

University of Florida Football

Media Conference

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Billy Napier

Press Conference



Florida 23, Mississippi State 21

BILLY NAPIER: Let me tell you something, I have a ton of respect for Jeff Lebby. He and I kind of grew up the same way. He's a football coach. He's a good person. He's got a good team. They fought, they battled. This is their third SEC game in a row where they're in the fight, with Tennessee, Texas A&M and the Gators tonight. Their team has improved from year one to year two. Hats off to Mississippi State.

I think it was awesome in there today. I think the fans were incredible. I do think that they helped our players get it done. We were really excited about the opportunity to represent this place. I think that was the emphasis all week. The effort was there.

There was quite a bit of adversity in the game just in general. I was joking with Derron and Vinnie a while ago. They say coaching in the SEC is like dog years, okay? I want to tell you something, Derron and Vinnie, they got their seven years' worth tonight.

We got multiple injuries in the secondary, players not available. Basically played with the backups and some threes. Bryce Thornton was out there directing the troops and did a really good job.

Some standouts, Alfonzo Allen makes 15 tackles. A walk-on that's earned a scholarship at different times in his career. Huge fourth-down play. I mean, incredible. The guy is a football player. Not the biggest guy, fastest guy, but instinctive. He stepped up in the team in a major way. Is that guy even here 10 years from now? Probably not, right? He was clutch.

Trey Smack was ice in his veins. Just continues. I think he's perfect since the opener, just showing who he is. That rubs off on the team. You can see it when he does it.

Jadan Baugh has a career high 150-plus.

In general I think that the defense kind of settled down

there. We won the turnover margin 4-2. If you count the missed field goal, turnovers and downs. DJ did throw a couple of interceptions, but he made a lot of plays. Quarterback rating is 116. Close to having a big day.

I do think just really proud of the group, with the way they handled last week. It was tough. They showed up to work. I think for young people, to be able to eliminate distractions and show up and do very hard work. It's not easy what we ask these guys to do. They were well-prepared. They showed up and played. We had a bunch of guys banged up.

Did have some injuries that you'll ask about. Did have a few penalties, touchdown called back, couple others that will be debatable.

But I'm proud of the team. I'm thankful for the fans showing up and encouraging the team, being in the middle of the fight with the group. This league, man, you win a game, doesn't matter who you put out there, I think you're seeing that you take 'em.

It's a good win for the Gators. What questions we got?

Q. You'd be about 70 after four years in the SEC with dog years.

BILLY NAPIER: (Smiling).

Q. Take us through your emotions from the third down call with DJ to their call at the end when it looks like they're going to get a field goal. Is that complete roller coaster?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I mean, I think it's situational football. Look, we gave up some big passes over the top today. Obviously the secondary not having the vets out there contributed to that, right?

A lot of those calls, everybody sees the corner chasing the guy, but in reality there's some of those where the safety is the problem, right? Basically played a light box the majority of the game, try to take care of the secondary. I thought the front really stood up.

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Look, they got their rushing yards at times. But I think knowing who we're playing the back end, I think we did what we needed to do.

I think we had two good runs. We got to it third-and-one, called a movement pass, tagged that with surrender. DJ did what he's supposed to do. He's supposed to take the sack, make them use the final timeout. They did a nice job matching the pattern. It's that simple.

Then obviously what a call. Ron made a terrific call there. Knowing the ball is coming out quick, they've been throwing inside, breaking routes. Mike drops right in the middle of it. Really good call in that situation, knowing where the kick line was at.

Yeah, I mean, I think good situational football. Good call on defense. Obviously we had our chances there to get a first down. They did a nice job stopping us.

Q. With the way Jadan was playing, was there any consideration on the third-and-one to have him run the ball?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, no, there was debate about it. We tried to win the game there. We went with the movement pass, so...

Very similar like the third-and-one earlier in the game. We called a movement pass, hit Aidan Mizell. Talking about maybe should have ran it on that one, too. We're not, 'cause it worked. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't work.

Q. Among the injuries, Jordan Castell, what occurred with him pregame?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, man, tough competitor, Jordan Castell. Worked his butt off all week to try to get prepared to play. This is the type of scenario where you get an injection, tough it out, try to play. He wasn't able to do that. He felt like he would be able to do it. Got minimal work throughout the week. Just the closer we got to the game, it wasn't getting better.

He has a grade two AC sprain which is significant. For him to even consider playing I think is a credit to him. But he wasn't able to get that done.

Mike Caraway played with a hip pointer today. Really sucked it up for the team and played injured and showed some toughness and played well.

We had some guys. Sharif goes down. Lagonza Hayward

is in the game. Devin Moore goes down. Now we got all rookies out there at corner, right? Grimsley, Hanks, basically three freshmen, J'Vari. We got our monies' worth out of that crew today.

Q. What's that say about the young defenders' ability to develop as the season has gone on?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, look, we've been talking about this situation, this scenario, every week, holding our breath. We've been giving them reps. We've been coaching 'em, developing 'em so they could be ready when they get this opportunity, so...

