

# University of Florida Football Media Conference

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## Coach Billy Napier

### Press Conference



Blue 38, Orange 35

**BILLY NAPIER:** Okay. Well, look, I was proud of the Orange team to regroup a little bit at halftime and come out and make it a game. I thought we got some momentum right there before the half, got a score and able to get a stop and really make it competitive. I was worried there for a little bit, to be honest with you (laughter).

But look, I think we learned a lot just in terms of what's required to play winning football, the offensive team on the Orange group, two turnovers on the first half, a fringe sack, and then some missed tackles and I think this really had to wake up on defense a little bit, but in general, got out of here healthy. I think you can see some of the young players' flash today and certainly decent quarterback play for the most part, you know, move the ball around, so in gentlemen, very positive, man. I thought it was an awesome idea by the athletic department to kind of join up the Orange and Blue game with the celebration for the national championship team and Coach Golden, recognize those seniors and also those guys that are coming back, so.

Man, we're very thankful for the crowd. Never fails our fans show up and show out, and I thought it was an unbelievable day in there. Couldn't ask for much better weather than that, so, yeah, what questions we got?

**Q. Can we start with Dallas Wilson, spring game record? I think it was 10 for 195 --**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Yeah.

**Q. -- with two scores. Is this a trajectory for him or is this a little bit of a surprise?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** No, I think the ball went his direction today. I think we were able to take advantage of the match-ups, the situations. He made some plays and not all those were routine. I thought some of those were really impressive. He's a big, physical player, you know? And I think the toughness that he showed in practice I've been

impressed with his football intelligence, how he's been able to retain information and obviously you don't produce like that today unless you're been really working hard, so he's had a good offseason and when given opportunities today, I thought he took full advantage of it. So we've seen a lot of that in practice.

Like I told you guys before, these rankings are a little more accurate than they've ever been and I'd say that's what a Five-Star looks like.

**Q. Ty Jackson and Drake Stubbs leaving the game as two of the leading tacklers. How impressive was that for them being so young at this point?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Yeah, I thought Stubbs was really active. He's got a knack for finding the ball. He continues to evolve in terms of knowing the system, but in general, physical player, not scared of contact, seeks it out. I thought he did a good job as a blitzer today a couple different times and just height, length, and then, you know, he's not scared to put his face in there. He will continue to grow and evolve. Still a young player, still learning. I think the game is slowing down for him a little bit, but good special teams player. A big summer ahead for him.

**Q. Just, Billy, talk about running backs. Another great day for them. Ja'Kobi was, you know, almost 200 yards rushing. Jadan obviously had a good day, big catch as well. What did you see from them today?**

**BILLY NAPIER:** Well, we got... D'Antre got nicked up early, so the defensive front for that Orange team was a little thin. I thought the Blue team took advantage of that, but just standing back there behind it, I thought that Ja'Kobi and Jadan both played fast. I thought they were decisive. We covered them up. Really, the plays were made once it got to the secondary, that's where we had the biggest issues tackling, so I think in general, it's hard to get to excited about it because I'm evaluating the defense too. So I think we need to tackle a little bit better in the secondary, but these two guys, obviously, we know what we have. They were productive last year and I think they're even better a year into it.



**Q. And then just about the other receivers, Vernell got some action, J. Michael, the newcomers besides Dallas.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, Naeshaun I thought was good. And, you know, Aidan was open a couple of times in the game. I thought we missed him a couple of times, Tank with a big touchdown. This is by far the deepest receiver group we've had since we've been here and documented speed. There's a bunch of speed out there. So that's got a chance to be a strength for us. If we can put together some balance there and distribute the ball and get good quarterback play, got a chance to make more explosives in the future. I think ultimately, that's an area where we need to improve to go the distance.

**Q. Coach, where is the defense after really a stellar last five games of the season where their confidence is right now? It looked to be a lot more confident bunch playing on the string a little better, really, to be kind of vanilla, still flying to the football.**

BILLY NAPIER: Sure, a little better in the second I thought. The Blue team, the Blue defense I thought you can see the depth difference, I think. So we're without a few there and I think that those are difference-makers. When you start talking about getting DD back, Bryce back, banks back, D'Antre went out in the first possession. Brien Taylor. George Gumbs. So I do think... you get Aaron Gates back from injury. So, the good thing is those young players, like we mentioned before, Stubbs, Laganza, Ty Jackson, Jeremiah McCloud. Stephon Shivers. Jayden Woods. There's a bunch of freshman that have been in that two-deep and we've seen those guys grow and benefit from the injuries, so, we can view that as a negative or you think we can view it as a positive, so we got a chance to get those guys that have played a lot of football back.

