completely ruled him out, and I think a lot of that will be to be determined as we move our way throughout the week. So that's a good thing for all involved and certainly for DJ

But I think you're spot on. I think in the moment there Saturday, obviously off to a good start, excited about being a part of that rivalry game and making his impact on that rivalry. Then I think that he in particular is a great competitor, and he wants to be loyal to his teammates and be available to do his part for the team. So, yeah, I think he was torn up pretty good like you would anticipate.

Q. When you say "not ruled out," just to clarify, for this week?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, yeah. We're going to kind of see how that goes. I think obviously the position that he plays makes that possible. Look, it's going to be pretty clear-cut once we get to Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, so we'll know.

Q. Were you surprised with that? Looking at the injury when it happened and the cart coming out, everybody is thinking, Oh, this looks like -- usually when that happens, it's the kind of thing where you are lucky to see the guy again in a year kind of thing.

BILL NAPIER: Yeah. Well, I think, yeah, you just never know. Soft tissue is a strange -- I mean, I think it's a very subjective injury, and this one proved to be that, right?

Ultimately you have to get to the MRI to find out how much damage there is, and that's what we did. We did the MRI Sunday, got it back last night. So positive news on that front.



Q. You seemed very adamant after the game. You had some fire about the ability for the team to compete with the best in the SEC and Georgia clearly. Do you feel very strongly this program is moving in the direction you want? Obviously you've made it on the win-loss column, but do you feel very strongly there that things are on track?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I do.

Q. Maybe not the timeline you want, but on track, though.

BILL NAPIER: We all want things faster, right? I mean, I think we all -- I think life and football is no different. It tests our patience, but I do think given the dynamic -- I just like this team I would say. I like what I have observed from this team since the first open date.

Obviously we were very disappointed in how we started the year, but I think just a group of players -- I have a ton of respect for the group of players. The body of work since the open date I think as a whole I've been pleased with that, and I think the mindset, the competitive spirit, the improvement, the football improvement, I think the tape speaks for itself.

Q. With the injuries to Devin Moore and Dijon, just what have you seen from some of the freshmen, Jameer Grimsley, Teddy Foster? They are thrust into action in a hostile road environment.

BILL NAPIER: I think they're capable. I think they're just green, you know. They've got all the traits that you would look for. Some a little more mature than others. I think that's part of it, but I do think there's talent there. There's height, length, athleticism, what you would want to recruit.

That was a deep room that's been hit with the injury bug, and I think some of the competitive depth that we've recruited and developed there showed up. Obviously Cormani continues to get a little bit better. He's impressed me with how he's managed it, and I do think that those other guys are capable.

We're not there yet. We'll know later in the week. I think both of those guys are in a category they could very easily be available for the game as well.

Q. What kind of temperature are you getting as for how the team is trying to hold together through this kind of rash of injuries? Did you have any team meetings yesterday, today?

BILL NAPIER: Our guys were in the building yesterday. Treatment yesterday. Recovery yesterday. Some voluntary film review yesterday.

I think it's next man up. I mean, we proved that Saturday, and I think it presents an opportunity for some of these guys that haven't maybe got to play as much as they would like to play, and I think ultimately you've got to view it that way.

I do think in this league with the level of talent, the physicality, the explosive plays it's always going to be that way. You've got to have a deep team, and now in the 12-team playoff it's even more than important than ever, right?

So we've survived it. I think the quarterback situation probably is the most dire injury. I think all the other positions we've been able to manage it for the most part.

Q. Tre Wilson and Treyaun Webb are two guys that were healthy against Kentucky and then they're out again. Did they suffer setbacks during the bye week, or what happened there?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, no, Treyaun -- both of which I think Tre's injury has been lingering. It's been an issue that he's had for quite a while that we've been navigating. I think at times he's been able to produce and then there will be setbacks.

Then Treyaun obviously we'll have a little bit more specific details for you later this week, but in general it was kind of unforeseen situations there that contributed to both.

Q. What's it take to kind of create the culture where players can pull through these kinds of things and in a lot of cases kind of play for you in a way? I'm sure that's very gratifying to see.

BILL NAPIER: No, again, I love this group. I think, like I've mentioned many times standing up here before, a very unique group in that regard. Wouldn't have been able to continue to play with the type of effort if we didn't have pretty unique character.

