

# Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, August 22, 2022

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

## Coach Mike Norvell

### Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate everybody being here. Excited that we are here at game week. A lot of work that's gone in. As I told the team yesterday, back to last December, really, as we were able to sign a class, come in in January, we had 23 newcomers that entered the program in January. Was able to really be very progressive. What we did, seeing the team come together, trying to establish an identity throughout the spring practice as I carried over into the summer, had a couple new additions and just really the overall development of our football team, I'm just proud of the work they've put in.

As we went through fall camp -- and it was a strenuous fall camp, the workload. I try to track things from year to year, and over the three-year period of time that we've been able to see that output in a fall camp, it was by far the best player load, the highest velocity and top speeds just as an overall average of a football team, our explosive movements, change of directions. We blew it out of the water from years past.

I love the competitiveness that I saw from our team. Really excited about the opportunity that's ahead.

As we get into week 1, just so grateful for the opportunity to be able to kick it off here at home at Doak Campbell Stadium in front of our home crowd. It's going to be a wonderful experience for our players, coaches, all the families, and you're just excited for our fan base to be here on this opening weekend of college football.

Like I told our players as we jumped into this week, the focus does not change. The focus is still on our improvement every single day, building that consistency, and you'll have an opportunity to go and compete to be the best us come Saturday.

I'm excited about the work they've put in and really grateful to be able to coach this team, and looking forward to Saturday night and seeing them go out and execute and play this game that we all love.

**Q. Coach, I saw that on Saturday Jordan Travis broke**

**the rock. Obviously it's a symbolic thing that you guys do here in the program, but for it to be the last day of camp, what does it symbolize and how far has Jordan come in the last 20 practices?**

MIKE NORVELL: He's had a great fall camp, and I think we talked about it a little bit after each day, kind of giving those updates. He was incredible. I mean, the work that he put in, the consistency that he showed at the position, each day even with mistakes that might have been made the day prior, you got to see the response. Just his growth at the position, the leadership that he showed.

One of the things that you look back at that, and Coach Storms, he selects that at each of those kind of pivotal moments to mark the end of a camp, or with here going into a game week, the guy that breaks the rock.

One of the things that he mentioned, which you see and you feel, is just the approach that Jordan brought to the field every day. I mean, he did an unbelievable job of finishing plays, did an unbelievable job of encouraging teammates. He went through fall camp with a smile on his face. You look at the work and the challenges that we try to create throughout fall camp, and he just embraced that with an unbelievable attitude.

I think that really uplifted a lot of the guys on the team. Even when guys were going through tough moments, when you see one of the best players on your football team just going out there and enjoying it and having fun, I'm excited for Jordan. I'm excited for this year that's ahead. I really believe that he's got something special in front of him because of the work and that investment.

But it was definitely a joy to see him break the rock. We had a lot of guys that definitely were capable and had earned that right, as well, but to see him get a chance to do that, it's special for our team.

**Q. On the projected depth chart, you've got Darius starting at center. That probably wasn't what you guys predicted going into camp even though he's worked at probably every spot on the line. How has he done, and is there any update on that position health-wise?**



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MIKE NORVELL: Darius, we've talked about it throughout camp. He's so versatile. He's played every position. He's played last year at center. It's been great getting him back in the lineup. We had some injuries there in fall camp. We know about Kayden; Maurice had got banged up there throughout camp and was going to be out this week and we look forward to getting him back very, very soon.

But going into this week, Darius and his versatility is just -- I think it's a very natural position for him. Obviously he can play guard, he can play tackle, but he's very smart, he understands the offense, understands the calls.

I believe that he really has a great future in front of him being able to utilize that versatility, and if the time calls like it calls for this week, he can go in and be able to play the center position, also guard or tackle. It's one of his greatest qualities. For all the work he's put in in the off-season, he was coming off of an injury and has kind of been limited throughout fall camp, but even his continued rehab and putting himself in a position is something that he's had to bust his tail to do.

