

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 19, 2022

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate you being here. Coming off the game there on Saturday, or Friday night, really proud of our team. I know I said it in the postgame, but getting a chance to go back and watch the film, first conference road game, it was a really good atmosphere that we had to go and compete in.

I thought our guys just throughout the entire course of the game just continued to respond in all situations. I was really pleased with the way that we had prepared. They had some dynamic players. I thought the quarterback played really well, made it challenging.

I thought they played their best offensive game. We were able to settle down defensively, and I thought in the second half, played at a very high level when we needed to to really elevate that. We were able to create takeaways. The three takeaways were huge. Four three-and-outs, those were well-timed just for what we needed throughout the course of the game.

I thought our offense, there was some ups and downs that showed up throughout, but you look at how Jordan Travis started the game. I think he completed his first 10, 11 passes. It was remarkable. He prepared well, came out and started really fast.

I liked the way we were able to throw the football. I thought our receivers probably played collectively the best game in a long time that we've had here.

You saw Johnny had a special performance, but guys, even Malik; I know Pokey had a couple plays that he was able to make. But when you watched them without the ball in their hands, their blocking on the perimeter was phenomenal, and just the physicality, the effort, all the things that they were able to do.

The running backs run hard. I thought there in the second half really were able to create some explosives, and we needed to be able to establish the run, which allowed more one-on-one coverage there on the outside, forcing some safeties to have to come in the box.

We talk to our team all the time about how you prepare. You never know when your number is going to be called, and you saw that there at the quarterback position, at the defensive end position, at offensive tackle. When guys went down, we had guys that stepped up and really played at a high level.

I know we talked about Tate, but that was a special performance for him. To come in there at the end of the expected quarter when things were -- there was a lot of adversity that he was thrown into, but wasn't great there for those first couple plays, got into halftime and really just took a deep breath and went out and played football.

It's something I've seen from him in practice. It's something I've seen from him in scrimmages, but to see him go and do that when his number was called in a critical situation -- the thing I love is that it wasn't all clean. He got hit. He had to step into throws. He did a great job and helped lead us back to victory there Friday night.

Really proud of our team. As we get into this week, it's great to get back home. It's been a month since we've been able to play here at Doak Campbell, and I know we're excited. Got a primetime kickoff. It should be a great crowd. We need it to be an electric atmosphere to create that home field advantage.

I know our guys are excited for the opportunity to go out and continue to clean up the mistakes that have been made, and I love that we're sitting here 3-0, and we still haven't played our best game. There's still a lot of growth, there's still a lot of things that we need to improve on, and even with last night's practice, our guys understand that, and there is a sense of urgency for improvement, and it's something that we absolutely need.

Obviously we've got this week ahead, and we've got to have a great week of preparation.

Q. When you talk about Tate, obviously the end of the first half wasn't the way you guys hoped. What were the conversations like at halftime, and how did he kind of gather his composure to come out and play like he

did in the second half?

MIKE NORVELL: It's just always about that next play. When you come into a game and there's -- especially in that situation, there had been -- momentum had been back and forth, and he gets thrown into the game. We had a missed assignment where we get immediate pressure on him, he tries to get the ball out, gets intentional grounding, and then on the interception gets just a slight tug there and just misses on a throw.

That's where in that moment, it wasn't how anybody draws it up, but you go into halftime, you take a deep breath. The energy in our locker room at halftime was awesome. There's a difference in our team. These guys, they believe. They know it's a mindset when things are not going as well as what you had hoped or if adversity shows up or things that -- the unexpected.

We were in there, it was coaches making adjustments, and you hear our players, you hear the talk, you hear the excitement, the sense of urgency to get back out. Everybody feeds off of that.

When I got a chance to talk to the team, talk to Tate, it was just go play the next play. All the things that we do, all the things of how we train, the situations that you have to work through, it's four times like that.

I thought the first drive of the third quarter was remarkable. The throw that he had there to Johnny, they blitzed off the edge. He made the right choice, the right decision, but he knew when he went to throw it, he knew he was about to get hit.

He stepped right into the throw, located it perfect, and that is the sigh. That's the relief is when you have that moment, you get up and then you're able to move forward, I just thought he did a great job.

