

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 26, 2022

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Saturday night, really pleased going back and watching the film and seeing just positive strides. We challenged our guys last week with the way that they prepared, the mindset which they brought into the game. We wanted to go out and play a complete game.

We had not done that throughout the early part of the season, and I thought the guys embraced the challenge. We started off with a bang on the kickoff return, really, really big for our special teams unit, something that we've been kind of hammering away at.

Trey did a great job of trusting what he had in front of him, broke a couple tackles, some really key blocks that helped spring it, and I thought that was big.

Also had an 18-yard punt return, which is something that we needed to see. I thought Mycah did a nice job throughout the night fielding the balls that he could field, but really got off to a great start in that game.

A dominant first half. Going into halftime 31-0 was big. I thought the defense really played fast. It was good seeing -- even with some guys that were out in the game, just really seeing players step up. I thought guys like Josh Farmer played his best game; Jarrett Jackson really showed up; Patrick Payton, Derrick McLendon, Dennis Briggs, all those guys up front really did some nice things. I thought our linebackers played fast. Jammie Robinson really flashed when he was out there on the field.

But going back and watching the tape, I thought he played at a really high level there throughout the course of the game.

We knew the skills players that they had, a quarterback that was experienced and talented, but I thought all in all, our defense was really good throughout the course of the evening.

Offensively I thought -- I'm pleased with what we're doing, just the buy-in from the entire group. We were able to show good balance. Boston College did a good job of

condensing some things in the run game there early. Jordan was exceptional; played at a very high level.

Once again, another receiver really jumped out there, Darrion had a great first half. Ended up getting banged up, wasn't able to finish the game, but had almost 100 yards receiving there in the first half.

And just everybody making the most of their opportunities. Able to spring some runs. We had some explosive runs that showed up throughout the course of the game.

More than anything else, it was just the mindset that I was most pleased with and just the way the guys approached the week and how that was able to carry over on game day.

We're excited about the week that's ahead and another opportunity to be here at home, another opportunity to take another step with where we're trying to get to within our program.

The confidence of seeing the work that was invested last week in practice and how that applied out there on the field Saturday night, we need to continue to push there.

I thought last night we had great meetings. We had a great practice in the short practice that we had. But I like where our guys, where they are mentally, but we've got to continue to push in all other areas.

But we've got a great opponent that's coming in. They're coming off just an incredible football game. They came up a little bit short there at the end.

But this is a very talented team that we're going to play. They've got great experience. They've got guys that play extremely hard. They're very well-coached.

Excited for the opportunity that we have in front of us, and got to go get better this week.

Q. A lot of times receivers have a perception in football of being divas or whatever --

MIKE NORVELL: I was a receiver, just so you know.
(Laughter).

Q. But the team you coach, it seems like these guys are a little bit different. They seem to embrace the physicality, the dirty work, things like that. Is that something learned or is that something you guys identified when you brought some of these guys in?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, I mean, we want guys that are -- that truly aspire to be their best in all. Playing receiver, you never know how many opportunities you're going to get. But on every play you have an opportunity to make an impact. That's what I love in the way that our guys are approaching each game and each rep.

One of my favorite plays of the game was when Darrion's -- I know he gets mentioned a lot, but watch Johnny Wilson blocking 50 yards down the field. Pretty impressive. You see the mentality of guys. I thought Mycah had a really good game and was able to make some big catches and tough runs.

I mentioned Darrion earlier. Kentron with his first touchdown. There's a lot of things that go beyond just with ball in hand that are impactful to the game.

Our guys want to be successful. They care about each other. They care about the success that our running backs have. They care about the success of the offense. Everybody wants the ball. That's a given.

But when you're willing to make the investment and to do the dirty work, to allow the offense to be able to go, it does benefit them, because when you can run the football, when you can do those things, you're going to get tighter play to the line of scrimmage, which creates more one-on-one match-ups, which gives better opportunities to push the ball down the field.

I'm glad that our guys, they embrace that mindset. And like I said, we mentioned last week, I think Coach Dugans is doing a great job with them, and they show up when their number is called in the passing game, as well.

Q. Did Boston College defend Johnny the way you thought they might after the game against Louisville? Did you see any shift in coverage towards him that maybe you hadn't seen prior?

MIKE NORVELL: They had a little -- they played a little bit more cover two there early in certain things, but ultimately I don't know if it was necessarily just for Johnny or it was just a big-picture approach of variations of what they wanted to show.

But it's one of those things that everybody is going to try to take away something. The way things worked out, Cam was able to get a couple plays over the middle when the safety was playing a little bit wider. It's all got to play off of each other.

It was just kind of the way the flow of the game went. I don't know if it was specifically their plan, but as a quarterback and all skill guys, you never know when that's -- on any given call or with each opportunity of how somebody is going to try to defend you.

