

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate everybody being here. Obviously exciting day for Florida State football being able to have a couple of key additions to our team here moving forward. Just to start off, want to thank all of our coaches for the work that they put in over the last couple months in getting out and being in the high schools and obviously developing the relationships, identifying these young men that we absolutely believe are the right fit for our program and are going to help build the foundation for not only where we were, but for where we're going.

I think it's been an exceptional group with the combination of the two sign dates. There are still a couple of potential additions as we're moving forward, but I think we've been able to identify and fill a lot of needs per position. But really, just an incredible group of young men. From the coaches to the coaches' families, you know, it's always a trying time when you're on the road and all the work that goes into it. But to the wives and the families, just very grateful for all that has gone into it.

To our administration, to our recruiting department, to everybody on campus, from the professors, academic support, athletic training, strength and conditioning, the amount of work that goes into showcasing all of the great things here at Florida State University, we're forever grateful for the time that they put into painting the picture of what the experience being a Seminole is going to be to these young men and their families. It's critical for our success, and we're grateful for all the work and time that goes into it.

Today is a great day. We're excited about the addition of young men that have come into the program, that we were able to identify early through the process and evaluate and really focus in on key positions and key needs.

We were able to bring a couple running backs into this class that we thought with the departure the Cam Akers going early to the National Football League was a position that we really wanted to address. To be able to get a junior college All-American in La'Damian Webb, of course that was a critical piece.

And then to bring a game-changing talent in Corey Wren out of the state of Louisiana, a guy that's one of the fastest football players in the country, we think is really a homerun hit for us at that position, to be coupled with Lawrance Toafili, who we were able to sign in the early signing day.

To be able to address some of the focus in the trenches. To be able to get Robert Scott out of Conway, Arkansas, that is a true left tackle prospect that we think history a potential that is limitless. I've been watching Robert since was a sophomore in high school. Obviously being in Conway, that was where my alma mater going into school, so a lot of great relationships there that were able to identify the right fit, and what Robert is going to bring into is our program we think is really special.

Today we were able to also address needs at the linebacker position, defensive backfield. Being able to get DJ Lundy to announce today to Florida State was a special moment for our program. One of the best linebackers in the state of Georgia, a young man that I think has the ability to be able to come in and compete early.

You look at very well rounded young man, not only with what he does on the football field, but also one of the best wrestlers in the state of Georgia. I think he has over 100 wrestling wins in his career, and just an incredible young man off the field; excited to be able to add him to the class.

You look at the defensive backfield and the addition of Sidney Williams here this morning, another young man that's had kind of one those interesting recruiting stories. Was one of the more sought-after athletes out of Alabama, coming from Mobile and Vigor High School. He had a couple setbacks. He had an injury that cut his senior year short. He's done a wonderful job in his rehabilitation. We were able to get him on campus and show him all that Tallahassee had to offer and Florida State. We were able to extend the offer to him last night, and he made his decision today to come be a part of the program.

We think that's a young man with a huge ceiling of what he can do, and really fits our program and brings a tremendous amount of versatility into our -- into the

defensive backfield.

You talk about the two young men have that joined the program out of the state of Tennessee. You got Darion Williamson, who wide receiver that brings tremendous versatility, big receiver, can run, great change of direction, explosive with the ball in his hands.

This is another young man that I've watched over the last few years up close and personal. You know, just a very dynamic playmaker. Brings great physicality to the position. Another student-athlete who had his senior year cut short due to injury, but has done a remarkable job in his rehabilitation and will be ready to go when he steps foot on campus here this summer, and I think is another tremendous player that's going to bring great value to the receiver position here.

Then I think maybe the guy that might be the steal of the class is Markeston Douglas. You know, 6'6", 260 pounds; first year ever playing football. Is an extraordinary talent. We have a big time need at the tight end position.

We knew that was something that we wanted to be able to address. He was the first target that we went after. This is a guy that has an unbelievable speed, athleticism; one of the smartest and probably quickest to adapt to playing the game of football that I maybe have ever seen.

I've had a relationship with his -- his head coach was actually one of my college teammates, and so we had some wonderful ties to the relationship with those two young men. I think Markeston and Darion have a chance to be special players here at Florida State, and we're obviously excited to be able to add them to the program.

