

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Gainesville, Florida, USA

Coach Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida 29, Texas 21

BILLY NAPIER: I'm going to tell you what, our fans showed up tonight, or today I should say. They showed up and showed out. They were a huge factor in the game. We're thankful for that.

Good SEC football game out there today. I think it came down to the things it typically does. We rushed the ball for 159 yards to their 53. The turnover margin was 2-2. DJ was 180 quarterback rating, played really clean for the most part.

We got off the field three out of 11, and we stayed on the field 7 out of 14 and blocked a punt. Taylor Spierto, who was a walk-on in year one here who's earned a scholarship was a spark tonight and made a huge play. How about that freshman receiver Dallas Wilson going off and setting about every record that there is for a rookie?

In general, we had four sacks. I thought we limited the run game. Thought we affected the quarterback, covered him pretty good. That's a good team. They've got a lot of resources at Texas, and they've put together one heck of a football team.

I would say for me, that's the football team I thought we had in the very beginning, and we finally kind of put it together there and played all three phases very complementary, all parts of the team really good.

We started fast. That was a huge emphasis in the game. Got the crowd into it.

Man, you've got to give these kids some credit. I think nowadays in college athletics, maybe there's a little bit of a black eye about the sport, what it can teach, what locker rooms are like, and I can only speak for ours. I'm not giving up on team. That's a football team.

I'm humbled to be a part of it. For them to do what they've done over the last couple weeks, I think, is to be commended in today's world. They didn't blame anybody

else. They took ownership, and they went back to work.

It's been a challenge. You guys know because you write about it every day. But we handled some adversity. This is just the beginning here. We've got a lot more games just like that when it gets to really good teams in the future.

We've handled adversity, now can we handle a little bit of success. I think that'll be really important.

In general, I'm extremely proud of the staff and the players for the way they held together and the work that was done in the open date.

DJ battled through the injury today. He had a little bit of a leg injury that we'll know more about, but in general, I thought he was kind of back in that mode that he was in at the end of the year last year where he was playing immobile and for the most part was a great leader, great teammate, and very effective today.

Go Gators.

Q. Not only DJ's best game of the season, arguably of his career, even with that injury. Is this a reflection of what you saw in the bye week or what do you take from this performance from him?

BILLY NAPIER: Well, I think he's a great teammate, and I think what motivates him is doing his job for his guys. That's one of the things these guys kept saying: My guys.

I think let's take our guys and go beat him and his guys, if that makes sense. I think ultimately that's when he's at his best, when that's consuming him and he's grinding throughout the week and he's studying the opponent, he's taking care of himself, he's working in practice. He flips that switch and kind of gets into that competitive spirit in practice, and I think we kind of saw it Wednesday of this week. I would say it was the first time I kind of saw he can kind of get in that place as a competitor. I kind of saw that.

You kind of saw it out there tonight. In general, I think he's a great teammate and one that -- he wants to be loyal, wants to come through for his guys, and ultimately I think

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that's what showed up out there today.

Q. You mentioned handling adversity in the past, handling success in the future. How relieving is this for you and this team after what's been endured the last month?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think the challenge will be how we handle this. I think it's going to be extremely important that we -- you've got to wake up in the morning and wash all this off. Same people that talk about you are going to be talking good about you, and can you handle that. I think that's the challenge in sport is to be consistent, to be process-oriented, to be motivated by the right things and not have a letdown going forward.

Look, that's a really good team, but just start looking ahead here. Every team is going to be a challenge.

I think football at this level is turning into that. You've got to be ready to play every week.

Q. You alluded to Dallas Wilson, long awaited debut. He lived up to it. But the 55-yard touchdown in particular, did that just kind of encapsulate his skill set, catches the ball, tightropes, runs over guys?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, he's a big, physical player. He's got unique play strength. Big frame. Just a total creature from a testing perspective, and then he has a competitive spirit that's second to none. He turns it up.

I'm going to tell you, his energy, I think, was a spark this week. In practice he was just doing what he did out there today and really elevated the energy, went to a different level.

He's got a great spirit about him. He's fun to be around. He's got a sense of humor, and he's a great competitor on game day, and that's his first game in a uniform here.

Q. And that physicality on that play, the team in general, what did you feel about just the physicality from the opening drive where you guys went 84 yards, the defense right out of the gates, and you guys were all over Manning all day?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think that's who we have to be to win here. If you're going to win in this league you have to be build in the trenches to go toe to toe. We've been doing that on defense to some degree. I thought we did it consistently today. To hold them to two yards a rush, and I think we rushed the ball 37 times and DJ -- I don't think DJ ran it, so no quarterback involved there.

