

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



BILLY NAPIER: Obviously excited to be back at it. And it's a fun time of the year. I think it's good to see some energy in the building. Players had a couple days off, for them to be back. And then obviously as a staff, as an organization to be kind of running at full speed ahead here as we approach an exciting time of the year.

Before we get going here, Joey Knight is not with us from the Tampa Bay Times. He had surgery. So he's in our thoughts and prayers, and obviously hopefully he'll be back with us here soon.

All right. We'll let you guys get to it here. We do have -- one thing, we'll give you a little bit of an injury update, and obviously we'll have an injury report once we get to week three and are playing in the conference. But you guys will be able to be there for practice.

I'm going to give you a little bit of a summary here, and then we'll try to keep it status quo from that point forward.

We have a handful of players that are going to be modified that'll be limited early in camp. DJ Lagway, Tavaris Dice, (indiscernible), Kahleil Jackson and Treyaun Webb. All those players are a little bit modified here in our day-to-day as they're in return to play.

We are positive, we have a positive attitude towards where they're headed and their opportunity to get back here shortly.

Questions?

Q. What's the concern with DJ's level and how much do you think he'll be able to do?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. He's day to day. The good thing is -- I think we're about a week removed. In general he's made a lot of quick progress. But it will be something that we're monitoring, and hopefully as we go, his ability to participate in practice will be a little bit more each opportunity that we get going forward.

Q. You didn't put Aaron Gates in that list. How have you seen him embrace the rehab process from last year and how available do you anticipate him being?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Aaron is on schedule, obviously still in the brace a little bit. Anytime a guy is an ACL guy -- as you get into training camp, we'll be monitoring his volume closely, but he's been a full participator here as of late.

Those guys are typically -- there will be a day or two where we'll pull him. But, yeah, he's had an incredible road back. I think he's been a really good example to everybody of how you attack the rehab process. And looks great. So obviously a really good player for us.

Q. Billy, you've been able to build your roster for the most part ground up with your own guys. You haven't gone wholesale into the transfer portal. Would you talk about the process of doing that.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I do think that's one of the exciting things about this team. I think we look around the room, I think we've got six or seven guys from the original group.

I think there was a commitment to recruiting big groups of high school players in the beginning. I think my opinion is that player retention is extremely important. Got a lot of players that are in year two, three, four in this program, these systems, offense, defense and special teams. And when I look around the room, I see individuals that I have extensive experience with, going all the way back to the recruiting process. So know their story, have been to their schools, have sat in their homes, know their parents. And they chose us to some degree as well. So I think it's a positive in that regard.

Now, we've had a good off season, and we've got a good roster coming back, but now it's time to go perform, and this next week will be about doing that.

Q. Three and four-year relationships that you've had that you've been able to build, but just talk about how important that is.

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BILLY NAPIER: I think that college football, the on-boarding process of rookie players is really important. And when you have veteran players that have a good understanding of expectations and know what you want and can be a good example to young players, I think that's really important. And I think we've benefited from that.

I thought last year's team benefited from that, and I think this year has been probably two or three times as impactful because there's strength in numbers, and I think we have that.

Q. You talked a ton about how beneficial the bye week was last year to the turnaround of this team. Is there anything you learned from that time last year that you're implementing here in fall camp?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think just the ability for our players to be present, to make the practice environment as competitive as possible. And I think this group learned that the practice environment ultimately has a huge -- it's a huge factor in terms of what game day looks like.

So one of the things we're trying to do this month is establish trust. Each individual has gotta earn confidence himself. He's also trying to earn the confidence of the staff and the confidence of his teammates. And I think you do it right out there on the grass between the lines.

So I think that's where you prove it to everybody that you can do your job, that we can trust you. And the more competitive environment that we have, the better, and I think ultimately we learned that last year and that open day.

Q. How much do you feel for DJ in terms of I know it's a minor thing and minor setback. But this is a guy who wants to be healthy and wants to be out there for every snap and he's getting these little minor setbacks.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no. I think, look, injuries are one of the tougher things about the profession, and certainly for him being a year two player and a really motivated and hungry guy. So I think he's done a good job staying connected. I think he still has a voice as a leader. He's still walking the halls. He's still able to be a factor in that regard. But he's still a very young player and needs these reps for development as well.