I think one of the plays of the game was the 3rd down and 10 where he was able to escape out of the pocket and he ran for the 1st down. That was huge. Tate is one of the more athletic people we have on this football team, and people don't think of him as that, but just for him to utilize his legs, as well, and be able to escape and extend the drive, it was just good seeing him go out there and play.

Like I said after the game, I believed we could win with Tate, and I had a lot of confidence in that, whenever his number was to be called.

But to see him do that on the road in that atmosphere, it was big for him and big for his confidence, too.

Q. When Jordan went down, his reaction seemed to kind of lead on to something catastrophic had happened, grasping at his ankle. You took him to the medical tunnel for X-rays. 24 hours later he tweets out, great news, let's get it. What was your mindset in that instant when he went down, and where is he at now?

MIKE NORVELL: Anytime a player goes down on the field, I always go out to them. It's something that's important because there's so much investment for players and to be able to play this game. Regardless of what injury it is, it's just when they have to miss a play or miss a series or whatever that time that is, it's emotional.

Obviously we've got really tough guys, and I think they've shown their toughness, and whenever they're down and they can't get off the field, it's something that you hurt for them.

But for me, you make sure that everything was all right in the sense of there on the field, and then we go through our process. We have a process with every injury that we have of what we do, what we look at. Obviously we have incredible doctors and athletic training staff, so we just go through our procedures.

If guys are able to come back in, then they get back in. If they can't, then we continue to move on.

That's kind of just how we process it. Coming through this weekend, we were able to get further testing and evaluation with all those guys: Jordan, Jared, Rob, Malcolm. There was a lot of guys that went down at different times throughout the course of that game.

I felt very good about where a lot of those reports came back, and we'll continue to evaluate that as the week goes on. I know these guys, they put so much into it. So anytime you have to miss any amount of time, it just hurts. I hate it for them, but I know they attack their rehab, and we've seen that throughout the early part of the season with a lot of guys that have been able to get back and play even before maybe we thought they could.

These guys, they're fighters and definitely going to work.

Q. Two questions about Tate. The first one you mentioned talking about him earlier, his confidence. When a player has a performance like that and proves that they can do it, have you seen any shift in body language, just the way he's acting around the facility the last couple days? Secondly, the touchdown throw, the last one to Johnny, just how impressive was that?

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, I mean, you see a joy. Tate is not the most outwardly emotional person. It was fun to see him have some emotion on the field, especially like after the second touchdown.

But he's such a -- he's a great young man. Just always happy for him.

Yesterday he came back and he went to work. It was what you would expect.

You see the confidence emerge throughout the course of the game, and just -- because he played relaxed. He played confident. To make that throw, it was really a second read as it went through on that play, and just to see him be able to execute in that moment and throw just a perfect ball -- Johnny makes an incredible catch, gets his foot down. That's what you want from your players.

Tate, like I said, he prepared really well throughout the week, and that got to show up there when he got his opportunity Friday night.

But he should be more confident. I'm not saying that he's any different acting now, but I had confidence in him before that happened. It's good for the young man to get the experience, and I know that he's going to be able to build upon that as we move forward, yes.

Q. When you have a 3-0 start like this, what does that do for you guys on the recruiting trail, and what has been kind of your message to recruits after a start like this?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, I mean, it's exciting for everybody to get a chance to see the identity, the foundation, all the things -- the playmakers that we have within the program and how we're able to utilize them, so when it comes to recruiting, you always allow a vision and a plan for each individual, because how we recruit, it's per individual. It's very specific to the young men, finding the right fit for Florida State.

But when they're able to see themselves in what we're doing, when they're able to see themselves and to see the steps, the growth -- we've had two wins on the road in very good atmospheres of having to play talented teams. It's exciting for recruits to see that progress that we're making.

I told our team, we still haven't played our best game yet. We're still early in the process of where we're going and what I believe we're capable of, but recruits are excited about it. We're excited about being able to showcase the opportunity that is here at Florida State.

There's definitely a great buzz around the program and with the young men that we're recruiting, as well.

Q. Kicking can obviously be something that really takes mental fortitude, real toughness. How do you talk to a guy like Ryan who's been going through what he's been going through, and are you exploring or options or is he your kicker?