But you've got to take what they're giving you, and I thought Jordan did a great job with that and really helped kind of spark the offense.

Q. On Jordan, how impressed were you with how he pushed through last week to play? How did he feel on Sunday? Also, how good of a job is he doing keeping his eyes downfield and being a passer first?

MIKE NORVELL: He did a great job. I touched on it just after the game. It was impressive seeing him get to Wednesday. He was able to -- very, very limited there on Tuesday, but he was getting -- he got treatment so much from last weekend all the way up, and then when I saw him out there Wednesday moving around, even though he was still not full go, but I felt very confident where that would progress to.

To go in and play the way that he did, it just speaks volumes to the preparation that he's putting in.

I think that coming out of the game he felt great. Was able to practice yesterday. We'll continue to push him.

I think you saw some -- you get the adrenaline going and just some of those reactionary things, that one run that he had was remarkable.

He's very confident in what he sees. He had the early play coming out of the end zone where he scrambled and was able to put the ball over to Darrion, and then later on, I think it might have been that same drive where he scrambled and things -- everybody pushed back and stayed in coverage and he was able to get a 15, 16-yard run based off of it.

That's the balance. He has great athletic ability, but what he's able to do with his arm and trusting the rhythm, trusting his guys that are out on the perimeter, it's pretty special to see.

Q. You guys have talked about Darrion coming on for

a little while now. For him to get into the game and get that kind of production, is that big for him moving forward? And how does it feel -- will he be available this week?

MIKE NORVELL: I think each experience allows you to build confidence. We've all watched it in practice. Even though he's been limited in his availability, we've talked about that here earlier in the season, but to see him do that on game day and really in one half. I think he had five catches for almost 100 yards, and it was -- I think maybe played his eight to ten plays that he was actually in, but he's capitalizing on them. Those opportunities are going to continue to grow because you see the confidence that's building in him as a player.

Coming out of the weekend, we'll continue to see how he progresses throughout this week. I'm hopeful that he'll be able to be available, but even if not, there's a lot of things that he should be very confident in by what he's been able to do.

I think he's got a great future in front of him, and it's definitely exciting to see him making those plays.

Q. You had a couple players, Lovett and Verse, out again on Saturday. How big for someone like Patrick Payton and others to step up in a game like that where your defense probably played its most complete game?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's huge. We pride ourselves in the development of the depth that we have and that competitiveness to be able to play multiple guys. When you see guys really forced into bigger roles, for them seizing those opportunities, it's huge.

Like I said, Pat is -- he's got a world of talent. As he's getting out and getting more and more play, he's been very impactful, whether it was there in the Louisville game last week.

What I love is how even coming out of the game, I mean, he was pretty irritated that he missed out on finishing some sacks and some opportunities that he had.

Now it's, all right, why did that happen? What are the things we need to do to get better as we're pushing this week?

So you really feel that hunger, and it's not just him but it's collectively as a team. If you're getting opportunities, you're crossing that white line to go play and to make an impact, let's go be our best.

That's where you see a big jump from Josh Farmer even in the reps that he had against Louisville to what he did this past week; you saw him playing faster.

Same thing with J.J.; guys that are very talented but now pushed into playing larger roles. We need that type of continued growth. They're working very hard and they know that this team is counting on them and depending on them to play at a high level.

Q. You called it a complete game. Especially for the defense, what do you think that can do for your confidence? You talked about the talented and experienced Wake Forest offense they're about to go up against.

MIKE NORVELL: You see the preparation carrying over into the game. Some of the issues that showed up in the earlier weeks were communication, making sure guys trust in their fundamentals. You're taking what they saw and being able to apply that in a very quick and decisive manner.

This week we're going to play -- Wake is going to play as fast as anybody that we play. They're going to push the tempo. We're going to have to be on point with our communication. We're going to have to make sure we're playing with great fundamentals and with relentless pursuit. What they do is challenging. They're going to out a lot of guys in conflict and responsibility, but you've got to trust each other to do your job, and when you get a chance to make a play, we've got to go make the plays.

I think our defense is -- they're building in their confidence throughout the year, and we're seeing guys that are playing fast.

I thought it was the fastest that we've played, and we've seen those flash moments, but getting a guy like Azareye'h Thomas getting in and being able to have some of those -- I mean, you watch him on that reverse and you saw his closing speed. Those are good plays to have. You see guys trusting their eyes, and just the natural reactions that they're having.

We're going to continue to build on that, and like I said, have a great week of prep.

Q. With Hurricane Ian just kind of hanging out right now, how do you prepare this week? Is it business as normal until otherwise, and do you have alternate plans?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, absolutely. Michael Alford has been in conversation -- and the administration and the

university -- has been in conversations even with the ACC last night of having alternate plans ready.