There could be a couple other additions to our team here moving forward, but we're excited about the young men that we've been able to attract in both signing days. Definitely excited about the future of what this class has to offer. At.

This time, I'll open up to any questions.

Q. You just described the work and effort that the staff put in over the last month and a half to lay this all out. Did it feel different? Did it change at all from the first few days of getting ready for the early signing period?

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, I mean, those guys have been relentless. They have been relentless in their work, in building relationships, the film study, identifying the guys that are the right fit for what we're looking for.

You know, like I said, when we were able to put this staff

together, I believe it's one of the best staffs in all of college football. Every one of the coaches that are here are relationship based; they're led from the heart. That's what has given us the ability to achieve at such a high level.

The thing that probably stood out more than anything else is just the success rate of kids that have been on campus that signed with us today. It's incredible. I don't have the exact percentage of it, but it was phenomenal.

And we truly went after the right fit. There were some young men, and we had them on campus, we're always identifying all factors, and so it's always a constant evaluation of which young man is going to come in here and really be able to thrive through the accountability, the discipline, the passion to be successful in every aspect.

Because at the end of the day, this class is critical, because this will be the foundation of where we're going. You look at I think the eight young men already on campus that we had to identify in a very short period of time. The success they're already having not only academically, but socially and physically -- in our tour of duty drills, it's impressive to see what this class has to offer, and we're excited about this group.

Q. You mentioned the importance of adding running backs to this class, and now with what you guys added last period and transfers and now, one, how much better do you feel about that position moving forward? And two, the versatility of the group, if you can talk about the different skills those guys bring.

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, you know, I think that's probably the highlight of the group of young men that we were able to attract. I mean, you got guys that are experienced with the Jashaun Corbin and La'Damian Webb that have played college ball, one at another Division I institution, but although La'Damian coming as the All-American from the junior college ranks.

Then with just a great mix of the high school talent with the likes of Corey Wren, you look at Ja-Khi Douglas that's already on campus that brings great versatility, and then Lawrance Toafili who's a special talent as well.

To be able to bring five running backs into this year's class is a challenge, but I think when you look at how those skillsets all complement each other with great speed, great ball skills, physicality and just tremendous young men, I think we hit an absolute homerun with that group of talent.

Q. I think after a coaching change it's almost expected for some programs to have departures. I guess with the recent stretch you guys had in January, how did

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that affect how you prepare coming into National Signing Day knowing you had to replace some plays, most notably like tight end and running back?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, those are all things that are going to occur. I mean, at the end of the day, it's all about the fit. That's the thing that I've been able to see throughout my coaching career, is that this is not for everybody. The way we do things, I mean, this is going to be an all-inclusive program. It's going to be built off hard work, discipline, and it's going to come down to what we do each and every day, how we prepare.

We're not going to be a program that's going to talk about all the things we're going to accomplish years from now. It's all about the work we're willing to put in today trying to be the best version of ourselves and fulfilling the potential that we have.

So there will be guys that come and join the program with the absolute right intention of what's to come, but then there is going to be some guys that maybe choose to go do something else. We wish them all the best. We're excited about what we have here and the young men that we get to do it with.

Q. Coach, you mentioned Sidney Williams and Darion Williamson coming off injuries. How do you go about scouting a player that missed most of their senior you're due to an injury?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, really it was great, because both of those young men we had an extensive background with from my time in Memphis. I actually went to one of Darion's and Markeston's games this past season early in the year, and both those guys were extraordinarily talents.

Unfortunately with Darion having the injury, you know, when we brought him in, we were able to really evaluate where he is in his recovery, and both him and Sidney are both well advanced in their rehabilitation. So you do your research, and you got to spend time getting to know the doctors and obviously the procedures that were done.

But those are not of any concern whenever they're here on campus. With Coach Woodson, coming from in from Auburn, Sidney was a guy that they were high on through the recruiting process, so had built a great relationship. That really was a big time help in getting a lot of that background information.

Obviously being in Mobile it's not too far away, so we've got some great relationships there as well.

Q. Few of the guys you got in on late, how much of I

guess Florida State's brand helps in that, and how much is existing relationships that your staff had?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's a great combination of both. We have one of the greatest brands and most tradition-rich programs in all of college football. These kids, much like myself growing up, you see the brand and the expectation of excellence that we have as a program that they want to be a part of that.