When he gets back, he'll be just fine. But I mean he's had a great attitude towards it, and I think we gotta help him manage expectations a little bit as well. So but in general I think one day at a time, being present and executing the plan for each day. I think we gotta help him with that.

Q. How good do you feel about Harrison's ability? And the talent around has just gotten increasingly better, too. The offensive line, obviously the back field, the perimeter guys.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no. I think all of our quarterbacks have taken advantage of the reps. Aidan in particular I think has taken a big step in the right direction, and obviously Harrison being a veteran player. And then Tramell we've seen him get healthy and more comfortable in the system, I think going back to the beginning of the install in the summer, Summer A, summer B. That group there's a ton of competition amongst that group there, and it's really -- there's a little bit of a blessing here that we're going to get a chance to give those guys a ton of reps and see how they respond to that.

Q. Supporting cast and what do you feel about what you've been able to put together on that side of the ball? Both sides, but --

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's probably the best combination of personnel around the quarterback. I think you're spot on. I think the O Line obviously has played a lot of football. And really the two-deep up front, I would say. I think -- I like that group. I think the two tight ends have played a lot of football in Hayden and Tony, and then Jadan and Ja'Kobi obviously are very experienced and proved themselves last year.

So got a group of new receivers to add to the ones that we have coming back. So there's some stability around the quarterback, and I think that's a big piece of the puzzle.

Q. How have you seen that grow physically and mentally in both lines of scrimmage, offense, defense, from when two years ago you played them and they kind of took their knocks and now they're more mature?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Some of those guys were -- you know, this is year four, to some degree; some year three. Austin and Jake obviously were -- they're two of the six or seven that were here when we first got here, and they've improved each cycle and obviously are in position, had great senior campaigns. And then Knijeah and Damieon both have played a lot of football, and here comes Bryce Lovett who was a part of that first recruiting class that we had. And then the depth behind those is something that maybe we haven't had. I think we've got some players that are in year two and three in that two-deep that I think are in position to be a factor.

Q. As much as this is DJ's team, so to speak, you

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have a ton of talent, especially at running back.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah.

Q. And I'm just thinking, I know you think about what if you don't have him. You have a lot of talent to run offense, especially the running back room. Talk about the other people on the squad, especially the wide receivers, et cetera. You have a very balanced and two-deep football team that can cause problems for anybody.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think the big thing would be we're going to have to play complementary football regardless of who's playing quarterback. I mean, if you do your homework here, 85 percent of the teams in our league -- I mean 85 percent of the time the team is going to play with the two quarterback. History is the best indicator of the future. And then we know that quality depth is critical. There's going to be weeks where we're missing three or four and we're missing six or seven. And I think the depth is critical. It's a part of playing in this league, the physicality of the league, the level of depth within the league.

And I think offensively we certainly have a really good -- when you talk about the front pairing with the big, long, physical tight end group, you know, the brand of ball that we were able to play down the stretch, I think we're in position to do that.

Look, quarterback play -- and I've said this to you guys going all the way back to year one, I think -- is always indicative of how well people are playing around you. Right? So I think we're always quick to give them the credit and quick to blame them at the same time. So I think we got a good surrounding cast on offense and we gotta go get them game ready, and I think ultimately the next month will present that opportunity.

Q. The young talent at receiver. How have they developed from the spring?

BILLY NAPIER: This is a rowdy group.

Q. The young talent at receiver, just from the spring, some of the guys that came in early through the summer, where are they now? And you've been in some places that have had really good young receivers come in. How do they compare to those groups?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. It's a deep, competitive group. I'm excited about Aidan being back. I'm excited about Trey being healthy. And then you got some of these guys that

flashed last year, Tank and TJ. No one talks about them. But they're coming along, and they're certainly part of the competition and in that battle.

This is going to be -- that's what the next month is about is seeing who we can trust, who we can depend on, who can be consistent, who can play winning football. But we really, if you think about it, there's five new players in that room that all have a chance to help our team. J. Mike and Dallas and Vernell, Naeshaun and Muizz. Muizz has had an outstanding summer. So, and look, this is about them developing confidence in themselves. Can we trust them as a coaching staff? Can their teammates trust them? And ultimately they're going to earn that on the practice field.

