

FLORIDA FOOTBALL

Eugene Wilson III





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Gators WR Eugene Wilson III looking to remain humble, continue improving amid impressive debut season

By: Graham Hall

Swamp247

October 19, 2023

As the Gators, now midway through the team's bye week, prepare for the remaining five games of the regular season, second-year Florida head coach Billy Napier insisted the program must take a self-effacing approach and exude humility in the weeks to come.

"It's important that we keep humility," Napier said Wednesday during his weekly appearance on the SEC's teleconference. "I think it's important for us. We have to view where we're at relative to the entire experience and not just last week's experience. Keeping the big picture approach."

It's a perspective one of the team's breakout players this season, freshman wide receiver Eugene Wilson III, shares with his head coach as he navigates his debut campaign with the Gators.

A midyear enrollee with the program, Wilson acknowledges his expectations weren't initially lofty regarding his potential impact within Florida's offense in 2023, and he arrived in Gainesville intent on honing his craft while adjusting to the collegiate level.

"Coming in, I expected it to be kind of like a learning year," Wilson said on the Gator Tales podcast. "It's just a blessing. A few months ago, I wasn't thinking I was gonna be in the starting lineup, but talking to them every other day, I just have to stay humble about it, go about the business everyday and getting the experience."

Wilson, who notes he recorded a 4.44 40-yard dash prior to his arrival at UF and was later clocked at nearly 23 miles-per-hour during his first offseason with the Gators, started to become comfortable toward the tail end of fall camp, as the team prepared to travel to Salt Lake city for what would be Florida's third true road game to open a season in 38 years.

By then, Wilson had become acquainted with the playbook, resulting in an increase in confidence that he could make an impact earlier than he initially anticipated.

"The week going into Utah, after camp and all that, that's when I was pretty familiar with the whole playbook," Wilson recalled, "and the whole groove of everything, the facility, the people and everything."

Rather than arrive with a mentality that his transition to the collegiate level would be a facile one, Wilson understood the Gators had weapons at wideout ahead of him on the roster, including his fellow freshmen signees who'd arrived in time for spring camp, giving him a head-start on carving out a role within the wide receiver room.

He arrived eager-eyed, motivated to learn and willing to accept teaching, knowing it would be in his best interest.



"The University of Florida, we're known for having guys, so I just knew coming in, having a pretty good receiver corps, I just knew I was going to be able to learn a lot from dudes," Wilson said, "Even though I still am, but it's kind of something I'm still taking day-by-day. It's just the way you got to approach everything."

It may have had something to do with his relative unfamiliarity with the position.

Wilson's father, Eugene Wilson II, is a two-time Super Bowl champion with the New England Patriots, and Eugene Wilson III initially looked to follow in his father's footsteps as a defensive back, and Wilson recalls countless training sessions with his father over the years.

"He played DB, I chose to come to Florida as a receiver. My whole life, I've been training as a DB," Wilson said. "He's been against pretty good receivers, so he's got that defensive perspective, so he got me right, I'd say he got me right. And I also have a couple pretty good coaches back home in my city that I used to work with, and I've been soaking a lot from them the past couple years, you know, because I've only played receiver for probably 2-3 years now, it's my third year playing receiver now, so I'm just still taking in a lot."

Ahead of his arrival at Florida, the training sessions with his father continued.

"My eighth grade year we was working on releases, because that was my first year with a real quarterback too, and we started working on releases – he's probably not going to like this – but he had tennis shoes on, I had cleats on, he ended up hitting that ground. I'm going to get on him about that all the time," Wilson said. "But I remember it was probably a couple months before I enrolled here, he was still giving me work as far as releases. 43-years-old, he's still giving me that work, you know. He's a bigger body and all that, so I want him up in my face giving me that work, working on my handwork and all that. As much as he can, he gave me that work everyday."

He may be motivated to remain humble, but Wilson has, in fact, taken a moment to reflect on his start to his UF career, which has seen him record 26 receptions for 251 yards and a touchdown, in addition to 37 rushing yards on just five attempts.