They can get a sense of the staff that we have, the relationships that we've built, the attention to detail throughout the recruiting process, whether it's a couple weeks getting to know them, to obviously over a couple years of being able to build a relationship with a specific position coach or an understanding of who I am and what we're all about.

Here at the beginning, you talk about the vision of where we're going, but it's more about the journey of what it's going to take to get there. That's what these kids buy into. College football, it needs Florida State to be among the nation's elite, because that has become an expectations over the years and one of the reasons that I'm here and I'm excited about this group and the young men that we've been able to add. They want to be a part of that journey.

Nothing is given. Nothing is easy. I tell kids all the time, I probably have one of the worst recruiting speeches that can possibly be given, because I talk to them and I say, there are 129 other programs that can go to that will a heck of a lot easier than this one. This is going to be about work, trying to maximize the potential these kids have, and it's going to be an all-inclusive approach.

What they're doing on and off the field, in the classroom. So finding young men that want to be a part of that and do it with elite level talent, that's what I'm excited about with many of these young men that we've been able to add, especially even in just this second signing day, because I think they check all those boxes.

Q. Coach, couple questions about Corey Wren. First, because of that transcendent speed, is he a guy that you'll look seriously at kick and/or punt returns? Also, when you have a guy with that kind of elite-level speed, how do you typically like to use them on offense?

MIKE NORVELL: We like to use them in every way, as many different ways as we can get the ball in their hands. Try to get them into space. It's kind of funny, you talk about relationships. Well Corey was one of the first players that I offered at my previous institution at the running back spot, really that four back position that we use.

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Of you look to the guys like Tony Pollard with the Dallas Cowboys. Kenny Gainwell who was just a freshman All-American. Corey has a lot of that similar skillset where he can do it all. If he was just a player receiver he would be great. If he was put in a backfield, which he did at John Curtis High School, one of the greatest high school programs in the country, you see a young man that is disciplined, he's tough, he's explosive. You want to find a way to get the ball in his hands any way possible.

I think that's what 00 he brings that homerun hitting threat to our offense and obviously into the program.

Q. Coach, a lot of the guys that you brought in play multiple positions or play sports. Is that versatility something that you actively look for in a player?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, we talk about it all the time, and I think I mentioned it in my introductory press conference. This is going to be a program that's built for playmakers. I love seeing guys that play multiple sports, multiple positions. When your high school coaches see the value that you have being able to do a variety of things, that is what attracts me to them.

Because once we get here, the key is to be able to showcase all of their skills and talents. There are guys -- you take a look at DJ Lundy. To get him a part of this program was critical, and somebody that we were honestly late -- coming into the process late with, but he checks every box.

He's a guy that for his first three years in high school was almost exclusively a tailback, big, physical, powerful. You look at the success that he's had on the wrestling mat. I mean, then going to flip it over to what he did at linebacker this year leading his team to a state championship. Anybody I talk to in the state of Georgia said he is the best linebacker that they had seen.

His coaches thought best linebacker they had ever had. That's what I'm excited about. That's what I'm excited about being around, guys that are instinctual playmakers but have an unbelievable ceiling.

Q. You touched on going and getting Robert Scott from Conway. Was that unique for you or special at all to kind of maybe go back and be a part of a place that's so significant for you?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, you know, it's kind of funny, because it does bring the immediate connection, you know, to be able to have those relationships. And for people that have watched Robert grow up, Robert is an elite-level

talent. I believe that coming out of Conway, Arkansas Robert wasn't a young man that went and did all the camps and a lot of things. But I've watched him since very early in his career, and he was very sought after. He had made a decision early in the process and things had kind of changed where he was going to reevaluate his options.

Man, he fell in love with Florida State, and I've been in love with him for the last couple years watching him grow and develop. I think he's got a chance to be a special player. It's not just what you see on the field. It's a work ethic, the character that he has, the family which he comes from. All those things matter, because when he gets here, it's going to be about the right things. It's going to be about work, about development, showcasing the best of what he has not only on the field, but what he's able to accomplish off the field.

That's what we're looking for.

Q. Coach, couple of these guys that have track speed, how much involvement did the track program have in helping you land a guy like Corey Wren, and are you open to some of those guys running track? That would be 2021 obviously. You open to that concept?