But in general, I thought we could have been better on defense today. I think the players will probably tell you that as well. Just tackling in general. In the beginning of the game, we were not ready. I think we settled in and did that better, but got to start a little faster.

**Q. Yeah, Billy, you mentioned a lot of guys kind of nursing things, but DJ in particular, what's the course ahead for him? Level of optimism for him?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, DJ's doing great. He'll start throwing here in a couple weeks. But, yeah, just in general, very positive there. The lower body stuff is good and I think he's been able to do that and I think we're working on just kind of getting him in position for the next step but in general, there are a lot of positives. Everything's on schedule.

**Q. So you expect him fully ready for camp?**

BILLY NAPIER: Oh, yeah. He'll be -- when we start OTAs in June, he'll be 100%. He'll start throwing in a couple weeks.

**Q. Just to follow up on that, how are his spirits you think have been through this month? And maybe what has he gained by not throwing in terms of some of the mental reps that you were talking about?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is that it's been a challenge, right? Just in terms of -- I think the big thing is we challenge them, too. How can you affect a team every day independent of your production, your performance? So I think his ability to connect with his teammates to create leadership opportunities throughout practice, throughout the offseason program. So he's frustrated, obviously. He wants to play, man. Nobody likes to play more than that guy. And I would say in general, injuries are a huge part of one of the more challenging things. So Caleb, Bryce, obviously, has been through some struggles there, DD, Gates. You think about K Jack, Trey Wilson. We're close to being, I think, get these guys back and I think you got a chance to have a really deep football team.

**Q. And then the experience. On the offensive line, how did you see the benefits of that today?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think it's good for Cam and Rod and Enoch and Noel to get that play time today. I think that's pivotal. Damian and Knijeah are probably the two most experienced inside players, so to be without them I thought that presented opportunities for Cam and Rod and certainly Noel and Enoch, those two, really their first time to play in that stadium, so I think that'll be a huge benefit for them to create some confidence going forward.

**Q. Billy, we obviously asked about DJ but the rest of the quarterback room, obviously that I have gotten more opportunities this spring. How do you feel like that position as a whole is right now?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think it's competitive. I thought -- you guys watched the scrimmage today. I think those guys were very capable and I thought Aidan did a good job running his team and I think Harrison maybe a little bit of a slow start, the players around him, some drops. I think the protection at times could have been a little better, but in general, I was pleased. There were a few situations where we took sacks. I think we got to manage the pocket a little bit better, but, yeah. I feel good. Tramell got two possessions today. He's probably 90% coming off the



injury and then we'll start over the teaching progression in summer A and I think that, obviously, will be big for him. So all three of those guys need to continue to improve.

**Q. 10-7 two years ago and Lane Kiffin was mocking you a little bit.**

BILLY NAPIER: (Laughter).

**Q. Last year, 19-17. Are we seeing an evolution of your spring or is this an evolution of talent? Are we seeing more talent in the program and this is the result?**

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think these skill players -- we've had this conversation before, you know? I think that the key is the -- we watched the playoff it is last couple of years. I think to go the distance, you need explosive play-makers on offense, right? Especially in our system. So, you know, the backs were productive today. I thought the skill players were impressive. So, yeah, I'm hopeful that that's an indication of where we're at. I'm also evaluating that defense, so in general, I'm hopeful that that's an indicator that we've got more speed on our team, more play-making ability, more match-up players. But, yeah, I think we're playing through our strengths. We've tried to do that in the past, so I think were making progress there.

**Q. Billy, what went into the decision to not televise the spring game today and how do you see that evolving in the future? Are you still hopeful that the spring portal window will go away that will maybe make coaches less protective of spring games?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think that we... once we didn't necessarily get the call to be one of the prime spots, I think we felt like, hey, what are the advantages and disadvantages? So gives us the freedom to just call everything.

We also felt like we'd get better attendance. People want to see the show. In general, couldn't have asked for a better day. Then the basketball team wins the National Championship and I think that just was the icing on the cake there from a decision-making standpoint. So, it was a great day and we're very thankful for the fans that came out and for the basketball team to be recognized at halftime, we couldn't have asked for much better. So in general, we don't have to worry about what's on tape and obviously people aren't evaluating our twos and threes in the depth chart.