Q. This is the first time in your four-year tenure that you're not opening with a power four conference opponent. Does that change at all or how do you keep the carrot in front of the stick there?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Good question. Yeah, no. I do think -- I think obviously Long Island is the next game we have and the most important game. That's my coach speak for the day.

But I would say that, you know, one of the things I've learned is it is a big transition when school starts for these guys. We're tweaking our schedule a little bit to help them transition into 12 or 15 hours, new routine, new schedule, new processes for our staff. So we've built our training camp blueprint in a way to kind of start gradually equipping our players for that transition; not only for the players, but for the staff as well.

Yeah, I mean I think it definitely -- if you think about your first conference game being in week three, I think ultimately for me I'm trying to evaluate what we need to do to get better each day and knowing that we develop our team in a practice setting. But there's certainly some things about school starting. That would be my other thing I would say that I've learned.

Q. What went into trying to see if Olivier could block the kick?

BILLY NAPIER: Man, I think me and Joe were just having lunch in the dining hall one day and the guy walks by and we're thinking about, you know, man, what is the guy's reach and then what's the guys vertical jump relative to the launch point of the block spot.

So we did a little bit of homework on that, and it's to be determined is what I would say.



Q. How is Coach Golden with that?

BILLY NAPIER: Oh, he's great. And we certainly talked to Coach about it before we did anything.

Q. One more DJ question. Obviously he was very limited in what he could do in the spring, limited to start camp. How concerned are you about this affecting his development considering how important that is at the position at his age?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean it's not ideal. In the perfect world he would have been perfect every day of the off season.

I think the good thing is his attitude towards it. I think that's a positive. And I think Coach O'Hara has done a good job of being creative. This room in particular we've used quite a bit going all the way back to when he first arrived. And then just ways to keep him connected, keep him processing.

We do a ton of things in our off season program, and certainly OTAs this summer. He was able to take a million reps. We do some of that without a ball, some with a ball.

So, look, he's in year two. He, I think, understands what's required to be ready. It's not ideal, but I think ultimately we'll come up with the best plan we can to have him ready.

Q. Talking about the defense, what do you see there? Obviously there are some key guys that left. But it seems like a very talented unit. You guys haven't finished really very high in the defensive statistics, but did come on really strongly at the end of last year. How do you carry that forward?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think it's ultimately, if you really take a good look at what we were able to do last year, a lot of the turnaround was playing better on defense. I think after the first month, probably Central Florida on, we played good enough to win on defense, outside of the Texas game. You know, we're in position in Jacksonville. We're in position in Knoxville as a result of playing really good defense.

I think we did a good job affecting the quarterback. We created take-aways, and we played good red zone defense, and we kept the point total in a place.

So I think the depth is there, all three levels of the defense. We have some young players that we're going to have to develop in the secondary that don't have a ton of experience. But every other spot I think there's a lot of players that have played football.

The front -- you know, I'm excited about seeing the progress we can make with the second tier of players on defense in training camp. I think it's an important part of this puzzle.

Q. Some of the guys single out like Cormani. We've seen the gains he's made in the weight room. LJ McCray, Tyler Miles was kind of raving about him. Myles Graham, seems like he could be a future star. He called him a superstar, Tyreek Sapp said he could be, in those three guys in particular?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think, to me, it's -- when I think about our defense, I think about building depth in the secondary, working contingency plans; who's the fourth corner, who's the fourth, fifth, sixth safety. You know, we've gotta develop these two young backers and build some depth there at that position. And then after Banks and Michai, who else has played some significant snaps in a game. BT, Brendan Bett, Tarvorise Brown. And then the rookies obviously have a chance to impact the team: Mbatchou, McCloud, Woods.

So how much can we get -- how many guys can we get ready to play winning football on that side of the ball. We're going to need them. So I think that's the important part of training camp. And, look, we've been working on these things since January. So it's go time now. I think it's time for them to go prove it.