MIKE NORVELL: You know, like I said, we're open to showcasing the best and the brightest of what our guys bring to Florida State. Corey is an elite-level track and field specialist, so I expect him to go out there and compete well for our track team if that's the direction he wants to go.

I think that's something that we're definitely going to do here moving forward. I like players that can compete at an elite level not only on the football field, but in any other sports program that can help our teams win Championships. That's what we're about.

I'll tell that you all of the other head coaches, I think I've talked to every one of them here at Florida State, and it is a special group. It's a special community that I get to be a part of. We're all here for each other. However we can assist each other in elevating all of our programs, that's what it's all about.

Q. Coach, obviously you talked about at the early signing period about filling holes and needs. Mentioned I think running back, defensive end, and offensive line. Seems like did pretty good there. Talk about your filling the needs and filling those holes in this class. And then secondly, seems to be a lot of excitement from the 2021 class. Just talk about the feelings you're getting from that class so far.

MIKE NORVELL: Well, identifying needs is a challenge



whenever you come in late in the process. To have I think it was nine days from the day I got hired to the first signing day, a lot of things we did was not only getting to know the prospects that we were going after, but also try to identify the needs within our own roster.

So that's a tough balance, but really when it came to any doubt in our minds, we went back down to the production of the player. You know, I'm always believing that you can get great talent and great potential, but I want guys that know how to play the game of football. I want guys that are passionate about being successful in every aspect.

So I think that it all worked out really well for us. We knew we wanted to get longer and to get more athletic and continue to have that sense of physicality on the offensive and defensive fronts. I think we were able to address that. When you look at the front seven, I think we signed three linebackers that you go watch their film and you feel their film. Physicality, speed, athleticism.

I'll tell you, Stephen Dix, who is here on campus, you stand near him when he's running you better watch out, because he only knows one speed. That's what you saw on film coming out of senior year, and that's what you get when he is here on campus. You go after the best player that fit what we're looking for, and I think that's helped address a lot of the needs.

It's like at the end, a guy like Sidney Williams, you know. There are some things that you're always trying to grow and get a sense of. But when you turn on the film, that guy is an exceptional football player. He has done it at every ever stage. You talk to any coach in the state of Alabama and they rave about the player that he is. And then you couple that with the type of young man, I mean, that's a homerun for us and we think a guy with an unbelievable ceiling.

Tying that to the future and our future recruiting, there is a tremendous amount of excitement about Florida State. Obviously the brand, the expectation, but as much as anything, the coaching staff. The group of men that I've been able to hire and the excitement, the detail, the passion, the relationships that they build, that's what is going to really help set this class apart, and it's also going to help build for what we're going to go in the future.

I'm excited about it. We've had a lot of young men that have already been on campus, and that's going to continue throughout the spring once we get out of this dead period, but we're looking forward to what the future holds.

Q. This is your second transition class as a head coach. Were there any lessons you learned at

Memphis taking over there mid-year, and what did you apply or did you apply anything from those lessons to this class?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's -- when you go back and you research how that transition went, it shows that you go after great young men that fit what you're looking to do. Because I believe in how we're going to develop talent. I believe how we are going to showcase talent.

But when you get young men that are the right fit and you know how they're going to utilize them and what you're looking for, then you are going to maximize the potential.

I think as you research what that looked like four years ago, I feel very similar about this class and what we're going to be able to do with the talent that we have and the opportunity that's in front of us.

I think we put together one heck of a football class for this year and what it's going to mean to the foundation of our program moving forward.

Q. Coach, as you spoke about earlier, you didn't have a lot of time after you were hired to jump into putting together this 2020 class. Looking to 2021, it will be your first full class. How does having that extra time change how you can prepare for and approach that class?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, for me it's all about relationship and knowing as much as I can about the young men that we're bringing into the program. I'll tell you that I think that even in the short period of time, this was a homerun hitting class. This is one that addressed needs. This was one that I think as it plays out over the years, I mean, the type of football players that these guys will become, it's going to be exceptional.

We also look at where a lot of these kids are coming from. It's spread out in some places that were built off the relationships. I'm excited about the relationships that are coming, and we have been working at very relentless pace in building those for this '21 class, the '22 class. We've had some of the top '23 players in the country here already on campus.

That's going to be something that's just -- that's who we are. We're about building relationships, the right fit, and then obviously showcasing what the opportunities for these young men when they get to Florida State.

