

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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Gainesville, Florida, USA

## Head Coach Bill Napier

### Press Conference



**BILL NAPIER:** Obviously before we get moving to the next one, I just want to thank our fans. I mean, I think it's 11 straight sell-outs. We're hopeful for the 12th this weekend, but just really special environment. I thought they played a major factor in the game.

I think this group and our team have been vocal about how thankful they are that our fans continue to show up. Obviously we've been frustrated ourselves at times, and for them to continue to be there and play a major factor in the game, I think we're very appreciative of that.

We're going to need them Saturday. Obviously a good Ole Miss team coming into town and a lot at stake. So the big thing for us is we have to earn the right to win, and I think that's got to be the approach each day of the week. I thought we wanted to be the most prepared we have been to play last week. That was the big message and challenge, and I think we were.

So this week it's all about earning the right to win, and we have to have a little bit of a playoff mindset ourselves to some degree. You know, can we handle the praise, the positive?

Obviously played well Saturday and get a lot of gratification from that, but I think it's important that we hit the reset button here, and it's about the next challenge. You're either growing or you're dying. You're either getting better, or you're getting worse. Our attitude and our approach towards meetings and practice and our self-discipline, our routine this week will be really critical.

But Ole Miss has got playmakers on offense. Obviously a veteran quarterback. Then defensively they've got some disruptive players up front. I think overall just a very veteran team. 32 seniors in the two-deep on offense and defense. Not to mention a couple of redshirt juniors.

In general they're in position to -- you know, they've had a good year. So I think this is a good football team, a ranked opponent, and we're excited about the challenge.

What do we have?

#### **Q. You worked with Lane for years. What are your thoughts on him as a coach and an offensive mind?**

**BILL NAPIER:** Charlie Weis Jr., the offensive coordinator as well. I worked with Charlie. We were all at Alabama together there for a couple of years.

So just in general one thing I would say is that I learned a lot. I think that environment, the people that we had in the building, when you start looking at the list of coaches and support staff, I think that was a beneficial time in my career just because of the people that were in the building. Obviously Lane was a part of that staff.

Yeah, that's what I would say. That entire experience was extremely beneficial.

#### **Q. Was it just his personality? What do you think he kind of brings to the game? He's kind of got a little Spurrier brashness and likes to kind of poke people, and he's obviously the offensive kind of guy?**

**BILL NAPIER:** Yeah, Lane has always been that guy. He's got tremendous experience. You know, I think Lane has shown a ton of growth in my opinion.

I obviously know him well. When his dad passed away, we spent a lot of time talking about some of that. Obviously I had been through that. He's a coach's son. I'm a coach's son. I think we love ball, right? We love everything about the game.

Lane continues -- you know, he has had multiple opportunities as a head coach. I think maybe this is his fourth opportunity. So just in general a very accomplished and experienced coach.

#### **Q. You guys chatted on the phone about when Monte Kiffin passed?**

**BILL NAPIER:** We did.

#### **Q. What about the intricacies of the offense?**

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**Traditionally they're tough and the challenge of that, and coming off your defensive performance, what kind of challenge that's going to be this week?**

BILL NAPIER: I think very systematic. I think he's had a number of different coordinators. I think you go back to the transition at Alabama and then obviously when he got the job at FAU, Kendal Briles and then it was Jeff Lebby, and now it's Charlie Weis Jr.

I think he's had a number of different coordinators that have contributed to the evolution of that. The tempo being part of that. Then I think you add in some of the unique formation variables that maybe goes to our background with the pro style.

Yeah, I think it's been challenging for people to stop. I think obviously they've had good balance too. It's not necessarily one-dimensional. So last year obviously very rush-heavy, and then obviously this year the quarterback being the premiere player. Obviously they have a really good group of receivers.

Lane has always done a good job of taking whatever skill players he has and playing to those strengths.

**Q. Sending the seniors out in the last home game on a high note, is that something that you discuss with the locker room? I know that you don't need to give the team any additional fuel, but do you bring it up at all as something for the younger players as a motivational factor?**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I do think it's a unique week in that regard. Obviously this group of seniors are a unique group. There will be a part of that for the younger players to want to do their part for that group. So that will be a portion of the motivation I would say.

