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Russ Callaway

Press Conference



Q. What kind of growth, just from a leadership standpoint, comfortability standpoint have you seen from not just DJ but Aidan Warner as well?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Oh, 100 percent. Both those guys have really taken the next step in their development. And, really, it ain't just that room. It's the guys that are around them. Like it's easy to -- I don't want to say it's easy, but it's a lot more likely to happen when you got guys like Jake Slaughter that have been here, played snaps, and he's a senior leader. Barber; you got Hayden Hansen, Tony. You got all these guys that have played a bunch of snaps, and you kind of feed off each other. But they definitely have both taken a big step, and Harrison as well. He's done a tremendous job. And I just can't say enough about that room and how well they've done.

Q. Without giving away state's secrets, how does the collaborative effort work? Like how many guys are in the room? I mean is it bouncing ideas off each other, different situations?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. That's a great question. You know, really kind of how we do it it's -- everything we do is collaborative, all right, and we have different ways of doing it. We meet all together, and we kind of assign different type roles, things to look at, study, and then we come back.

And then some things are separate. And then we come together and say, hey, this is kind of, you know, what we see, and, again, bouncing ideas. And the main thing is it's not creating the idea, because we have, you know, enough plays just very similar to everybody. It's about getting the right people the ball, making sure that we got the protection sound, we got the route concept sound, the way that we're calling it so it's consistent with the people signalling.

But to answer your question, it's really -- it's kind of a mix of both. Sometimes we'll start together and then split up, and then sometimes, hey, we're separate, but, hey, on Tuesday morning we're going to meet on these four or five things. And I think we got it mapped out pretty good, with Coach Napier, myself and the whole offensive staff. It's way more

than just me, him and whoever else. It's everybody. So that's how we do it.

Q. Are you orchestrating that more so now in the new role?

RUSS CALLAWAY: You know, I would just say it's really kind of similar to how we did it the last couple of years. Some things have been a little bit structured differently.

I've taken on more of some things, which is normal, I guess. But, no, it's, just like he was asking, we've kind of taken another step in that development. We don't just stay stagnant in how we've done it the last two years. We do try to improve it. We study NFL teams, other college teams, hey, how do you all do it, how do you see this, and stuff is naturally going to change anyway. But I'd say for the last two years just been pretty consistent with a couple of enhancements of kind of how we've done it.

Q. When we talked to you back in spring right before spring camp, we asked you about seeing four wide receivers out there on the field. Now that you've spent the last couple months around them, how much more confident are you that just the wealth of options you have, you're going to have to try and find a way to get them all on the field.

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. I just think, look, at the end of the day it's about getting the best 11 on the field, period. And of the week-to-week basis, we may think 11 is better; we may think 12 is better; we may think 13 is better, 10, whatever. We may not even have a personnel grouping that we think may be better, but it's all about that's the whole -- that's the genesis. That's where it starts.

And to say that we're going to do that this year for sure, don't know. We might. We might not. But I do think there's some things that we can do not just with the receiver room, but the running back room and the tight end room, to kind of get a lot more people involved. And that's kind of been the goal starting last spring throughout summer, and we're going to continue on that way.

Q. Sounds like a good problem to have in a sense

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here. As a tight ends coach, is there, in your mind, guys that you're working in the wide receiver room to try and get a little bit creative there?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. That's something we kind of made a conscious effort. And, really, again, not just the tight ends, but the running backs and the receivers. We have the receivers doing things out of their comfort zone. We have the running backs doing things out of their comfort zone. And then the same with the tight ends. And I think what you're going to see with that is you're just going to see a little bit more versatility, because we have really good players, and we got really good kids, and they just want to win. And I think the biggest thing is making sure that everybody understands, hey, this may be my week to get the ball; this may be the running back's week to get the ball, whatever, and as long as everyone is bought in with that and we all understand, we're going to achieve the same thing. So I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Talk about the growth that you've seen in the off season from Hayden Hansen and Tony Livingston.

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. Hayden -- really both those guys. I tell you, that whole tight end room, Hayden Hansen, Tony Livingston, Amir Jackson, those three have made tremendous strides. Micah Jones, Cameron Kossmann, they've both taken steps. But specifically those two. And, again, they had a really good year last year, but, again, it's been more about them taking a step from a leadership role.