Many are hoping Wilson's promising start is just the beginning, and it's a sentiment he shares, too, as his inaugural season with the Gators continues after the team's bye week, starting with a highly anticipated matchup with the No. 1-ranked Georgia Bulldogs.

"I wouldn't say, in the most humble way, I'm not really surprised. As much as I wanted to make an impact on the field this season, I feel there's no doubt in my ability. I'd say there's not really no surprise, in the most humble way," Wilson said. "God-given talent can only get you so far, and Coach Nape, he preaches all the time 'Success comes with work', and everybody wants to win, but he also preached that not everybody wants to put in the work that comes with winning. My dad, I had no idea what was going on since I started playing Little League, but he would bring me out in the front yard in mornings and have me working out. I don't even know what's going on, but once I had the gist of putting in the work and seeing it pay off on the field, it kind of turned into a routine thing."



Emerging Gators star Eugene Wilson III a national true freshman standout from Week 7

By: Keith Niebuhr
On3 – Gators Online
October 17, 2023

It's safe to say Florida Gators receiver Eugene Wilson III is living up to the hype of being an On3 5-star coning out of Tampa (Fa.) Gaither in the class of 2023.

And, he came up big again Saturday in Florida's 41-39 win at South Carolina's Williams-Brice Stadium.

For his efforts, Wilson was named one of the week's True Freshman Standouts by On3's Charles Power, who wrote the following Monday morning:

“It was a matter of when, not if Eugene Wilson III would become a key piece of Billy Napier's Florida offense. The true freshman appeared ready for a breakout game against Tennessee back in September before going out with a shoulder injury. Wilson is back in action for the Gators and looked like a dynamic weapon in Florida's 41-39 win at South Carolina. Wilson finished with six catches for 83 yards and three rushes for 10 yards. Perhaps his biggest play of the game, came in the final minutes. As Florida was driving for the eventual game-winning score, a Graham Mertz pass went off of Ricky Pearsall's hands. Wilson came down with the deflection and ran down to the fifteen yard-line, setting up the eventual score. Florida got the ball into the Tampa (Fla.) Gaither product's hands in a variety of ways – including carries out of the backfield.

If the last two weeks are any indication, Wilson is going to have a key role in Florida's offense for the remainder of the season. A five-star outlier for On3, Wilson finished as the No. 32 overall prospect in the final 2023 On300.”

Wilson is having a terrific season for the Gators

Wilson now has 26 catches for 251 yards and one touchdown on the season — with a long reception of 37 yards — despite having missed two of the Gators' seven games due to injury. He is second on the team to Ricky Pearsall in both categories.

Additionally, Wilson has five carries for 37 yards.

Wilson's 83 receiving yards against South Carolina was a career-high.



Eugene Wilson III named one of CFB's top 50 newcomers by ESPN

By: Zach Abolverdi
On3 – Gators Online
August 12, 2023

Freshman Eugene Wilson III sets career highs vs. Vanderbilt: 'He's a difference maker'

By: Corey Bender
On3 – Gators Online
October 8, 2023

GAINESVILLE, FL. — One of the Gators' more elusive playmakers was back in the starting lineup on Saturday and definitely made his presence felt.

A former five-star prospect, Eugene Wilson III injured his collarbone during the week-three victory over Tennessee and has been sidelined ever since.

He entered Saturday's Vanderbilt game with 12 receptions for 104 yards. This afternoon, he manufactured his best outing to date, reeling in eight receptions for 64 yards and his first-career touchdown. Those are career highs for Wilson as well.

Florida has plenty of athleticism at the skill positions, but with Wilson, he moves different than most and Billy Napier acknowledged that after the game.

"It's good to have Tre back. He's a difference maker," Napier said. "Tre is tough to tackle. He's got unique acceleration, showed some toughness today, I thought. He's got some play strength to him, although he's a little bit smaller guy. But we were trying to get him the ball as much as possible."