I'm excited for this year for Darius and just that versatility he brings to the offense.

**Q. What have you seen from the run game throughout camp? Seems like you have a diversity of different types of running backs, and how can that be utilized to your advantage this season?**

MIKE NORVELL: I really like our backs. I like the -- they understand tracks. They understand the patience, but also just the aggressive nature of how we want to be able to attack in the run game.

I think they're all dynamic players. They can do great things running the ball but also catching the ball out of the backfield, which definitely presents different challenges for opposing defenses.

But our guys take pride in how we run the ball, and it's something that we have to be able to get established week in and week out, for us being able to identify the best concepts and schemes for those five guys that are going to be there in front of them and the tight ends and how we want to utilize those different packages.

I do believe that we're going to be able to play multiple backs throughout the course of the game. There's going to be times where you'll see many of them out there on the field together, but I think they all complement each other well. I think each of them can be the primary back, but also being able to showcase that versatility I think will be

something that will be great for the offense as the year unfolds.

**Q. Last year you guys opened up against one of the most storied programs in the history of the sport. This week you're opening up with Duquesne, a little bit different challenge for you guys. Can you assess the way you guys have attacked and how you haven't seen distraction or complacency that people might assume.**

MIKE NORVELL: Our guys are excited to play. Being able to play at home, like I mentioned, is something that we're definitely excited about. This Duquesne team that's coming in, it's a program that's had a lot of success over the last couple years. You look at their head coach has been there I want to say maybe going on 18 years. Very disciplined football team, one that plays -- they're very multiple in their concepts. They've got a new defensive coordinator that's going to be very multiple in their approach and blitz packages. Offensively they can do a little bit of everything.

They've got really quality football players. I want to say they've got maybe seven or eight preseason all-conference players that are returning. This is a team that they can play really good football.

And for us, and I'm going to say the same thing next week and the week after: It is about us. It is about us going out there and being able to execute the plan that we have to be consistent in our approach and consistent in how we are able to respond throughout the course of the game of whatever a play result might be. We've got to be able to learn from that and be able to move forward, whether it's good or bad.

I'm excited to see our guys compete. This last probably week plus, I know I've used the term "irritable." We've had that. Guys have competed hard. We've been physical throughout fall camp, really trying to establish that identity. Our guys embrace it.

The fact that we get to play somebody that's going to be in a different colored jersey come Saturday, we're excited, and to be able to do it at home, we just have to do everything in our power to prepare the way that's necessary for us to go play our best ball come Saturday.

**Q. Talk about the offensive line as a whole. You've talked a lot about this off-season about how much attention has been paid to that with the additions and all. How much is this depth chart looking at who you have on that, despite being out probably the top two guys at center coming into the preseason attest to where that room is at compared to when you got here?**



MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, we knew we needed to continue to build depth and we knew we needed to continue to -- as you see young players that are developing and growing in their versatility, growing in the things that they can do, I think it's exciting that we have those guys that have come in and been able to bring that type of value to our program.

But also there's a lot of competition. Even going into the course of this week, we have an initial depth chart. We know Maurice is not going to be available this week. But what you see on that depth chart, there could be some moving pieces between now and Saturday.

There is a lot of competition for us. We need that consistency and execution, so we'll still be evaluating that here as the week unfolds. But we definitely -- I like the young men that we have in that room and the work that they've put in, and we're just going to continue to push and develop them as each practice goes by.

**Q. Sticking with the O-line, what has Jaz done since his arrival and what kind of versatility does he provide as possibly a swing lineman?**

MIKE NORVELL: Jaz has really done a nice job. You look at the newcomers that have joined, and Julian Armella who's a true freshman there as a backup at left tackle; you look at Jaz coming in, a guy that's played tackle, has started games, and then we've even this last week, week and a half have moved him around a little bit between guard and tackle.

The way that he's embraced just role opportunity, there's a lot of things that those guys have had to learn coming in. It's been really impressive just to see the work ethic that they have, but also how the other linemen that are returning have really taken them all under their wings to help along the process.