Q. What about those guys like Cormani, LJ? These are five star recruits.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. They're in position to impact the team. I think Cormani has taken the feedback and tried to get better. He needs to become a better tackler. I think the weight room helps that. His physicality, his play strength. Obviously he's gotta be a better communicator. And he's gotta have a thorough understanding of the play book. Now, this guy, there's growth. It's time to do it.

LJ is in a similar -- LJ got some experience last year. So it's time for him to take a big jump. And we need him to. And he has position flex at Jack and F. I think he can play both spots.

LJ, I think, did a great job of taking the feedback from the weight room and nutrition from the spring semester, really bought in in that regard and changed his body comp. He's starting to look like a guy who's ready to play in this league and be a factor. Who was the third player?

Q. Myles Graham, which we already kind of saw flashes from him pretty strongly.



BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think you saw that Myles is unique in his ability to play. He's a rookie. Obviously Myles is in a position where he's gotta communicate. There's going to be more snaps on his plate. And then obviously got a leadership role, and I think he's got the traits to be a really good leader. So there's character there where he can be a steady example for the other players. But we got a lot that fit into -- just like those three you mentioned, I think there's a bunch of those stories.

Q. Myles has been doing some stuff at Mike would pop out and just getting some experience there?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think we've had opportunities to work a lot of combinations of players at that position. And, you know, you think about getting the best two out there that are available. But, yeah, who's got the green dot on, I think if we play dime, who can play Mack in third down, those types of scenarios, two-minute.

So, look, Myles is a guy who has -- there's a big toolbox there, and I think we need to create opportunities for him to impact the game. But like you say, what position that is, I think we need to continue to grow the depth at that position.

Q. I know you've addressed this before, but one more time. How did you arrive at spot the ball?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think it was really more of a mentality that was created last year during the season. I think the verbiage there actually came from our weight room. And I think the players bought into it. And I think obviously we get asked about our schedule around here every two or three days.

I think I want our team to understand that we can go toe to toe with anybody. I think last year's team proved that. And then we have to get this team ready to do that. So I think that term to me when I did that was a little bit of a reminder to our team that it's right around the corner, right? And we have work to do to get ready for those opportunities. But the games will be won between the lines when we spot the ball.

Q. Is there a challenge sort of like bring it on? Is that kind of what that means?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think we want our players to have that type of mentality.

Q. With that said, expectations can be tricky and getting guys to be where their feet are also tough. Do you even mention College Football Playoffs or do you

completely ignore that stuff when you meet with them to start the season?

BILLY NAPIER: No. We absolutely have aspirations to be a playoff team. That's the intention of coming here is to win championships.

Now, what do we know about that? It's about the work we do. It's about today. Okay. It's not about yesterday or tomorrow. It's about today. A good today leads to a good week, leads to a good month, leads to a good season, and you look up and count them up at the end of the year.

I think for us it's about getting the most out of this group. It's the best thing about coaching football is the challenge of taking, okay, I'm a position coach, I'm going to take this player or this position group and get the most -- I'm the coordinator, I got this unit. How can we get the most out of this group. And for me, it's the team and organization as a whole, right?

So I think for us we know that the results will be a product of really buying into the process, being present, stacking good days and creating habits that will hold up on game day. So we got a lot of guys that need to establish that we can trust them, and this next month will present that opportunity.

Q. Russ said that how the offense has evolved is that now you have more players that you can get the ball to. Would you talk about how you see how the offense has evolved since you've come here?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I think we probably have more players that we would plan around. I think one of the things we've been able to do is take the three or four skill guys that we've had and really be creative and get them the ball. I think we have more of those on that list now, which is a good thing.

So you build your system around what the quarterback can do and what he does well. And then you build it around the skill players that you have. I think that's the fun part of coaching is building that identity.

And, look, it's gotta be flexible enough to win every week depending on the opponent, the strengths and weaknesses of that week. But I like the pieces that we have. We certainly -- there's more of them, and that's a good thing.