Those guys will talk about that. Obviously it's going to come up, and the families are involved, and I think it's a big deal. Especially a place like Florida playing in that venue, which is a privilege. You only get so many opportunities to do it, so I do think it's a special, special day.

**Q. I want to ask about your secondary the other day, but those guys, the corners and safeties I think played all 93 snaps. Just the job they did to cover at a high rate to allow the defensive front to get home, how critical was that in the win in your opinion?**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I thought it was huge. I mean, it was a big part of the challenge in the game. They've got really good skill, and obviously the quarterback to go along with that. You pair the running game with the tight end and the

receivers there and some of the unique matchups.

So I thought we stayed on top of them pretty good. We played with better leverage. I thought the communication was really good.

There was only a handful of plays that we were maybe a little bit out of whack, and some of that was underneath coverage. So Trikweze Bridges' position flexibility has proved to be very valuable. He can play corner the entire game.

Then Bryce Thornton I thought really stepped up, and we're getting good play out of the nickel and free safety position. So DD, man, what an incredible example to other players relative to his toughness and grit playing through injury.

Those guys got healthy last week. We leapt into that Texas game, and they played, but they weren't quite themselves. I think being healthy helped them, but there's no doubt some coverage sacks in the game, they were a big piece of that.

**Q. (Off microphone)**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think ultimately that group is -- they played every play, which is unique. You know, Sharif played at star with Gates. That position does quite a bit of running. It's a different type of position, but I think that's who we are right now. It's who we have to be. Pro ball, it was an NFL game, you know?

**Q. You go from a game where you have a stationary quarterback in Nussmeier to Dart, who is very, very active, very mobile. Talk about the challenges that presents.**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I think you're thinking like me now, but I think it's one of the more demanding parts of the matchup. Not only do you have to match up with the skill outside and the coverages, you would like to play to leverage all the routes the right way. It puts you in a position where the quarterback can hurt you, right? You are kind of picking your poison.

I think they are committed to the run. There's a ton in RPOs in his system as well. That will be one of the chess matches that will be taking place.

One thing I would say about Jackson Dart is he is 225 pounds. He is 6'1 1/2". He is dense and proven to be effective in this league as a runner. They mix him in there throughout the game when they need him, and he's effective.

**Q. Senior Day, how tough is that for you going through a Senior Day?**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, man, I think the pregame routine changes up a little bit. We got some special ones in this group, some guys that I think have shown outstanding leadership. We've got some guys that are injured as well that are part of this group.

Yeah, I think as we get closer to that day, you'll spend a little more time thinking about each one of those individual players.

**Q. Has there been any discussion with Asa about applying for a medical year?**

BILL NAPIER: Not that I know of.

**Q. He can, right?**

BILL NAPIER: I don't necessarily know that he is thinking in those terms, but obviously I imagine that that could be out there for him.

**Q. With the back field, obviously Montrell coming back from injury and then Jadan and Ja'Kobi just having excelled in the last few weeks, what are you expecting to see from this group, which has really found its footing as of late? What are you expecting to see from them going into Ole Miss and the homestretch of the season?**

BILL NAPIER: The two young ones continue to get better with confidence. I think the biggest area of growth for them is just overall understanding of the scheme and the protection part. They've got really good instincts with the ball.

I think typically running backs early in their career are pretty good with the ball. It's the protection piece that's key. You know, again, you're either growing or dying. They need to not rest on their laurels here and have a great week of prep and try to finish the season trending in the right direction. So far so good with those two.

**Q. When you look at the two-deep right now, it's still a lot of freshmen and sophomores. How invaluable are the next couple of weeks going to be to finish up and have been maybe in SEC competition and what that means for the future of the program as well?**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah. Look, for us I would like to see some maturity from our team. Can we handle -- this group has been able to ignore the noise. Can we sort through the

hype a little bit and stay consistent in the way we prepare, our practice habits, our self-discipline, our film review?