MIKE NORVELL: No, Ryan is our kicker. Obviously he missed a couple kicks on Friday that I have the utmost confidence that he was going to make, and unfortunately there's a technique thing here or there that he's going to get cleaned up.

Ryan has done a good job for us over the last couple years, especially there in those mid-range kicks. He's been very accurate for us.

Unfortunately it wasn't -- he missed a couple opportunities, but just like any other position, when you have a mistake, when you miss an opportunity, it's where do you go from that moment, how do you respond to that.

Ryan works as hard as anybody on this football team, and he knows what he has to do to get it right.

You look at the week prior, we had a couple issues on our kickoffs. He's new at being our kickoff specialist. He had put a couple out of bounds at the LSU game and I thought he was phenomenal at location, kickoffs, all the kickoffs in the game there on Friday night, but unfortunately the two missed field goals were things that did cost us in the moment.

That's part of this game. If you're going to be a kicker, a quarterback, a receiver, anybody that gets put in a spotlight, it's about how you respond when things don't go your way. Ryan is extremely mentally tough, and he's going to respond the right way, and excited for what the rest of the season is going to be for him.

Q. Every team uses the next-man-up mindset or talks about it. When do you know that a team really believes it? Did you know it at some point before the season, or was it as the season started?

MIKE NORVELL: No, that's where competition really -- I think it's a competition aspect of it. You never know when your number is going to be called. There's a few positions where there's just one guy that plays a majority of the reps, but there's other positions that you're going to see guys roll. You're going to see -- we try to prepare them to be put in different spots, and we want that competition. We want competition at every spot because you never know when

your role might change.

It's just like going from last year to this year. There's guys that played last year, but this year they're in more of a showcased role, and they have to perform at an elite level because so much of what we're doing is working through them.

That takes a step, and it's just like when somebody goes down, you have to be prepared. But how you prepare through practice, if you're willing to make that type of investment, if you're willing to truly see yourself even better than the role that you might be in, regardless of whether you're a starter or not, then I think that puts you in the best position to achieve success when it shows up on game day.

Our guys, they compete hard. They compete hard in everything that we do, in the off-season, there in practice, and when they get the opportunity on game day. I do think that helps them.

But it's about maximizing the opportunity, because everybody wants more. Every player wants more, whether it's more balls, more tackles, more playing time. Everybody wants more. But you've got to go prove it and earn it in all that you do, and I think our guys are doing that in a really good way.

Q. When Johnny Wilson entered the transfer portal I'm not sure how familiar you were with him, but what was the evaluation process like for him? Was it an immediate go for him or did you have to do a pretty thorough process?

MIKE NORVELL: I actually remember I was in Arkansas when I saw his name went in the portal.

Obviously I've got a lot of familiarity with that program. But when I saw his name go in, I actually immediately got on my computer and pulled up every play that he'd had in the year and a half that it was.

I think I was on the phone with him after I watched it. I was on the phone with him within 30 minutes, told him that there was no doubt this was going to be a great situation for him.

I just saw in his movements, his size, what he did, went back and watched all his high school tape. It was pretty quick for me.

To see him coming in and just growing and becoming the player that I believed and knew that he would be, it's exciting.

You get a sense of the young man. It's one thing to watch film, but I was -- after I did my background, and there was plenty of people I could contact about the character and the type of person he was, but when I talked to him and just the desire and the work ethic that he has to be great, that's what makes him remarkable.

I would encourage everybody -- you can watch however many catches he had for however many yards. Go watch him block. Like that is what speaks to the young man.

I thought he was dominant in his blocking. It's good to see somebody that does that.

I'll go ahead -- for Coach Dugans and the job he's doing with our receivers, it's incredible. I thought they played one of the best games that we've played here, and it wasn't just all with the ball in their hands. Mycah, you just think -- he throws his body around, and blocking and being able to -- it's an impressive group. Malik making big plays, Pokey. We've had a different guy each week - Kentron in week 1 - a different guy showing up each week and being able to play at a high level.

Just seeing the emergence of that group, it's because of that competition, but we've got the right guys.

Q. You talked about Jordan's injury, Jared got hurt, and you talked about a couple other players. What's Jared's status, and did you guys come out without any season-ending injuries?