Wilson will be a mainstay in the Gators' lineup

And because of that, UF is making sure the freshman is a part of the game plan week in and week out.

Whenever there is room to operate, Wilson flashes that elite ability in a hurry. That slippery style of play is a major reason why he has already emerged as a crowd favorite as well.

According to the 2023 On300 rankings, the Tampa native finished his prep career as a five-star prospect and the No. 32-ranked prospect regardless of position.

"He's one of the players that you want to make sure has an opportunity," said Napier. "We tried a few things that didn't quite work today with him, but I think for the most part, we want to make sure when the game is over every week that he had his opportunity to impact the game."



Gators secure needed Week 6 victory over Commodores

By: Jacob Rudner

Swamp247

October 8, 2023

GAINESVILLE — With just over four minutes left in the third quarter on Saturday afternoon, Florida did something it's done at every home game so far this season.

On the jumbotron appeared a video with university president Ben Sasse, who reminded fans that several weeks ago, Florida was named the No. 1 public institution in the United States by the Wall Street Journal.

Sasse said the crowd should celebrate. And to help them do it, the video gave way to one of Steve Spurrier chanting "We're No. 1," several months after his 1996 team won Florida's first football national title, a reminder of the height the Gator program had reached.

Almost three decades later, Florida head football coach Billy Napier has stated plainly on several occasions that he is aiming to bring Florida back to its championship-winning status so that "We're No. 1" chants in Ben Hill Griffin ring out to celebrate success on the gridiron, not in the classroom.

It's a long process, though, Napier has reminded fans on several occasions, especially in the wake of a disappointing loss to Kentucky on Sept. 30, one that would require the Gators to fight through adversity in order to perform at a high level on a weekly basis.

It might not have been the blowout fans were hoping for, but on Saturday evening, in Florida's 38-14 win over Vanderbilt (2-5; 0-3 SEC) to improve to 4-2 on the season and 2-1 in SEC play, the Gators did that.

They did what they needed to do.

"We want to see actions and we want to see the right attitude," Napier said matter-of-factly a few days before Saturday's matchup, "and ultimately, Saturday at 4 o'clock, we play Vanderbilt and it presents that opportunity."

Florida was methodical in its offensive approach throughout a game that started slowly for the unit.

The momentum generated by a Gator touchdown on its first possession of the game, a 14-yard reverse to senior wideout Ricky Pearsall, was quickly wiped away when Florida dialed up a double pass that saw quarterback Graham Mertz toss the ball to Kahleil Jackson, who dialed up a deep ball, which was easily intercepted.

Vanderbilt answered with an 85-yard touchdown to wideout Will Sheppard, which likely should have been called back due to what appeared to be a missed hands to the face call.



But the score proved inconsequential as the Gators slowly found their footing on both sides of the ball from that point on.

Less than five minutes into the second quarter, Mertz found redshirt freshman tight end Arlis Boardingham for his first score of the evening.

Florida's defense then held sharp inside its own 10, preventing the Commodores from scoring from four-yards out on three consecutive plays. True freshman cornerback Ja'Keem Jackson, who just seconds earlier allowed the explosive play that set up the and-goal situations for Vanderbilt, recorded two consecutive breakups in the end zone.

"Ja'Keem is an impressive young player," Napier said Wednesday. "He's got traits. He was a fantastic high school player, comes from a great family, he's got character, he's very consistent in his work habits, and he's done a nice job."

Efficient passing from Mertz set up Florida's second score of the second quarter almost exactly 10 minutes after its first, a Montrel Johnson run from seven, which provided the Gators with a comfortable 14-point lead heading into the half.

They never looked back from there.

Florida's 152 yards of total offense in the third quarter alone produced another touchdown and while Florida's defense surrendered one of its own, it still limited the Commodores to just over five minutes of total possession in the quarter compared to over nine minutes of its own possession time.

The Gators put the game on ice with a 10-point fourth quarter, which included Boardingham's second score of the night, marking his first multi-touchdown game of his collegiate career.