It's something we talked to the team about last night, that we were going to make sure that nobody knows exactly what is going to occur as the week goes on, but our plan -- we are prepping for this game, and we will have plans in place if anything does occur that needs to alter that.

But right now that's all of our focus, and making sure that guys understand that we will always have a plan in place for them.

Then obviously the thoughts with everybody within the state, just of the potential of what's coming, and just thoughts and prayers with all that's coming towards the end of the week.

Q. Just to follow up, do you know when the decision would be made, when it has to be made?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, the administration and conference and everybody, they're controlling that. I don't have any control with it. I'm going to focus on just making sure our guys are prepared for tomorrow.

I trust our administration and all the planning and everybody that's tracking that situation.

Q. (Regarding Trey Benson.) You had mentioned after the game that getting treatments and going on the kickoff return was big for kind of sparking him and vice versa. What is that conversation like during the week, not just for special teams, but understanding that could have an implication for him throughout the course of the week on offense?

MIKE NORVELL: What do you mean with the offense?

Q. You mentioned sparking him specifically against a player, trying to get him into a rhythm early on. Is that a conversation you have as coaches?

MIKE NORVELL: Ultimately Trey is a great talent, and he has all the attributes of what you think would be a great returner. Forced misses tackles, runs hard, has great speed in the open field.

Also to be able to create those touches, as well. I'm excited about Sam McCall. I'm excited about what he's shown. He was really close the week before, but in this game wanted to provide that spark for Trey and really give him the opportunity.

I had mentioned a little bit about our running back situation

that has kind of adjusted some of those thoughts, but I thought the time was right, and to see Trey be able to hit that -- for him, I think the confidence has really grown a lot, just even that last part of the Louisville game, whenever he was able to get in there, make a couple guys miss, just the strength of his runs.

Each rep for him is building confidence in what he can do and where he can go. You see the toughness that he runs with. He's done a phenomenal job, and really excited about his continued growth.

Q. You got a few players get some ACC action in the fourth quarter that don't normally get to play. Did anyone stand out for you from that game?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I thought Daniel Lyons was somebody on the defensive front, I really like what I'm seeing. Omar Graham has really flashed. I mentioned Azareye'h. Azareye'h got in earlier in the game, and we wanted to force the action with him to really go out and work to make an impact.

There's a lot of guys that are growing and developing.

I think Rodney Hill, even there late in the game it was great to be able to get him in. You saw an explosive run that he was able to hit.

I think his growth of what he's doing -- one of my favorite things in the game was you go watch the last kickoff, and you see guys, like the mindset in how we cover. Our guys are really embracing that part of the game.

You've got Wyatt Rector has been phenomenal. Brennan Gant. You've got Brian Courtney got in there, flying down the field. Josh Burrell. I like seeing guys want and take ownership in those roles and responsibilities, and it was pretty impressive to see.

There were a lot of guys that were able to make an impact and try to maximize that time on the field, but there's still a lot of steps that they know that they have to take, and it's good to be able to put that on display.

Q. Kind of following up on that, do you see as guys get those reps -- because in the previous years Florida State hasn't had a lot of opportunities to get younger guys those at bats. Do you see as they're on the field from week to week just them get better and better the more they're out there, those young guys?

MIKE NORVELL: I think we've been playing a lot of younger guys in previous years. I know what you're saying. No, it's good. It's good when you can get guys in

that are in the depth -- whether they're older or younger, just those on-field experiences because now they get to know from what they're doing in practice, how they're applying it on the field.

As you see the growth, as you see the confidence, as you see sometimes even some of the plays that don't go well for them how they can bounce back from that. That's what's great for them.

As you see the season continues to progress, the opportunities are going to grow for them.

It really helps the coaches' confidence that you see them in the game, it's an ACC game in front of a sell-out crowd, those things that they get to go out and kind of prove where they are. It also inspires them for future opportunities that could present themselves that they have to be ready and they have to be better.

I think it definitely could open up some doors for guys. We're big in that regardless just in how we practice, trying to make sure those guys are always a part of that development throughout the season.

We'll kind of see where that goes.

Q. Do you have a hard and fast rule about when to go for it on 4th down? Is it a gut feel? And when you have a kicker that's maybe not kicking it great, I assume that adds to the calculus, too, of when you go for it and when you don't and what's the better percentage play?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it's twofold. So analytics, I always want to know what -- by percentages of what it could look like in certain situations, and I also -- I've got a sense of just strengths in the match-up. There's certain times personnel, where our guys are.

I was pleased with Ryan and obviously how we kicked off this game, and he did a good job on his field goal. We did have the extra point that was missed. But Ryan has done a lot of good things in his career. Last year he was 10 of 13 on his field goals, and this year he's had a couple that he's missed.