Q. What's the next step for Jadan Baugh? I think Tyler was in here saying that he's pound for pound the strongest player he's ever seen.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Freaky numbers. I think all the



testing is -- but, look, I think my challenge to Jadan is to control the things that he can control. You know, talent -- and I go back to the really big emphasis to me is like, look, if you're sitting in that room, if you've got a locker down there, you got talent. Okay. You wouldn't be at the University of Florida. But it's about doing all the things that require no talent. Can you buy into this idea that your unlimited improvement when it comes to your skill set, your toughness and resilience, your football intelligence and then what type of teammate you are.

And I think for him he's got a bright future in the game. But he's done a good job of improving all these areas that have nothing to do with physical talent, you know. And I think he's a great teammate. He's a leader. And I think we want to continue to challenge him to be that. So, look, you want to have a good team, some of your better players have gotta kind of walk around setting the standard. We're challenging him to do that.

Q. How much does it help to have a player like Ja'Kobi behind him to to push him along?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. That's exactly right. Look, there's guys on this team -- some of my favorite players are guys that were unheralded, right, like that literally came from the bottom to the top, Ja'Kobi Jackson, George Gumbs. You want to write two stories, you write those stories. Those two guys are no stars. Okay. I mean I don't even know if they have a profile. Okay. But they're two of our best players. And they're two of our kind of set the -- bring an edge to them to prove themselves. I think they've done that, and they're better competitors and teammates as a result of that.

Both of those guys are good examples. Certainly Ja'Kobi rubs off on Jadan. You think about it, Jadan got here last year and was able to observe a guy like Ja'Kobi and the way he worked, the way he practiced, his attitude, his energy. Those two guys are some of our better teammates and players.

Q. When we talked to Tyreak's dad, he said he wanted the O Line to hate practice. You talk about competitiveness. You see the passion in practice. How is that billed throughout your years here?

BILLY NAPIER: It's one of the most important things to building a team is having a competitive practice environment where the game is not too fast for you. I think Sapp is one of our best practice players. He's consistent; his energy, his attitude. And there's no doubt that they'll tell you the guy is tough to block, right?

And then look at the production on the field and look at the

life he lives every day. Sapp's the same guy every day. He's one of the best edge players in the country as a result of the way he lives life and the way that he approaches the work.

So Sapp's a great story as well, just in terms of his journey and how much better the guy's got every cycle. I mean this guy went out there -- this is year six, if I'm not mistaken, and he's got -- I think he gained eight or nine pounds of lean muscle again. The guy got -- he's jumping higher, running faster. So he's in position to maximize coming back. And a guy that sets the tone. Wouldn't surprise me if those O linemen don't like him.

Q. Curious about Asa Turner's status with the team. I know he got the seventh year. He's not on the roster. What is he with the program?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. Asa is transitioning out of football. He's had really three years of significant injuries in college football. I actually met with Asa this morning. Look, Asa did a great job when he got here and was a really big contributor early in the season. Got injured and then hasn't quite been the same guy, if you really look at Washington the last couple of years.

Asa contributed to our team last year. Very thankful for the way he approached being a teammate, his attitude. But he's at a point where he's not going to play.

Q. Do you feel differently entering this year than the previous three? I mean it's been tumultuous at times, for sure. And you've put together this roster and has some continuity in some key places on the staff. Do you just feel differently, optimistically or comfort level, confidence level?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I mean, I like the people that we have in our building. I think, look, you can have a phenomenal off season. You can have great -- you can be in position and have a great roster, but you gotta go put the ball down in play.

So I think reality is that we've gotta go earn it on the field. And I think ultimately I'm focused on getting this team ready to do that. So I love the intangibles of the group. There's a lot of height, length and speed and guys that have -- there's experience. But it's about getting our veteran players to play their best football, and then we have quite a few of these younger players that we need to continue to grow and develop. And we have to get consumed with improvement, and we gotta get ready to go play winning football, and I think that's a process. We can run all summer. Football condition and football execution is different, and I think that's what this month is about.



Q. What about you personally? Are you sleeping a little easier? Are you more comfortable, confident in this position? I mean, because, again, there's been a lot of tumultuous moments during your tenure to this point.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no. I love the challenge. This is a challenge worth pursuing, and I think I wouldn't rather do it with anybody else. I like the group that I'm getting to do it with. And, look, you know, about a month away we'll crank this thing up. But we got a lot of work to do between now and then.

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