So just in general here improvement, belief, a certain mindset that you have to have in terms of how you compete, how hard you play. We've taken a step forward in that direction.

Q. How do you balance the desire to want Lagway back on the field playing versus making sure he doesn't make it worse?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, soft tissue is really -- those are the challenging ones, right? I think the position he plays contributes to that, but look, we're going to exhaust every resource we have.

I think we are very fortunate that we have a great group of professionals that work with our team. Dr. Farmer, all of our orthopedics just in general through UF Health and locally here. We have access to some of the best. It's a really competitive advantage for our players and our staff. Really all of our athletic teams.

So we've got access to really smart people, very experienced people, and I think that's going to be the key. The sports science piece is a huge element in that regard because we have metrics that can give the player confidence and allow us to make objective decisions at the same time.

Q. Did you pull a hamstring when you were (indiscernible)?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah. I can tell you when it's going to rain outside. Let's put it that way.

No, I just think that it alleviates some of the -- for me I would say we're always trying to make the best decision for each individual player and we just have more ways to evaluate it. It's less subjective. Whereas, concussions are that way. Soft tissue is that way. All the force plate, all the NordBord, the Catapult. We have so many variables that we can look at and say, Hey, this guy is ready to go. The Bio-Dex. There's a million of them.

It helps the player because oftentimes the injury is mental, right, and I think we can say, Hey, look, you're back to baseline. If anything, you're performing better than you did even during training camp, et cetera. So it's definitely a completely different game for sure.

Q. You said you came out Friday pretty hard on the faking injuries standpoint. Did you feel like that was a problem across the league, and what was kind of your reaction to that?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, we don't do it. We don't believe in doing it. It wasn't a concern for us, and I'm not aware if any team has done it against us. It was not an issue within our team.

Q. Was it discussed going into the season or during the season, like with the SEC coaches?

BILL NAPIER: It's been a hot topic for several years now. To the level of which I think they're proposing fines of that

nature and now penalties, right? Yeah, not a big believer in it. I think it's not something that we needed to review going into the game.

Q. If Aidan does play on Saturday and you mentioned he was put in a tough situation, but fans are going to look at 7 of 22, just maybe ways even as a coaching staff or so forth to get that completion percentage a little higher, ways that maybe you can manage him or navigate him in terms of higher percentage throws?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I'm with you. I have the same concerns and same -- I mean, I think we always -- there's an element of, Okay, hey, you always have to kind of have some awareness of the things you can control and you can't control, and then you have to have courage to really take a good look at the mirror at the areas where, Hey, I can do something about that.

But, no, he was the backup, and obviously we were hoping that we didn't have to go there, but we did, and then Georgia is a stingy operation, and I think they can make it very challenging for you. The coverage and the rush.

Look, the kid did as good of job as he could do. There will be some plays that he would like to have back, but it's a pretty big stage to trot out there in the middle of that one, which, yeah, I've been impressed with him. He won the job back during training camp, late training camp going into week one in the season.

We kind of decided to make him the three. He did not go through spring practice. He did not go through OTAs in the summer. Kind of proved himself during training camp, and really we were dividing reps with that third and fourth quarterback at that point.

Then, obviously, we got to the season, and we made that decision. Now, the three quarterback gets no reps, right? He got reps for the last couple of weeks as the two, and I would say he's had some really good practices. I think there are some things to be encouraged about.

Q. How will the next couple of days be for Clayton knowing that now he is one play away from being inserted in the game?

BILL NAPIER: I think Clay got a ton of reps in the spring. I think obviously the two spot practices contribute to that, but Clay is very capable player as well. Yeah, he'll get all the reps with the twos this week.

Q. What's an ideal scenario -- what does a Bill Napier roster look like from a quarterback standpoint? What number of scholarships guys would you ideally like to

have?

BILL NAPIER: I would take six or seven if you give them to me. I think there's a fine balance in there in terms of recruiting to that position. I signed four in one year at Louisiana if that makes any sense. Yeah, I just don't think you can ever have enough of them.

Now, that being said, we carry four on scholarship typically and a fifth if we were able to, but nowadays there's a lack of patience, and everybody wants to be the guy. I just think you are always looking for that fourth player. So the right combinations of scenarios that allow you to recruit to that spot.

I think four in a perfect world would be just right, but I think it's year-to-year. It's absolutely one year at a time.