Those five guys, they've got to play as one. So that communication and understanding and trying to build upon those finer details and those reactionary moments, it takes a lot of work. I think our guys have done a nice job of that, and it's a compliment to those newcomers of the work that they've put in to put themselves in a position to even be able to play multiple spots even though they've only been here for a short period of time.

**Q. Just the opportunity to play week zero, you're one of a dozen games on TV this Saturday night, to be able to showcase this program on a national level like that when there's a lot of eyes on not that many games.**

MIKE NORVELL: I love it, and it's really -- it's added to the sense of urgency. We started a week earlier. We actually

-- one of the things that was a benefit is today is the first day of school, and so we were able to really get an extra week of camp where you could have the night meetings, the walk-throughs. So we were able to get, I think, a little bit further advanced with that extra time, hit in different situations, making sure we were cross-checking and really -- sometimes when you're going towards a first game, you're going to hit everything with that first group, second group, but even just helping understand with some of the newcomers and being able to go back through it with a night walk-through or just being able to slow down some of those situations. I thought that was really good.

You get a chance to kick off here, be one of the first games in college football that's played this weekend, it's just exciting. It's an exciting time.

I love the opportunity that we get each year -- that's what makes college football so special, because there's so limited opportunities that you get in a season, and to be able to start it off and to be a part of that week zero showcase, I'm excited about it, and like I said, I really appreciate the work that our players have put into it, and it's time to go play it.

**Q. Kind of a two-part question but it's related. You guys were able to retain some staff members who might have had opportunities elsewhere during the off-season, and then also there's a commitment I think from the university to help you expand the staff. What has that done for you going into this season?**

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, it's been great. I think when you look at one of the things with our program is continuity has been important. It's really something that we've needed. There's been -- we've talked about the amount of change that the program has seen over the last few years, and even with guys that got other opportunities and are at different places, we've been able to have that continuity with Coach Shannon and Coach Tokarz and Coach Atkins becoming the OC.

The comfort and expectation and understanding of at a position and also just collectively as a group, I think that helps accelerate the process for our guys and there's no slow-down in the growth.

I think we've seen a lot of development. We needed to see a lot of development. We've been one of the youngest teams in college football the last few years, and we needed to see those continuous steps. It's something that I believe has really helped us, and I've loved what I've seen in the preparation throughout fall camp.

When it comes to expanding the staff, I think it's been



important. We've been able to add a couple roles, whether it's in personnel, scouting, different areas. There's not a magic number in staff. We just want the right number, the most efficient number of personnel and people that are here to support our student-athletes, to help provide us the best opportunity to go out there and play at an elite level.

I'm grateful for how everybody has been able to come in and the way that we've been able to efficiently operate together, and excited for that to go into play here this week on top of all the other things that we've done leading up throughout this year already.

**Q. You've always placed a great deal of time and importance on special teams. How much better do you feel about return game with the new faces that are now part of it?**

MIKE NORVELL: You know, I think that's going to be -- that needs to be a great improvement. We've invested a lot of time. We've gone back and even reevaluated some of the things we did as coaches, how we scrimmaged and some of the things that we wanted to see that really allowed guys maybe a little bit better opportunity to showcase exactly where they were before this first game.

We got some full-speed reps in the return game, and I'm excited about the guys that we've had, that we've added, and guys that we've had that have been here that have continued to grow and develop.

The thing about special teams is it is -- that's got to speak to the culture of the team. When you see your best players that are wanting to be a part of those special teams units and understanding the importance of it, we need to have those game-changing plays. We need to have those impactful moments where we can flip field position, win hidden yardage, do the things necessary to help our offense and defense to have the best chance to achieve success on their own right.