It allowed Florida to turn to backup quarterback Max Brown in the late stages of the third quarter.

"Ultimately we control our actions and we control our attitude," Napier said earlier in the week on the need for an impressive outing.

To be sure, Vanderbilt is among the worst teams Florida will face this season.

It entered play with one of the worst-ranked defenses in the nation, let alone the SEC, and was riding a four-game losing streak after opening its season with wins over Hawaii and Alabama A&M.

But there's also no understating the importance of a clean Gator performance on Saturday afternoon.

After a bad loss, Florida needed it. It's one step back in the right direction, albeit a small one.



FLORIDA FOOTBALL DAILY NEWS SUMMARY

“You like to think that these things present opportunity,” Napier said, “and I do believe that.”



FLORIDA FOOTBALL DAILY NEWS SUMMARY



UF's dynamic freshman Eugene Wilson will make first start with Gators

By: Edgar Thompson
Orlando Sentinel
September 7, 2023

Florida's dynamic freshman Eugene Wilson III arrived late but quickly has made up for lost time.

Wilson will make his first start Saturday night when McNeese visits the Swamp for the Gators' home opener.

One of the few first-year players who did not enroll in January, Wilson burst onto the scene during fall camp with his explosiveness, instincts and knack for the big play.

The 5-foot-10, 170-pound Tampa native was one of the bright spots for coach Billy Napier's offense during the Gators' 24-11 season-opening loss last week at Utah.

Wilson will replace redshirt sophomore Kahleil Jackson, who is questionable with a lower body injury after catching one pass for eight yards during his first career start.

"He's very capable player. We saw some of that last week," Napier said of Wilson. "Kahleil being banged up, we kind of shuffled the deck there. He's deserving, and he's going to only get better as we go forward."

Wilson possesses playmaking abilities perhaps no Gator can match.

"He's extremely talented," redshirt junior quarterback Graham Mertz said last week. "I've been in college a few years. I haven't seen any a young guy that fast, that twitchy that retains information that quickly and knows how to get open.

"He's shifty."

Wilson totaled 33 yards from scrimmage on three touches, with catches of 11 and 13 yards and a 9-yard run. Even though his 23 snaps were fourth most among UF receivers, the efficiency and flashes suggested Wilson needed more playing time and touches.

Much was expected of Wilson when he signed in December.

The son of former NFL safety Eugene Wilson II, a two-time Super Bowl champion with the New England Patriots, was the nation's No. 109 overall, according to 247Sports after a sterling career as a two-way player at Tampa Gaither.

In just seven games in 2022 because of injury, Wilson scored 11 touchdowns and averaged 19.1 yards on 40 receptions and also recorded five interceptions, two of them pick-sixes. In 2021 and '22, he scored 22 touchdowns in 28 games, including a kickoff return.

At Utah, Wilson did field two punts inside the 10-yard line but is sure to get a second chance.

"Still a freshman, and there'll be some things that come with that," Napier said. "But he is proven to be a very effective player."



FLORIDA FOOTBALL DAILY NEWS SUMMARY

Meanwhile, veteran center Kingsley Eguakun will miss his second game with a right foot injury.

Redshirt sophomore Jake Slaughter will replace Eguakun, a veteran of 26 starts.

Slaughter allowed two of the five sacks of Mertz while the Gators averaged just 3.1 yards on called runs.



Wilson III Earns Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List Honor

By: UAA Staff
Floridagators.com
August 31, 2023

PHILADELPHIA – Florida wide receiver Eugene Wilson III was named to the 6th annual Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List, as announced by the Maxwell Football Club Wednesday.

Wilson III is the first Gator in program history to be tabbed to a Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List.

Wilson III was rated as the No. 32 player and a top-five receiver in the 2023 class by On3. The five-star recruit from Tampa, Fla. was invited to the 2023 Under Armour All-American Game and caught 40 receptions for 764 yards with 11 touchdowns his senior season at Gaither High School. Additionally, he started both ways his junior year with 925 yards and seven scores receiving along with 23 total tackles, five pass break ups and four interceptions on defense.

The Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Award has been presented to the College Freshman Player of the Year since 2018 and is named in honor of Shaun Alexander, a former standout at the University of Alabama and with the Seattle Seahawks in the NFL. Past winners include; Trevor Lawrence (Clemson) - 2018, Kenneth Gainwell (Memphis)-2019 and Will Anderson Jr. (Alabama) – 2020, Brock Bowers (Georgia) – 2021 and Drake Maye (North Carolina) 2022.



Florida WR Eugene Wilson III Makes Freshman of the Year Watch List

By: Zach Goodall
FanNation – All Gators
August 31, 2023

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah -- Expected to occupy a significant role in Florida's offense right out of the gate in his college career, Gators freshman wide receiver Eugene Wilson III was named to the sixth annual Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year watch list on Wednesday, as announced by the Maxwell Football Club.

Wilson is the first player in program history to receive a spot on the catalog.

Despite Wilson's summertime enrollment at UF, having missed the team's spring training camp, he quickly ascended within the offense amid Florida's fall training sessions.

Wilson was listed as Florida's No. 2 slot receiver, behind senior Ricky Pearsall, on Florida's Week 1 depth chart. He was also named a co-starter on punt returns alongside Pearsall, and was included on the team's four-deep kickoff return unit with running backs Trevor Etienne and Montrell Johnson Jr. and cornerback Jason Marshall Jr.

Marshall, in particular, has been impressed by Wilson in the practice setting this offseason, having matched up with the receiver multiple times in coverage.

"I have to guard him in practice and he makes it hard on me as well," Marshall said about Wilson on Monday. "It's iron sharpens iron, he's getting better, I'm getting better, preparing him for the weeks with these games coming up and very explosive guy, twitchy, quick in and out of his breaks."

The son of former NFL defensive back Eugene Wilson II, the younger Wilson was one of the most sought-after slot receiver prospects in the recruiting class of 2023. He was considered the No. 2 player at his position and No. 68 overall prospect in the county by the Sports Illustrated 99.

He collected 108 receptions for 1,816 yards and 18 touchdowns in 28 varsity games with Tampa (Fla.) Gaither High School.

The Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Award, named in honor of former Alabama running back Shaun Alexander, has been presented to college football's top rookie since the prize debuted in 2018.

Past winners include quarterback Trevor Lawrence (Clemson, 2018), running back Kenneth Gainwell (Memphis, 2019), edge rusher Will Anderson Jr. (Alabama, 2020), tight end Brock Bowers (Georgia, 2021) and quarterback Drake Maye (North Carolina, 2022).



Gators WR Eugene Wilson III named to Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year watch list

By: Graham Hall
Swamp247
August 31, 2023

With his collegiate debut imminent, Florida freshman wide receiver Eugene 'Tre' Wilson III has been named to the 6th annual Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List, as announced by the Maxwell Football Club Wednesday.

Wilson III is the first Florida player in program history to be named to a Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List.

Wilson, a four-star recruit from Tampa ranked as the No. 105 overall prospect in the 247Sports Composite Ranking, was invited to the 2023 Under Armour All-American Game and caught 40 receptions for 764 yards with 11 touchdowns his senior season at Gaither High School. In addition, Wilson started both ways his junior year, tallying 925 yards and seven touchdowns as a receiver to go along with 23 total tackles, five pass break ups and four interceptions on defense.

The Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Award has been presented to the College Freshman Player of the Year since 2018. The award is named in honor of Shaun Alexander, a former standout at the University of Alabama and with the Seattle Seahawks in the NFL. Past winners include former Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, Memphis' Kenneth Gainwell in 2019 and Alabama's Will Anderson Jr. in 2020. In 2021, Georgia tight end Brock Bowers was the recipient of the award, followed by North Carolina quarterback Drake Maye in 2022.

It's only the latest bit of preseason hype for the first-year wideout at Florida.