It's where do you go from there. It's not a talent issue. It's just continue to work on that consistency.

I've got a lot of confidence in Ryan, but when you're sitting there and you're looking at longer yardage field goals, it wouldn't necessarily matter if he's on point or not. I'm going to always play to both, and then it goes to the gut and kind of the decision that I want to make.

It worked out for us on a couple, and then a few of the fourth downs we weren't able to convert. Those things are just always a part of that game and the decision-making process.

Q. Did you get -- I know ACC meetings, have you had a chance to get to know Coach Clawson, and when you watch his teams, what are some things that come to mind?

MIKE NORVELL: I've actually gotten to know -- a few years ago in a bowl game at Memphis we played Wake Forest. That was the first time I got to be around Coach Clawson and some of the bowl events. A lot of respect for him. He's a phenomenal coach but a great man.

You see the character that he has that shows up within his football team. They are very -- they're on point in all aspects that you need to be on point to win games. They are opportunistic defensively. I think it's 34 of the last 36 games, they've created takeaways. They are going to be unbelievable effort, great technique, great fundamentals, playmakers.

When they get the opportunity to get the ball in the hands offensively, they're going to attack the defense. They're going to force your hand.

They've done an incredible job of evaluation. You could take all recruiting rankings -- recruiting comes down to evaluation. This is one of the most talented offenses that we are going to play this year. They are talented at receiver, talented at offensive line, they've got three ACC performers, running backs. This is a very, very talented team because they evaluate really well.

Ultimately that's what it comes down to.

I think when you see just the details that he approaches all things, his team is going to be prepared for each situation. We've got to go out and we've got to play at a very high level this week.

It's still not about Wake Forest. It's all about us. If we can focus on the things that we can control, we know it's going to be a great challenge, and we're excited for the opportunity to compete.

But I've got all the respect in the world for Coach Clawson and how he runs his program and the things, the characteristics that his football teams put on display.

Q. After the game you had mentioned you felt a sense of energy around town, around campus, throughout



the week building up into the game. I imagine that will continue as you guys keep winning. I ask this knowing that it's still early in the season, but for you personally to kind of feel the buzz and to feel that kind of growth around the program, what has that been like for you early on here?

MIKE NORVELL: It's great. We're here at Florida State, and there is a great expectation and a great sense of pride in our program. I mean, I love that.

It is about the people. I'm so blessed for the opportunity to be the head coach here. Good Lord brought me here for a reason, and that's what -- every day we're trying to represent the program the way the program needs to be represented.

I think when the community, when the fan base, they see a team that's fun to cheer for, they see a team that's working extremely hard to do things the right way and they care about each other, they care about what they represent -- I said that maybe in my opening press conference before camp is that these guys care about Florida State. They care about each other.

That matters. I think that shows up when they're out there on the field.

In a day and age where everything seems to focus on the individual, whether it's social media, whether it's all the things going on, when you have a group that is willing to invest for something other than just themselves, there should be a sense of pride. That is what has always made this program what it is.

That's what we've worked really hard to kind of get that back, so yes, when you have a sold-out crowd, when you have people that are in town, when you -- you feel the pride regardless of what the record is because people care about being a Florida State Seminole.

But when they're seeing those positive steps and there's a team that is representing you how you want to be represented, then yeah, it's definitely a great joy.

Like I said, I'm just blessed for the opportunity I get to be able to lead it and to help guide it. We've got to go continue to get better because this is a special place.

Q. Mike, where is Duke Cooper now compared to maybe a month ago, and what will be the key for him and just the secondary overall against guys like A.T. berry?

MIKE NORVELL: Going into the game, he's probably as

good as he's been since we started towards the beginning of the camp. It's unfortunate that he had the injury and it took -- he battled his butt off to try to be able to play there in the LSU game, and it really -- to see him out there on Saturday night, he was back to what we expect him to look like and to play.

So we expect him to be 100 percent moving forward. That really helps us. We're seeing really positive steps from all the guys. I think Renardo Green has played at an extremely high level. You've got Jarrian Jones is playing his best ball since he's been here. He's taken some positive strides. You had Greedy Vance who had an interception in the game. Kevin Knowles. You're seeing the corners, the nickel backs. Those guys are doing a great job, and they know the challenge that's ahead.

Our safeties, like I mentioned earlier, I think Jammie has probably played his best game of the year and you just felt his presence. I don't know what all the stat lines said about it, but I know what I saw. I think when you have those guys that are taking those positive steps, you face a team like this, everybody is going to get challenged. Everybody is going to have one-on-one opportunities. Just being able to trust your fundamentals, trust your techniques and go rise to the occasion, it's going to be a critical factor in this week's game, and I'm excited to see our guys compete.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