But from the coaching staff to the players, I really think there's been a great deal of buy-in. I'm excited about our return units. When you look at some of the explosiveness that we have back at the returner positions, if 10 other guys can all do their job and help provide those seams, I definitely think we have guys that will have an opportunity to make some of those impactful plays, whether it's a Deuce Spann, Sam McCall is somebody that has really -- he's emerging, especially in the return game. I'm excited to see him get an opportunity there, whether it's kickoff return. Obviously Mycah Pittman has done an exceptional job since he's been here in the punt return game. Guys like Keyshawn Helton has really continued to come along in that. But I'm excited about the personnel and looking

forward to seeing them go out there and execute.

**Q. You've expressed a lot of optimism about the growth and direction of the program. Going into the season, what would constitute as successful in your mind and a step in the right direction for the program?**

MIKE NORVELL: It's seeing that continual growth. I know there's not -- I want to see us play our best ball each and every week. To see us grow and get better. This week, this is our first opportunity. We've got to go out there, and how we execute, how we perform, how we respond to all situations that show up come Saturday night, that's going to be -- that is our first opportunity to see exactly where we are, and then building from there, we have to see that gradual improvement.

There's not a limit of things that -- I'm not going to put a limit on what this team can do or accomplish. I really am excited about this group. I know there's some things that we're going to need to see some rapid acceleration at some places, at some positions. Come Friday night it'll be the first time that a lot of these guys, especially the newcomers, have gone out there and played here at Florida State. It's going to be a new opportunity for some of the younger players that have now established themselves in different roles to go out there and showcase all the skills and talents that they have and all the development they've been able to achieve.

But that's what will ultimately define success. We see that continued growth within the program. I want to win every dang game. Ultimately that's what we're here to do.

But you have to see that growth, and seeing our guys go out there and play to the best of their ability in every opportunity that they get.

**Q. You were really aggressive in the transfer portal even last season. Seeing the way that guys like Jermaine and Keir practiced in the preseason and the way they were able to perform for you last year, did that give you a feel or a bit of confidence when you see guys like Jared, the way they practice, or Tatum? Does it give you a good gauge of how guys integrate into a program and how quickly they can help you out in the season?**

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, and that's the expectation. That's where when you see your top players practicing at a top level and the effort they give, the intensity that they bring, those are things that are sought out.

For young players that maybe came from different places and for them to embrace that mentality and to really -- it





inspires others. There's a reason why I coach the way I coach. I want to be an inspiration when we're on that field. It's a very short period of time that we get to be out there, but to maximize each moment, it will prepare them for how they're going to play.

I want game day -- I want it to feel slow for players. I want them to feel like we compete and push at practice at an extremely high level so when they get into the game they're able to be unbelievably confident in what they're being asked to do just because of the way that they've prepared.

I think the guys that you've mentioned, I think they showed that a year ago, and I'm really excited about what this team has done in their preparation in fall camp, because the numbers speak for themselves, and I said this last week. Everybody is going to have a feel-good message going into week one.

What gives me confidence is I've seen the work. I've seen the increase in everything that we track. These guys have pushed at an extraordinary level. Looking forward to them getting to go play the game.

**Q. You talked going into spring about the competition you wanted to see from the team. Then when we look at this depth chart and kind of who's projected to possibly start and who's at an "or" and you have some guys who have won jobs over returning starters and some returning starters who have fought off pretty good challenges, has that competition been what you hoped it would be?**

MIKE NORVELL: It has, and I think we've had competition at all spots. I think you've seen growth at all spots. Sometimes when you have those "ors," it's going to take more than 11 guys on each side of the ball to play winning football. What I'm excited about is I think rather than maybe a 13 or a 14, we're going to be sitting there close to 18, 19, 20 that are guys that have put themselves in that position where you can have possibly a three- or four-man rotation, some positions a five-man rotation. You look at our defensive tackle group, it's a group that I'm extremely excited about because of the depth that they have.

As you look at that, that's where it also couples in with the special teams. You're going to be able to play your best players because if a guy is playing 40 snaps offensively or defensively and then still being able to get another 10 or 15 there on special teams, that's a heck of a workload going into a game, but it's also guys maintaining -- being able to play fresh and being able to go out there and play at the best level that they can with each opportunity.

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