Midway through fall camp, Wilson was named as one of ESPN's top 50 newcomers in college football for the 2023 season, and the 5-foot-10, 180-pound pass-catcher was one of just 21 freshmen to make the list from ESPN staff writer Tom VanHaaren.

Ahead of Florida's contest with the Utes, Wilson was listed as the back-up to starting wide receiver Ricky Pearsall on Florida's depth chart, and he's expected to play a considerable role Thursday when he makes his collegiate debut.

Throughout his first organized team activities in Gainesville, Wilson, along with fellow freshmen wide receivers Andy Jean and Aidan Mizell, has received praise for how coachable the first-year players are in the room.

"I think they took tremendous strides in these practices that we've had," Pearsall said of the freshmen in fall camp. "It's funny, because I'll tell them one thing, maybe give them a pointer, and they'll come up to me and be like, 'hey, coach me up on this route', and I'll tell them, and then they'll go out there and perform it."



Eugene Wilson earns Shaun Alexander Freshman of the Year Watch List Honor

By: Nick de la Tore
On3 – Gators Online
August 31, 2023

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Wilson named an On3 Sports Freshman All-American

Wilson was named to the On3 Sports Freshman All-American team. The Tampa native will play receiver for the Gators but will also make his presence felt on special teams. Wilson was listed on the Florida Gators first depth chart as a kick and punt returner.

On3 Director of Scouting Charles Power had this to say of Wilson.

“Eugene Wilson was a five-star outlier for On3. We ranked him much higher than any other media outlet, and I think based on the early returns since he’s arrived in Florida, I think he has a chance to live up to his five-star billing. He’s been a silky smooth, extremely coordinator, fluid receiver, who just has a lot of play-making ability.

“I think when you’re looking at the receiver position, we highly-value coordination, movement-skills, and Eugene Wilson has all of that in spades. ... Just a phenomenal overall athlete. ... Getting really strong reviews early on in his time at Florida. ... They’re going to need some play-makers, obviously they’re losing Anthony Richardson. ... So Eugene Wilson, he’s one that we’ve been high on for a long time, and I think he could be set to surprise some folks this year in Gainesville,” Power stated.



Eugene Wilson III named one of CFB's top 50 newcomers by ESPN

By: Zach Abolverdi

On3 – Gators Online

August 12, 2023

On Friday, ESPN released its list of the top 50 newcomers in college football, compiled of both freshmen and transfers. It included one member of Florida's 2023 class: five-star receiver Eugene Wilson III.

Wilson made the list as one of 21 freshmen and was ranked No. 50 overall by ESPN staff writer Tom VanHaaren, who also mentioned another wideout from the Gators' 2023 recruiting class.

"Wilson, the No. 7 athlete in the class (according to ESPN), has already made a name for himself. Coach Billy Napier said he thinks Wilson will make the team better. Napier also mentioned Wilson's speed as an aspect that has stood out, and given that Florida's offense was ranked 77th in pass yards per game, Wilson and fellow freshman Andy Jean will be welcomed additions."

Wilson was limited for the first three practices in a non-contact jersey but has been full go since then. He showed out in Florida's first padded practice Sunday according to Napier.

"Trey, in particular, I thought last night really cut it loose for the first time," Napier said Monday. "He's kind of had some soft tissue issues to start camp, so I think his presence was known out there last night. I think he'll make our team better."

Wilson, a five-star recruit in the On3 rankings, is expected to have an immediate impact along with fellow freshmen Jean and Aidan Mizell, both of whom enrolled early. Mizell caught a touchdown in the first scrimmage of fall training camp on Thursday.

"They're all extremely fast. I think that always helps, right? Documented speed. I think Andy, Aidan and Trey, all three, are verified fast," Napier said. "Receiver is still a very skilled position so it's one thing to be fast and another to play fast. There's a mental component here relative to my assignment, my technique, my adjustment to the coverage."

"Whether it's steps or depth or landmarks on the field, I think we're seeing them get comfortable. ... I think those guys, they got character, they want to be good players, they're good teammates. I think they're hard at work trying to improve their role relative to the team."