I think long-term as a program to go where we want to go, we're going to have to navigate that week in and week out. This league in a playoff format will challenge that.

So not only physically turning it around and being ready to play, but mentally new set of variables, new personnel, new plan, and then emotionally you have to sort through that too. Are we mature enough to handle all the praise, and can we turn it around and do it again?

**Q. I was going to ask you about DJ Lagway. He woke up Sunday and still feeling good. That's probably the most he had done in two weeks. What do you expect out of him this week from continuing to progress standpoint? Do you anticipate ramping it up a little bit more for him in practice?**

BILL NAPIER: Well, I mean, I think he didn't miss a rep with the first unit last week, so we'll take the same approach this week.

I think the soft tissue injury, again, those are very subjective, so we've got every gadget that is known to human -- I mean, every gadget that you can imagine downstairs. I think we're using all that data and all those metrics to make decision to try to put him in position to be as healthy as he can be.

Yeah, I mean, we're going day-to-day. He did have a setback, and I think he feels a little bit better at this point in the week than he did last week.

**Q. What was his week like in terms of kind of having to adjust his thinking to how he was going to play? He talked about it being kind of -- I don't know if you saw his interview, but he said he took it on as a challenge to kind of like operate from the pocket because that's not really his full game.**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I think that was part of the message was, look, I think this is part of the challenge. Can you evolve as a player? Can you play a little short-handed? This will be good for your development as a whole. You have to view the game in that regard. It's not an option.

Now, don't get me wrong. I think he did extend the play. He did move in the pocket. He did a really good job in that regard, but I thought overall he handled it pretty well. Look, there were a handful of plays out there, missed opportunities. I mean, he could have had a big, big day.

He's still a young player. He's still evolving. I think that

was a good kind of experience for him long-term that he can lean on in the future.

**Q. A quirk of the portal this week with Princely back, on Senior Day of all things too. Probably will be his Senior Day. What have you seen from him? He's having a pretty huge year.**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, I think it's just another week in college football. Get used to it is what I would say. Yeah, I think I've commented on that in the past, and I think it's just the next challenge.

**Q. This is a team that also leads the country in sacks, and you're coming off a game where your offensive line did a terrific job in pass protection. Talk about the challenge and they seem to get so much of their pressure just from their front three.**

BILL NAPIER: Sure. Yeah, I think they've got some unique players up front. I think they cover them pretty good in the back end. I think it's structurally -- obviously you guys have done your homework here. Pete Golding and Ron Roberts, that relationship is a big piece of the puzzle in this game in terms of defensive structure.

Much like us when the rushing coverage worked well together, they can affect the quarterback. I think at times they've done that.

**Q. Who taught you how to do The Griddy?**

BILL NAPIER: My sons have been very critical of my Griddy the last day or two. No, I think players ask for it. I delivered. I think I got a six out of ten or something like that. Maybe I'll do better next time.

**Q. What type of weekend does that do for recruiting, momentum? What do you think feel like that could carry into this last few weeks?**

BILL NAPIER: Winning helps recruiting. That's what I will tell you. I think for us that game day environment, seeing players produce, seeing players improve, I think it just kind of -- it's a final piece of your product.

I think we've worked on all the other parts of the player experience here. I think it's second to none, and I think seeing players improve and develop and grow into guys that can be some of the better players in the country at their position and have future NFL careers, that's important. Winning is important.

Then just having a seat in that Swamp when it's on fire like it was Saturday night, I think that's important as well.

**Q. (Off microphone)**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah.

**Q. Three in a row at home, is that a reflection of your team? The last home loss was in September against Texas A&M. Is it a reflection of the growth of the team?**

BILL NAPIER: Yeah, it's part of being a good team and part of having a championship contender. Trying to become a championship contender is you have to be strong at home. You have to win those.

I mean, home field advantage in this league has got to be -- it's a big piece to the puzzle. If you look at the history of this program when we were winning championships around here, they dominated at home. We understand that and know that, and that's a big part of it.

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