Like I saw Hayden and Tony do things this summer and in spring that -- from a leadership standpoint that I've never seen them do, and I think they both are bought in to the fact of like, hey, this is part of the next step. This is why I come to Florida. We want to come to Florida to obviously win games and build a championship program. But to do that, at some point we're going to have to step up and we're going to have to push people and we're going to have to get on people, and a lot of times it's not comfortable, but obviously as we all know, you grow in uncomfortable situations, and I'm super proud of the way they've handled it.

They both got their body looking really good. Hayden has got it trimmed up. Tony has got some good muscle coming on. Hayden has gotten a lot better at some different route things. Tony has gotten better at some route things and some run game things.

And then Amir Jackson, that guy, when we signed him, he was a raw skill player in high school, and we basically had to teach him how to play the position, and he has worked his tail off, and he has come a long way, and I'm excited to

see what he can do this year as well.

Q. We've started to see a lot of hype and buzz around DJ. When did you realize that he could be a special player, either during the recruiting process or when he got to campus?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. That's a good question. His high school tape was obviously really good. And you never really know when you get a kid, in my opinion, until they get here, they get around all these other big-time players and they are in your building every day. And I really kind of figured the first summer he was here, you know what, this guy's pretty good. We all kind of saw it. We didn't want to say it. And then he goes out and he does what he does on the field versus not just, you know, at the beginning of the year, but the middle and the latter of the year, and he played through a bunch of things.

Yeah, I would say probably that second or third game I was like, yeah, I think this guy's got a chance as long as he continues to work and have the right mind frame, which he definitely does. He's probably the hardest worker, one of the hardest workers on the team, and yeah, I'm super excited with his progress.

Q. Other than staying healthy, what are kind of the next real steps you want to see from him?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. You know, I think, obviously, him -- he was different because he was thrust into that role so quickly. And that was -- to answer your question from earlier, that was probably a moment where, you know, it's like, all right, this kid's 18 years old. Is this going to be too big for him. And it wasn't. And that first walk-through that he had out there the Friday before we played, I guess it was Samford, it was like this kid's on another level from a mental work ethic standpoint. He was flawless that walk-through.

I just think, you know, along with him continuing to do that and develop -- I mean, he's a natural deep ball passer. He's obviously a good runner. He's good at intermediates, good at the quicks. The thing I think we would like to see another step on, and he is doing that, is just continue to be able to roll with the punches. Like not from a scheme standpoint, week in, week out how it changes, but the ups and downs. And he's done that. He has it in him. It's just when people start wearing on you and the media and everything, you know, kind of comes at you at once, it's like, all right, how do I handle this; and he's done a phenomenal job of handling everything good and bad, and I think he's going to continue to get better in that role.

Q. How does his passing ability change what you can

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do, the throws he can make?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, that's a great question. It's obviously his passing ability, but he's such a big human, and he's hard to tackle. So certain things where you would maybe a little bit hesitant to maybe call with him, it's like, he's liable to throw that defender off and make them miss and then throw it. There's just like you gotta -- you don't plan for that, obviously, but you feel a little bit more at ease calling it because he is -- some of the times he's going to make you right.

But obviously his deep ball accuracy is really good. And he's gotten better at everything. He's been good at all of it, but it's not staying where you're at. You're either getting better or you're getting worse, and he's gotten better at everything. So, yeah, I would say that's probably the most unique thing.

Q. Is he too big, by the way?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Well, I don't know if you could ever be too big, as long as you can move, I guess. No, he's not. I think he's about what you want. If you were to draw one up, I think he would be the one you draw up.

Q. You told us that you were a ball boy during the Steve Spurrier era?

RUSS CALLAWAY: I was.

Q. What's it like having his son here now, and what are your impressions of him so far, and how much involvement is he going to have in coordinating things for you?

RUSS CALLAWAY: No. I'm super excited about Coach Spurrier. Man, you talk about an unbelievable person, along with a lot of the guys back there, but you asked specifically about him. But he's awesome. Just a great team guy, very knowledgeable, obviously, with what not only his dad did, but what he's done. He'll be involved in our game planning process, along with some other guys.