Q. During the visits, the official visits, you're allowed to have current players interact with the recruits. Did



you learn anything from listening to the current players, what they were saying to the recruits?

MIKE NORVELL: You know, that's probably been my favorite part of this process. We try to allow that on official visits, allow as much of that interaction with the coaches away from our current players just so they can tell what the experience is going to be.

The message that has been echoed to the prospects and now our signees, it's one that I'm proud of. Our kids, they talk about the standard, the accountability, the passion to showcase the best of what they -- of who they are and what they're all about.

Our kids are excited about the future. I mean, when I took the job I didn't promise them many things, but I guaranteed them it would be one of the hardest things they've ever done in their life. We're holding true to that guarantee. They definitely are embracing the work and it's an exciting time.

Q. You talked about building relationships. With seven of the eight state champions this year being from South Florida, how important was it to get down there and build those relationships?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, absolutely, and it's something that anybody will talk about it. I can say any coach will talk about the importance. We try to let our actions speak louder than any words we say. We spent a lot of time in south Florida and throughout the state of Florida building those relationships, and that's going to be something that continues. It's not a one-hit wonder where you go down and try to make a splash. It's about developing those relationships that are going to last the long haul and continuing to get to know the coaches, understand the schools and the different dynamics that make up our great state.

It is one of the most talent-rich football states in the country and the reception has been incredible. We've been throughout the state. We've been throughout -- all over in South Florida, and the excitement for the future of Florida State football in those areas, it's incredible.

THE MODERATOR: Got time for a couple more, but first, TJ Davis.

MIKE NORVELL: Outstanding. That's a good one. We were waiting for that one. TJ Davis, defensive lineman from Metter High School in south Georgia. Extraordinary talent. This is a young man that you look at the growth of what he's been able to do in his high school career, you talk about the selflessness and the versatility of a player. His junior year he played middle linebacker and was a sideline

to sideline player. I think he's 6'4". I don't know what we have his exact size as, but he's close to 250, 260 pounds. This is a young man that I think the sky is the limit. He played inside linebacker as a junior in high school. Very explosive player. And then moved to the edge as a defensive end, outside linebacker this year.

Is an extraordinary player. Very physical. Fast, athletic. A great young man. It was his recruitment exploded here late in the process, and we were excited to be able to get him on campus this last weekend. It was a great fit for everybody involved. We're excited about what he's going to bring to our program. Definitely glad that you just provided that news.

Q. When you spoke to Kenny back in December after the early signing period, you discussed the importance of using senior film as part of the evaluation process. I guess how big of a piece of the puzzle is that for you guys and why is that important?

MIKE NORVELL: You see development and you get a better understanding of how kids are developing throughout the process. That's one of the crazy things with recruiting and how early things start now in the evaluation mode. But you have to continue to evaluate and see how kids develop, what they're doing, whether it's size, speed, athleticism.

And so as we go through this class, that is one of the benefits of coming in late and having to put some pieces in place, is that you get to really see every aspect of it. There are times you get an early commitment and things might go one way or the other, but we were able to see the total package with these kids.

That's what gives me such confidence about this class. Some kids might be rated higher than others because they developed later and maybe they didn't get the camp exposure and things that help really fuel some of those national ratings.

But there are guys on this signing group class that might not be the highest rated, but have a chance to be some of the super stars of this class. We're definitely excited about how they've developed throughout their careers.

Q. When you're evaluating the fit and whether or not a player is a good fit here, is it ever hard to resist the temptation to bend your rules or say, We can work on that when he gets here? Is that something you learned to kind of stick to the principles in that process?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, it depends. With that question there are a couple different ways that can go. We

know a certain skillset. We know the character of a young man. We know the passion a young man has to be successful. That doesn't mean this every kid we get or take is going to fit in some cookie cutter style approach. Every situation a unique.

For us, it's about getting an understanding of what drives the young man. What are they looking for? I can tell you that if they're singular approach is just to come out and play ball and that's it, and maybe not approach the focus of the physical development, the mental development, the relationships that go into it, you know, we're looking for the best and brightest in ever aspect.

I can tell you that that's one of the most challenging things. That's what makes it difficult coming into a situation late. That relationship has been over time, and so it's a critical part of our evaluation.

But I think we hit a homerun with these kids that we were able to sign today.