

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate you all being here. Just want to start off today with the news of what happened up at University of Virginia. Our thoughts and prayers are with that whole community, Coach Elliott and that football program, and our hearts go out to the lives and families that have been tragically affected. Just a terrible event that has occurred. Just want to express our remorse for the families and for the whole community there at Virginia.

To kind of reflect back to Saturday and being able to go and rewatch the game film, once again, very proud of our football team. To go on the road -- the last two weeks have been two trips in challenging atmospheres, and just very proud of how our team has prepared, the way they've gone out and executed. We got off to a fast start. I thought our defense was extraordinary in how they played. I think we had eight three-and-outs, were able to create a takeaway. Were great in situational football. Didn't allow a touchdown for the second straight week.

Really playing at a high level. I think that you see the confidence that's really emerging at all three levels. Our defensive front is doing a remarkable job. Some guys that are showing up big in the stat book, Jared Verse, Patrick Payton, Derrick McLendon, those guys, you really see some great numbers that are being put up, but then also guys who maybe aren't showing up as much in the stat line, they're still making great impact, Fabien Lovett, Robert Cooper, I know Josh Farmer had a couple tackles there, really did a nice job.

But you see the impact that's being made, and that's allowing our linebackers to play really fast. I thought our defensive backs really played at a high level. Excited about what I'm seeing on that side of the ball.

Offensively I thought we were very efficient, being able to run for over 200 yards. That was a defense that was top 15 defense coming in, and they've done a good job of creating havoc to offenses that they've played, but we knew we needed to establish the run game, and we were able to do that, going for over 200 yards for I think it's the

fifth straight week. It's a testament to our offensive line, receivers, blocking. All those things showed up big in the game the other day.

Jordan was so very efficient in what he did. I thought he played at a very high level, located the ball great. The receivers, not only did they play physical in the run game, they were physical once they got the ball in their hands and were able to do a great job. I think they had over 80 yards after catch and contact there from a receiving position, which was impressive to see.

All in all, it was a dominant performance. I thought special teams, Alex once again was able to flip the field position. That was a huge factor in the game the other night. I thought our punt return unit was able to get us in a great starting field position. I thought Mycah Pittman did a nice job being aggressive but also taking care of the football and getting our offense started in good shape with that.

But to finish ACC play, we talked about wanting to make a statement in how we finished, and we secured at least second-place finish in the Atlantic Division, which is not where we want to be, but it definitely shows growth. It shows steps of progress, and even with that stretch there in the middle of the season, I thought our guys responded at a very high level with our last three games in the ACC.

We go back to non-conference play this week and continue the emphasis of our growth, and obviously the development of our team, and I was really pleased with the guys and their attitude and approach. We got back really early there Sunday, went out and practiced, had really good meetings. I loved the approach from our team, the mindset that they're bringing on a daily basis to go out and improve. We know we've got to get better this week, and excited for the opportunity to be back at home.

We've got our last two regular season games at home, and excited to see our team continue to take the positive steps building upon what we've done up until this point.

Q. I might be just projecting because of the way they're playing, but even watching the team go through warmups, it seems like there's just a confidence and



businesslike that seems different from earlier. Have you seen that coming, and where do you think that comes from?

MIKE NORVELL: I think they're growing in confidence through the experiences that we've had, but they're also seeing what has worked and tried to continue to improve in that.

The Georgia Tech preparation I thought was really good, and even before the game there, I had mentioned about how we had prepared, and whether it was Jordan Travis and almost preparing angry, there was a sense of urgency to get back out on the field. Coming off a bye week, how they did it, they experienced success, and then we go on the road, big rivalry game, and even like you mentioned in pregame, you just feel that edge.

They carried that to the Miami game, and then when I loved, it was the same there in Syracuse. It's a choice that has to be made, but it's also when you see the benefits of a heightened level of the way that you're getting yourself ready to go out there and execute, especially being on the road and facing some challenging things that you know will show up.

I think that's just like in life, when you see that -- if you do things to a certain standard in a certain way, if you see the benefit, it starts becoming a part of who you are. I do think we're growing in that area, and I've been pleased with the results.