MIKE NORVELL: Like I said earlier, we're excited about where we are right now. We'll evaluate it as it goes through the week.

Q. Darius obviously stepped in when Robert Scott went down. He might be the first guy up at a few of the spots or was going into that game. We've talked about that experience, and how did he evaluate stepping into that role?

MIKE NORVELL: He did good, and Darius has played so much football here. Coming off the injury, he missed -- he wasn't full until probably the last week of fall camp, but to center, guard, tackle, every position across the board, he can play.

I would say probably two weeks ago, you really -- he missed the LSU game, and we tried to push to get him up, but he just wasn't available to really go out there and play at the level -- coming off of Duquesne and having a little tweak there.

But coming off of that LSU game, really from that point on, you really seen a lot of growth in him and just the confidence building. You're feeling that strength, feeling that power. Darius has played good football for us.

To be able to have him in that position, to come in and be able to step in for Rob when he went down, but he can do it all. His versatility, he's got a bright future in front of him, and as this season progresses and as he continues to build that confidence, I think he's going to play at a very high level for us, and we need him to.

Just what he brings to this team is invaluable, and definitely proud of him for the work that he's putting in.

Q. I know that polls don't matter, especially in September, but would you like the players to receive some validation for a couple wins away from home against pretty good teams?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, it's where you get your validation from. Our players, they watch film here. They know. That's where I get it from. I know what we've had to do these first three games and the work they've put in and the way they've performed.

Ultimately I respect the crap out of what this team is doing. Like I say, we have not played our best game, and we've got a lot of areas we're going to continue to grow.

Ultimately if we continue to take those steps and we make the most of each opportunity, then all that other stuff will take care of itself. What I want is for our team to go play our best, and we've got to get better this week, and they know that.

Nobody signed up just to be 3-0, and yes, we're excited, we've done the things necessary, but still, the standard here is to be your best when you step on that field. We've had some mistakes that have shown up, and we've had some inconsistencies in areas from what that is, so this week is our time to go get it fixed.

We get an opportunity come Sunday or come Sunday night to play another conference game, play a very, very well-coached team in Boston College, that's tough, that's physical. They have some of the most dynamic playmakers in our league at receiver. This is going to be a great match-up and an opportunity for us to go out there and to show improvement and to go have an opportunity to play our best game.

That's what our guys are pushing for. If you rely on everything on the outside to give you validation, well, there's plenty of people that will say enough negative

things about you and enough people that will say enough positive things about you, it's all going to wash itself out. Let's just go be our best, and the rest will take care of itself.

Q. With this team, looking at how far they've come over the last year, a year ago it was 0-4, and today you're 3-0. At 0-4, did you even think that you guys would be able to do over the last 10 or 11 games what you guys have done?

MIKE NORVELL: Did I think this would happen?

Q. Yeah. Did you think it was even possible?

MIKE NORVELL: Hell yes. I believe in how we do things. Nobody signed up to want to be 0-4 last year. But by how we played and some of the things that we did and, coach and all of it, we all earned where we were.

There were some -- we played a top-ranked team really close. We had some close games. But what I appreciated is our guys, they never let up. They just continued to push, continued to work.

I've said here since I've been here, it is a process. It is a process to set the foundation. There had been so much change, so much inconsistency just in expectation. Well, there's no inconsistency in expectation here. That's something that we've worked hard to establish. Our guys have bought into that.

I look back to the Louisville game a year ago, halfway through the game, you're down 31-7. That was a pretty terrible place to be at in that moment.

But even how they finished that game, that was something I pointed to, that shows you what they have inside. They came back, continued to work, continued to speak victory over them, and they responded.

I'm still pissed about some of those opportunities between that point and now that we came up short because it wasn't consistent enough. That's what we're looking for. We haven't been consistent enough in our first three games, and we're 3-0, yay, but I want better. That's what we're pushing for, better. Ultimately it is about us going out there and playing to the level that I know we're capable of, and we have yet to do that.

We get an opportunity this week, but we've got to take the lessons, we've got to learn from the mistakes and we've got to go play. We've got to do it at a very high level of consistency and being able to showcase the best of what our players do, and if we do that, I feel confident in where we're going to continue to go. I'm excited about the future

of this program and where we're at but more importantly
where we're going.

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