Hats off to that crew for stepping up, making some plays. Obviously gave up a few. But in general they made a lot, too. They're smiling in there. Hard work pays off. Those guys got here in January, and they did a great job. We're banking reps for young players. It's part of what we do. You never know when your opportunity's going to surface. Hats off to that group for showing up and playing that way today.

Q. A lot of emotion, excitement there at the end. As you're exiting the field, there's a lot of fan unrest. There's a lot of uncertainty with you, what your future holds. Where are you with that game-ending reception? What do you think lies ahead for you right now after this game?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, look, I would say that, yeah, I think I'm built for it. I'm made for it. I chose the coaching profession. I was called to coach. The good comes with the bad, the bad comes with the good.

I do think the game's about the players. I'm proud of the players and the way they played. Never going to make everybody happy. You get these leadership positions, you're in charge, these are the things that come with it, right?

I love the game of football. I love the game.

Q. You've been through a lot of ups and downs over the last four years. What was that message like in the locker room in terms of talking to the guys after a win like that?

BILLY NAPIER: Uncommon. I think this is equally as hard. I think as it is, yeah, just I'm proud of the players, man. I think it's very uncommon for them to do what they've done. I think that's a tribute to the relationships they have with each other, the loyalty that they have.

I think in this league, man, you got to show up and play



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every week. I think they did that play. I'm proud of the players. I think tough win last week, then to hit the reset button, to show up and put full pads on on Wednesday and do the type of work that we have to do to be prepared to play.

Bunch of guys playing banged up out there. They're doing that because they care about this place. They wanted to represent a certain way today, knowing it was homecoming, knowing that alumni, former players. I said, One day it's going to be you sitting up there watching playing, you'll want to be proud of the team. If we're doing this the right way, this is the way it goes: They start here, they finish here, they come back here.

The challenge was accepted. We got a win tonight.

Q. As DJ continues to develop, you look at the two picks, what is the discussion with him on the sideline in those situations?

BILLY NAPIER: Yeah, I just talked to him about it. I think one of the cool things about having the video on the field is he's able to see immediately, he gets the feedback right away, so there's no uncertainty in his head. He can move forward. He knows the mistakes. He knows the answers. We have answers for him. Then he can move on to the next possession, right?

He was a little bit late on both throws. If you take those two out, what a day. What a day at the park, right? He made a bunch of plays.

Look, if you are playing that position, it comes with the territory. Your toughness and your resiliency, what type of competitor you are is important.

For him to have the intangibles to continue to play, make plays after those things happen I think is impressive to me for a young player.

Yeah, very correctable. There's answers on the tape. I think that allows him to move forward and play the next possession.

Q. When you look back on your four years here, every single season you've had games impacted by injuries. Have you ever looked in the mirror and sometimes said, What did I do to deserve this? Snake bit or something?

BILLY NAPIER: Injuries are part of the game. Every team in the country's dealing with 'em. I think when we're living in our house, we're a lot more aware of the in-house issues, but everybody's got problems.

The key is you have to be solution-oriented and you have to stay focused on things that you can control. But yeah, injuries are part of the game. They're one of the hardest things about the game. The hardest part is the player, the player going through the injury. There's a ton of things that go with injuries that are tough.

These guys, the missed time, the missed work, the anxiety that comes with maybe feeling like they're getting behind. They want to be out there for their teammates. It's a tough part of the game.

Q. How is BB3 doing?

BILLY NAPIER: He's doing good. He's got an AC sprain. We'll have a little bit more clarity. He was out. He wasn't able to return. Wasn't one of those categories where maybe you could do some things to help it and he could get back in the game.

Obviously he'll be here tomorrow and we'll be able to see where he's at next week.

Q. You mentioned your love for the game of football and these players. How much do you desire to finish out this season with them, finish what you started?

BILLY NAPIER: Man, I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to enjoy this one tonight. That's what I'm going to do, okay? I'll wake up tomorrow and we'll worry about what's next.

We're banged up. We need an open date. I know our group will be excited about the next one, right?

Yeah, I'm going to go take a deep breath, get something good to eat, prop my feet up on the house, hug on them kids, Miss Sally, then tomorrow I'm going to wake up and we'll think about the next one.

Q. What are you going to eat?

BILLY NAPIER: We'll see what Miss Sally has at the house tonight.

Q. The emotion that you showed there with the love of the game, do you sense this is it for you, tonight was your last game with the Gators?

BILLY NAPIER: No, I think about our players, man. I think about our players. That's what I think about. I mean, I think we work. That was a good testament to the entirety of the group from a work ethic, commitment. The depth was challenged. The entire process was challenged. Had



a lot of players play some of the best football of their careers, then some unknowns step up out of nowhere and make incredible plays. I think it's a testament to the entire organization.

Young people, that's not normal, you know, to play with that type of effort in a game where there's a ton of adversity for them to keep fighting and find a way. I think it's pretty special.

That's what I love about the game, man. These guys can learn a lot. That was a great memory there. I think there's a lot of life lessons for them in terms of what happened out there today.

Thank you.

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