Yeah, that's the recipe that we've been -- it's worked for us in the past. We played to that formula today, and it worked for us.

Our teams look like that when they're playing at their highest level. Eight years as a head coach, that's complementary ball. That's what it should look like.

Q. You alluded earlier in the week to starting fast and staying on schedule and you were able to do that in that first touchdown drive. What did that do for the confidence of the offense the rest of the game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, and a good mix. I thought DJ did a nice job in that possession. Did a great job on 3rd down. I think we were 50 percent on 3rd down, way over that going into the four-minute situations. We got stopped a couple times.

Yeah, I think that getting 2 off to a good start knowing they would feed off of him, getting 6 involved early, and then being able to rush the ball. 13 has got to be a presence there with him. I thought Duke Clark stepped up in a major way today. I thought he was very effective for a rookie to be out there playing in that type of game.

Look, in the kicking game, when you play Banks at Texas, it's toe to toe. It's real football. I thought Joe Houston and his staff did a great job today. We blocked a punt. Certainly specialists could be better at times, but overall the plan was really good. The specialist play needs to improve a little bit.

Q. What's been the attitude of the defense kind of playing and holding the weight while the offense has kind of fought to come along a little bit, just their growth week to week, kind of putting things together and then kind of breakout with a huge game, turnovers, sacks? What's their weekly mentality been as they prepare?

BILLY NAPIER: You know, if you think about that side of the ball, there is some veteran presence there. There's some guys that have been a part of the program for a while.

Look, these guys are -- there's crossover relationships between the offense and the defense, and I think when our team is at its best, they're complementary. They're interacting throughout the game, throughout the week. We work against each other.

I think it's important that we challenge each other, and I would say the defensive leadership has challenged -- hey, look, we've got to pick it up on offense.



We watch all this tape together now. I do a summary of the game. It's usually about 40 plays. So they get to see the mistakes. They get to see the detail and the undisciplined play, the fundamental issues, the decision making.

I think in general, there's accountability there, and I think that's up to our team.

Q. It's a line of scrimmage league, and tonight you guys dominated on both lines of scrimmage. They didn't sack DJ a single time, you run the ball well and your rookies there on the defensive line like McCloud played really, really good.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, in general we knew -- look, every week in this league, that's the challenge. You know -- and we've played -- LSU and Miami are outstanding teams, so we've played two of the better teams in the country already, and South Florida obviously has played well given their schedule.

I think in general, we know what we're capable of. We know who we are and what we stand for in the locker room. We know what we're capable of. It's healthy for that group to gain some confidence and see that they're capable of that. We're going to need to continue to play well on the line of scrimmage to beat the teams that are on the schedule the rest of the way.

Q. You mentioned you were humbled by the guys in the locker room. What do you think it is about your guys, you, your staff that when your backs are against the ball like last year, like this year, that you guys come out fighting?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think it's more of a big-picture program, organizational philosophy in terms of what we want our program to be about, the investment in people. We teach values. We prioritize education. We run a tight ship. We don't put up with crap. They're going to do what we ask them to do, and I think they have a healthy respect, and they chose us. They chose that experience.

I think that that requires a certain character from that person to sign up for that.

To me, it's a reflection of the organization as a whole in terms of what we want the program to be about.

Look, we cannot connect our identity to the outcome. I think it's important. Sometimes when we don't get the results we want, we typically -- it's in our nature to compromise, to blame others and not be accountable, and

who can be objective.

I think it's important not only for myself and our staff, but we've got to be very consistent in fair. We have to define expectations for the players and then we have to hold them accountable.

Look, it's a game. Winning football looks a certain way, and you're going to lose if you play the way we played in the past. We've got to keep it technical and show them, hey, this is how you get the result that you want, and they did that today.

Q. Billy, the 3rd down battle today, you guys were able to win. How satisfying was that just coming off of Miami and the bye week and how much emphasis you put on that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, 7 of 11 I think -- or 7 for 14, and that's with the last couple being four-minute and having to run it and punt it.

Look, I thought DJ was sharp. I thought the staff had a really good plan, and we kept it manageable. I don't know how many long yardage situations we had today. I know we had a holding penalty. We ended up throwing a screen on that one and ended up getting a big chunk back.

You've got to keep 3rd down manageable, and that starts with good 1st and 2nd down efficiency, run the ball, good quarterback play, keep 3rd down manageable, and when you get to the red area you've got to score.

Look, that was a heck of a football team. Texas has got a really good team. The guys in blue won today.

Q. I asked you this week about the success Jadan and Ja'Kobi had last year against Texas and trying to replicate that. Ja'Kobi is out today. Just Jadan being able to carry the load that he did today, 27 carries, be as productive as he was?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah. I'm going to give him a sponge bath tomorrow, I can tell you that. (Laughter.)