Q. Watching the game back, Greedy Vance kind of popped on film again watching it back. He's kind of become a playmaker out there and he's playing limited snaps. How much has his growth helped the defense?

MIKE NORVELL: No, it's great. He's definitely a playmaker and you're seeing that show up, back-to-back weeks with interceptions. He's doing a good job of competing with Kevin and having the balance of those two, Kevin has done a lot of good things throughout the season, but you're seeing greedy get in there and being able to make plays, it's been huge for our football team.

You look back to earlier times in the year where maybe there were missed opportunities, and you see him just continuing to grow in what he's being asked to do. He's doing a great job of executing how to do it, and he's making plays. That's something when you have that quality of depth within your defense, you're able to roll more guys. Guys are staying fresh. Guys are being able to make those impactful moments, not only on defense but also in special teams. It's big for our football team.

We have had that show up in a lot of different positions, but Greedy is definitely one that's taken advantage of it.

Q. In what ways has Trey Benson improved with each game, and how impressive is it that he improves each carry?

MIKE NORVELL: I think you see just the understanding of all that he's being asked to do. Obviously with the ball in his hands, the efficiency in his tracks, the efficiency in his footwork, he's such a strong, powerful runner, but getting himself in the right spot and then trusting what he's seeing. There were still some things coming out of the game -- what I love about Trey is he's always searching to improve. He always wants more. He wants feedback. He wants to continue to grow, and even coming out of the game there was a handful of plays that you sit there and say, well, these are the things you can do to really take your game to another level. He embraces that.

But the confidence is growing just through the work that he's putting in, and it's really just an overall understanding but also just in the ability that he has and what he can accomplish here in this offense.

Q. I know we've asked and you've talked a lot, Coach talks a lot about the physicality of the receivers and their blocking this season. I think we really saw the physicality in the receiving with the ball in their hands Saturday. What was it like to see the Malik play, and Johnny Wilson made guys miss in space for their touchdowns?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely, and you had the 3rd down run, I think it was -- might not have been 3rd down, but speed sweep with Micah making guys miss. That toughness, it's going to show up. If it's going to show up without the ball in your hands, you know it's going to show up with the ball in your hands. That's something that we preach and we believe in having that mentality. When you can throw a hitch and have an explosive play, score a touchdown, this game is going to come down to one-on-ones, and it's going to come down to blocking, running, tackling, all those things, and our guys are winning their one-on-ones.

When you can do that and teams are stacking the box just to stop the run game, it gives you those opportunities out on the perimeter, and definitely creates challenges for opposing defense when they -- it has to limit how many times they put guys out on islands.

Really proud of our guys for the work that they're doing. I think Coach Dugans is doing a great job in the foundation that he built with that mentality, and then obviously the way

our players have embraced that and continue to work getting better there.

Q. How much fun is it seeing your starting quarterback with a baseball cap on the sidelines for the fourth quarters of these games, and how much do you enjoy that time getting to coach a lot of those younger guys?

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, man, I think it's great when you get to have younger guys or guys that are in the depth and be able to get them meaningful, meaningful reps.

Obviously Jordan played an exceptional game. He prepared at an exceptional level to prepare him to put himself in that position.

But I was glad for Tate to get out there and get work, and I thought there was some really good work, things that he can grow and improve in in that game. We were able to do that at a lot of different positions.

We held AJ in the game the other night. We thought about it, AJ has two more games left, but with three games out there, we just want to make sure that we're being smart with any potential situation that could come up where he would be forced to play because we'd like to be able to keep him under four games.

Talked to him about that, but when you see Jordan -- what I love is even when he's not in, he gets his baseball cap on, and that's obviously kind of a funny thing to me, but he's still so active and coaching and he's engaged and he's there working.

He's just such a great young man. He is a leader within this team, and it's not only when he's out there on the field, but even whenever his work has been done, he's still trying to make a positive impact. I love his approach.

Q. You just mentioned the redshirting. With the luxury -- it's a nice problem to have with the bowl game. How do you weigh that going into the final two games and the bowl game?

MIKE NORVELL: It's something we've definitely put a lot of thought in. There's still guys that we have that have one game left, and we didn't play Rodney Hill the other day, that's intentional. We've had those conversations with him about the process of what we're doing and just trying to make sure that we're maximizing these guys and their opportunities through their careers.