No, we actually were talking about the story the other day when his dad thought I was stealing signals and relaying them to my dad on the other sideline.

But, no, he was laughing about it. It was funny. But he's a great, great person, and we're super glad he's on our staff.

Q. What does Steve bring mostly to the staff?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. I think anytime -- obviously just the type of person he is and the wealth of knowledge he

has, but he -- and to me it's how it should be. Like you have your core beliefs and your core things that you believe in that you do, okay. But he, along with the other guys, brings in a unique view. And it's like, hey, this is good, but have you thought about doing it this way? Oh, no. That's a good idea. Or, no, that doesn't really fit or whatever it may be. It's more of when guys come from outside, and it's like, in my opinion, you don't want to say, hey, we don't want any of your -- no, we want all advice. We want to know what you think, what other teams are seeing, what other teams are saying.

He's a very, very knowledgeable coach, and obviously from how he grew up and everything he's done. And he offers a lot, not just from the offensive standpoint, but from a defensive way to do things, how he's seen stuff done and the quarterback position, receivers. I'm really excited about Coach Spurrier.

Q. We saw a lot of talent of the new receivers and the young receivers during the spring game. How critical is this fall, particularly with DJ getting the continuity since he didn't throw in the spring?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah, no. And they've been doing that. It is very -- just like anything else, you want to be on the same page and you want to get the timing down. And they've been doing that.

And he's -- again, DJ is the type where he's going to figure it out. They're going to come up here extra, they're going to get up here early, whatever it may be. But, yeah, we definitely want that continuity, especially with some of the guys that haven't been here. And I think they've got it. We just gotta continue to build on it.

Q. How big was it for Tony to come on at the end of last season and the opportunity he has in front of him, how much do you think it means just given everything he's been through and not being able to come here that first year?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. Man, Tony has grown -- I was actually just talking to his dad. He has grown not just as a football player and he's changed his body, but, man, he has matured in ways I never thought he would, to be honest with you. And that's a compliment to him. I'm not saying it was bad. It's just he has really, really bought in to being a pro, and it really started, like you said, the middle to end of last year. He made a decision that that's something that he wants to do. And we sat down and talked about, okay, man, this is what you want. This is what's expected, you know, just because myself, I've been there. We've had other coaches that have been in the NFL. This is the facts. This is what they expect. And he



has done it. And he's met every standard, done everything plus more. I'm super excited about Tony, and I'm super proud of that young man. I'm very fortunate to be a part of his journey.

Q. The offense is always about the players and adapting to that. How do you see the offense evolving from last year to this year with what you've got?

RUSS CALLAWAY: Yeah. You know, I think, again, it goes back to who the best 11 are. And I would say this. I would say we feel comfortable really at every position, receiver, tight end, running back. We feel comfortable with guys making plays at all positions.

With that being said, that's a good thing, obviously, because then the attack is not near as -- you don't know -- it's not locked in on one or two people. It's you're spreading the ball around, you're spreading the wealth around.

And I think this is the first year that we can say we got really all rooms, not saying that we have 50 first rounders, but we got a bunch of really good players that are hungry and that have been working. So I think just the ability to spread it around a little bit more is going to be exciting.

Q. Coach Napier confirmed to us during SEC Media Day that walk-ons are going to get grandfathered in and you guys will carry a roster bigger than 105. Just curious, how crucial are walk-ons to your guys' game prep, process, scout team and your thoughts on that situation?

RUSS CALLAWAY: I think they're extremely important, to be honest with you. Not just from a game prep and practice and everything else, but I've been a part of multiple programs, whether it's my dad coaching or me playing or coaching or whatever, where guys come in as a quote, unquote walk-on, and they obviously earn a scholarship. Some of them play in the NFL. Some of them become major contributors to the team that you weren't expecting. There's always that element, and there's always, in my opinion, going to be that when you're dealing with a developmental game from high school to college.

It's something that I think is very important, and I think the value of a quote, unquote walk-on, they're all the same to us. They're part of our team. They're part of our family. But, yeah. They're very, very important in a lot of ways.

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