**Q. On that note, how much attrition do you expect this spring from the roster and is there a spot or two that**

**you still want to address in the portal?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, we've reached agreements with 98% of the team, so I think we're just one or two players away from being done. So as far as the player retention part. Now, we'll evaluate what becomes available every day going forward. Maybe there's a situation that can make our team better around we'll definitely be aggressive if we feel that way.

**Q. "Reached agreements" interesting.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, welcome.

**Q. Interesting lexicon these days.**

BILLY NAPIER: Mmm. A lot better than it used to be. I can tell you that much.

**Q. So how long were you guys signing autographs? I was up stairs writing.**

BILLY NAPIER: 45 minutes.

**Q. Okay. So was DJ on a pitch count there too (laughter)? Because he literally had endzone to endzone line and he left some at the alt tar.**

BILLY NAPIER: I was a little jealous. I got about 40 or 50 in my line and I can't see the end of his line, so (Laughter).

**Q. It's unbelievable. So just how -- we've asked you a million times. I mean, he's in the spotlight constantly. Walter Clayton might have taken a little bit of that away from him.**

BILLY NAPIER: Sure.

**Q. But just the way he handles that, it's just an incredible fascination around this young man.**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think the... look. The key for us, we do good job as an organization of, first of all, helping lead him through some of that, keeping him process-oriented, helping him recenter around his purpose, his passion, his love of the game and ultimately help him lead his team. I think if he gets consumed with improvement, if he gets consumed with how he can lead the team and make the other people around him better, I think that gives him the best chance to play the way he's capable of playing.

All these things come with that but we have to keep the main thing the main thing and I think that's where this year it'll be important. He'll be tested in that area. I think it's



important that we help him do that. He's got the character to sustain is what I would say. So there's a humility there. The devotion today, this morning, was about the fruit of the spirit, right? And we'll let you guys do your homework on that. But if he can do that, I think he's got a chance to continue to be a productive player.

**Q. I hate to go from fruits of the spirit to the transfer portal but back to what Zack was talking about, how much does that change what you can actually do in the spring? Tennessee's a playoff team. They lose their quarterback team the day before their spring game. How much can you actually accomplish in the spring and how big of a problem is that?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I would tell you a lot of my job is TBD, right? I think what we've tried to do, and I've said this publicly, I think for probably the first 18 months I'm sitting around for somebody to tell me what to do, like what are the rules? Hey, what can we do? What can't we do? Just kind of got to a point where, like, screw that. We're coming up with our rules, our own system. We're not waiting on anybody to tell us what to do. We're just going to be aggressive and go do what we think is best. We've done that, we created a great system. I'm very thankful for Florida Victorious, their leadership, how they've enabled us to acquire talent, the resources that we have, the investors that we have and the roster that we've been able to put together as a result of that. I think now we're built systematically to continue that part of what we do, so I think if you spend all your days looking around at what everybody else is doing and all that, it's a waste of time. We've got our system, we use analytics, we have our algorithms built and we are aggressive in what we think is best for the team and we got great personnel. I'm very thankful for the front office people we've hired, Nick Polk, Ben Elsner. I think Jacob LaFrance and Chad Lucas have done a good job and right now we're in the position where we don't have to worry about the portal. If anything, we may add a player or two, but we've retained 98% of our team, and we got eight more high school players that'll be here June 1st.

MODERATOR: Last question.

**Q. Billy, obviously, linebackers Jaden, Myles, both had huge days, local kids. Talk about what you see from them and as young players, what are their expectations for the season?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, the backer group has been impressive all spring. I think Coach Bala has done a great job hitting the ground running. He had good knowledge and comprehension of our system and I think he's a great teacher, so Aaron Chiles, Myles Graham, J Rob, even Ty

Jackson took advantage of pickup being out and he's had a good spring. It's similar to Lagonza and Stubbs. Those ghouls are getting rips with the second group where they would have been on the developmental field. So, yeah, just in general that group, the big jump is the first year of experience to the next season is where the huge jumps are and both of these guys fit in that category.

**Q. Billy, we saw your home run. What's your three-point range?**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah...

**Q. Walter Clayton...**

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I used to -- I'm not going to say anything about it because I'm going to have players calling me out (laughter), but I'll play you in HORSE. Just put it that way, okay (laughter)?

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