But you have to be strategic with it because when you have regular season opportunities and heaven forbid

somebody gets hurt and these guys have actually got to be prepared and ready in those situations, but also if we can have a good balance with the potential of another game, we're just trying to be aware of that and making sure we're preparing guys for what can come.

Q. The 3rd down defense the last few games has been off the charts. How much of that is putting teams in 3rd-and-long situations, and then how well are they playing in those situations?

MIKE NORVELL: They're doing a great job in those situations, and it does. When you can force teams into longer yardage situations it really allows you to kind of pin back and be aggressive or have a variety of things that you can mix, whether it's dropping coverage, whether it's blitzes and the different things that you can put together.

I mean, it all stacks upon each other, but I just think our guys, the emphasis that we put on 3rd downs, that was something that cost us in some earlier games.

You know, the ownership, the situational awareness, the communication, it's not like we added all these new calls and defenses that we're running, but you see the confidence in the way that guys are communicating, playing their technique, playing their fundamentals and being able to impact the opposing quarterbacks is a big thing, and our guys are doing a wonderful job of that.

Q. Shyheim Brown got his first career start. I think you guys came out in dime. What has he done this year as far as his continual growth?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, he's maturing in all areas, as a player, the things we ask him to do. Defensively what he's done on special teams has been really big. You see his confidence growing. I think it was the very first play of the game, the ball comes his way, and he was in great position, goes and makes the play, he's violent at the catch point, gets a PBU, and that's what -- Shyheim has a great future in front of him. If he'll continue to work and develop like he has, he's an ultimate team player.

That was something we knew when you watched his high school tape. I think he played every position you possibly could play, and you just saw the selflessness but the care and the passion of how he played was something that I was so drawn to, and we're getting that.

It's just as he's growing up and gaining the confidence in his techniques and what he is being asked to do, it's great seeing that growth, especially as we're here in the back part of the season. But he's got a great future in front of him.

Q. Jared Verse after the game mentioned that he was upset that you guys gave up three points. How does that speak to the mentality of the defense, and how close are they to potentially getting a shut-out?

MIKE NORVELL: These guys are working each day to just be their best. I thought there were some great moments, especially I've mentioned that after the game they were put in a challenging situation after the turnover where you could go out there and all right, they're already in field goal range, but our guys really bowed up and was able to knock them back out of it. The guy forced a missed field goal, and to keep no points on the board in that situation was something that was big.

There was still plays on both sides, offensively, defensively, special teams, where we can grow and we can get better. They were able to move down on a drive and be able to finish with a field goal, but it's also there's things that if we will continue to play the level that we're capable of, I think the sky's the limit to what we can accomplish.

They've done a great job the last two weeks doing something that hasn't been done in a long time here, and I think that we'll continue to take those steps, and I'm excited for what's ahead.

Q. I guess when you look at these last couple games and just maintaining that level of confidence and intensity and focus, is it just a matter of doing what you're doing, or do they have to take it to an even higher level?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, it still comes down to what we're here to do, and that's to get better. That is our objective. Our opponent this week, it's a team that has some very talented players. They do a good job schematically. It's not about them. Just like I said last week, it wasn't about their team. It truly has to be about us. We've got to embrace each day to -- being able to sell out on our improvement, on our growth, on going out there and playing a complete game to what our best is. You can look the last couple -- I'm very happy with what we've done and what we've shown and the progression we're seeing, the mentality that we have. But we have not played -- we still have not put together in every aspect where we're -- to what we're capable of.

We've been dominant the last three games, but we can be better. That is the push. That's one of the things I appreciate with this team is that they understand the process of growth. Every one of these players, not only with what they do here at Florida State but they all aspire to get to the next level. They all want to do more. We've

got to take advantage of that with every opportunity we step on that field. We've got to make sure that we're pushing them, that we're holding them to that standard of their best in all things that we do.

You're seeing some of the benefits of it, but there's still that constant push of regardless of who we play, that's what needs to show up. If it ever goes away from that, well, that's when you put yourself in jeopardy.

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