No, you've got a player like that, you've got to give him his opportunities. This is our formula. When we're playing at our best, the guys up front are ready to go. They're mixing it up and we're able to be physical, and there's a cumulative effect to that, and I think that we feed off of that.

He's a marquee back, and he deserves a number of carries each week.

Q. You had the bye week, so did you look at this past

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week as just -- the prior week as just a reset on getting those three losses out of the way? What was the approach? And did they run basically the practices into this game the way that you wanted them to?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, look, I really think we got good work done Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the bye week. I think obviously a little bit of a struggle early. They're hurt, man; this is like you're putting the paddles on a bunch of 17- to 23-year-olds trying to get them back to life. We went through that a couple weeks in a row.

You've got to have good people around you from a leadership standpoint to get that done, and the players got to be made of the right stuff.

I told them after the open date to go home for two days, and you've got to really think about what you've experienced, what you've learned, listen to the noise, listen to it closely, and you've got to know that -- we've got to know who we are. We'll have an opportunity to change that narrative the next time we compete.

I wanted them to move forward. When they showed up Sunday, wash it off, flush it, forget about it, let's focus on this one week at a time. That's the key is to get this age group to -- tomorrow will be a different set of challenges, right? I think that consistency will be important.

We've got a good group of kids in there with some adults leading them. Like some of these guys that are vets around here have done a great job leading the pack.

Q. When DJ makes his comment and gives his guarantee two weeks ago after a couple really rough games, obviously it can open him up to critiques social media-wise good or bad, but as a coach, what was your initial thought on that, and obviously you thought he could follow through with it, but what did that do for you as a coach, if it did anything?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I think DJ speaking to his teammates indirectly, in my opinion, he wanted to make sure -- maybe he didn't have a chance to say that in the locker room in that moment, but I think he wanted to make sure that they heard that.

Look, I think the kid, there's a sincerity to this kid in terms of he chose the University of Florida and he's all in. He's on a mission to do special things here, and he's committed to that.

There's a certain level of pride there. This kid has been through the gauntlet this off-season. There will be a book wrote about this set of circumstances. The kid is tough.

He has character. I think that he is loyal, sometimes to a fault.

But he works like no one else.

For him, this experience -- that's kind of what I've been saying to him is look, you're going to be playing the game a long time and there's going to be days like this, there's going to be weeks like this. Playing in this league, playing in the next league, every team is a good team and you're going to have bad days, and you've got to have an identity independent of the game. That's where his faith -- he can stand on that, where maybe someone else who doesn't have that foundation -- he has that, and I think that makes him really unique.

Q. On the final offensive drive, the time-out to avoid the 10-second runoff, can you take us into that play, just what happened? I think a lot of people were a little confused with Texas not having any time-outs.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, the clock stops because our helmet came off, right, so we wanted to get our best tackle back in the game. We wanted to talk as a group about the 3rd down play, and that's ultimately why we did it.

Q. Building off of that, your defense coming back out on the field for one final drive, a sack by George, how much are you proud of your defense for continuing to just rise to the occasion in moments like that?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, it's a special group, man, and they're good football players, but that's the easy part. I think the leadership over there and the ability to continue to show up and do their part for the team -- and look, knowing the circumstance, knowing the struggle on the other side, for them to challenge the group, for them to maintain their character, for them to continue to work, and they practice that way. They've got a maturity about them.

I think the coaches on that staff have done a fantastic job. Ron is exceptional. He's one of the best defensive minds in the game. Chapman and Mike have been around the block here and been with us, and certainly the three new guys have added another dimension to that side of the ball.

They've been ready to play every week so far. We talked about establishing that here, knowing that's what it takes to win a championship, and we finally paired it with a good offense today.

Q. Back to Arch Manning for a second, what's the challenge he poses? We saw his feet, we saw that one scoring drive late where it was like boom, boom, and they're in their end zone. And what did it take to



perform the way you did against him? You guys were all over him most of the game.

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, look, offensively there's a lot of new faces over there, not just him. That's important. But he's no different than any quarterback; you get all the blame, you get all the criticism.

But in general, you saw today how talented the guy is. That's the guy I remember from high school. Elite arm talent, obviously the football IQ is there, and he's a heck of an athlete. That's what I remembered in high school.

We knew going in if we got out of our rush lanes, the guy could make us pay, and he did that.

But the coverages that we play, we've got to live with that sometimes, and I think that when we're doubling receivers and chasing routes, we've got to make sure that we're in our spokes.

We gave up a couple scrambles where he extended the play today. But in general, he's got a bright future in front of him. You could see that today. He's going to be a special player.

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