Q. How much harder is it now in the transfer portal, and do you find yourself trying to sell if you really like a guy or like a quarterback, or do you understand that it's just the nature of the beast and they'll go where they can play?

BILL NAPIER: I think it's important that you are very honest in the beginning. No promises. I think you've got to be very transparent about the current role. I think the team dynamic is very important once they do arrive that they understand where everything is at.

In the recruiting process all these kids on our team I sat in a room with them, their parents at some point in time in the process. So we want to try to do it the same way, and I think we've done that.

Q. Shane Matthews on his show this morning he said quarterbacks want the football a certain way, and Aidan really wasn't preparing the footballs as he would like. I'm not talking "Deflate Gate" here, but I'm talking scuffed up. Some of them maybe like them fresh out of the package. Is there something to this, or was Shane just kind of -- it seemed kind of he would know. He is a pretty insightful guy with something like that.

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I can tell you as a former quarterback, I had a little deal with the managers. I would find one during the week and say, Put that -- I would say, Set that one aside, you know, or after a couple periods I would be, like, Hey, that one is out.

I mean, I think the best in the game -- Shane Matthews is one of the best quarterbacks in the history of this program, so his opinion -- you know, he's played the game. He's had a helmet on. He's laced them up. I think there's something to it for sure.

Q. Because there was a throw, one in particular, with where he --

BILL NAPIER: I don't know that that contributed to what happened Saturday.

Q. It looked like it kind of came out of his hand even because he made -- Aidan made some sweet throws. There were a few that were very nice, and there were a couple of where it was, like, Whoa, because maybe that -- I don't know. Is there something --

BILL NAPIER: I don't know that that contributed on Saturday. I promise you Aidan Warner was not thinking about that Saturday, okay? I can promise you that.

Q. Another question, the field, was that an issue? You had a lot of guys slip early. Obviously DJ slipped when he was about to cut on the hamstring. Was the field an issue or the cleats maybe you guys had for the field?

BILL NAPIER: I think it's week-to-week depending on where you are playing. I think there's always a little bit of an adjustment. We had some players change cleats after pregame, halftime, some of that, but that's common at every level of football.

I think it's something that we discuss. Then obviously equipment helps the players with some of that. I mean, I'm watching Penn State, Ohio State, that's a completely different surface than maybe what we played on, right? I just think that it's part of the game. It's an outdoor game. The surface is always a little bit different, and I think the other team has to play on that same surface. So I think it's something that we don't necessarily control, and we don't spend time worrying about it.

Q. The play of Aaron Gates, I know he is a guy you liked for a while. What did you think of his performance Saturday and how he is coming on?

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, Gates is one of our best football players. Obviously I had a high opinion of him coming out, and he's big, long. He's dense. He's extremely quick and fast. He's very instinctive, played both ways in high school, was a returner. Incredible parents.

Last year played in the final four games after coming off the ACL. He had an ACL injury his senior year, so we played him in the final four. Redshirted him, and then obviously he's been able to be -- it's very evident when he is out there. He and Sharif both have done a good job as really young players playing for the first time, but Gates

made some really impressive plays on special teams Saturday as well.

Good in coverage, physical, good tackler. Yeah, I'm excited, and he's got position versatility. I'm not so sure he couldn't play corner. He could play all five if need be.

Q. I've asked you about that before. Because of the injuries if you have to keep putting Bridges at corner, could you see him playing --

BILL NAPIER: We worked him back there in practice a little bit late in the week. So we're really testing our position flex right now, but --

Q. Played corner too at one point.

BILL NAPIER: Scout team last year he was playing corner. Just trying to get the guy on the field to be honest with you.

Q. Aidan Mizell, you mentioned some of the factors that have gone into him contributing. Is there anything -- like you talked about him building up his body and football IQ and all these things. What else is he doing to continue to make strides because he definitely seems to have a knack for big plays?

BILL NAPIER: Well, first of all, he's extremely fast. I mean, the guy is elite speed. His skill level is improving. Just overall route running, releases, top of route transition. He was a little bit behind from the skill development standpoint, and he has physically matured quite a bit. So I think he's still getting bigger and stronger.

I think he's got to improve in his play strength, his overall physicality, his temperament, just as a blocker in general, but I think he's got some strengths. He fits the prototype, and I think he'll continue to get better.

I mean, it's really his first significant year of playing time.

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