

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning. Everybody. Appreciate you being here. Kind of wrapping up Saturday, you go back and watch the film, really proud of our guys for the way that they were able to come into the game and really dominate throughout the course of that game.

I know there was some moments where we didn't play as clean of football as we wanted to. There were some mistakes that we made offensively there early, but I thought they did a great job in their response throughout the course of the game to be as explosive and productive as we were able to be throughout the four quarters. I was definitely impressed with the work those guys put in that.

That was a good defense we played against, one that hadn't given up that type of output to just a couple teams throughout the season. I thought our guys played well. I thought they did a really nice job. They prepared well through the bye week, and it showed up.

We do have to clean up some of the mistakes that hurt you and some of the things we had to overcome, but all in all, I thought it was a good performance.

Defensively I thought it was absolutely dominant in the first half. Guys played hard, played very explosive, numerous TFLs, really attacked that offense and made the quarterback uncomfortable throughout. Really able to stop the run game there in the second half. They had the surprise outside coming out of halftime. They were able to make a couple plays, and we had a bust there that left a guy free.

There was a few of those things that showed up that we have to clean up, and unfortunately it's some of those situations where you have a mistake out there on the field, and guys get to the sideline and they can tell you what should have happened immediately. It's just a frustrating thing because they know what to do, but in the moment just for whatever reason, a lack of focus or just a momentary hesitation, those are things that we need to continue to grow in.

But I thought our defense played really well throughout. They had the one touchdown drive, and then obviously the last drive of the game, we were able to get a lot of young players in. Still need to be able to finish and keep them out of the end zone there on that last drive, but I thought our defense did a really good job. They were good on 3rd downs, good throughout the course of the game.

Like I said, there's about four or five plays that we'd like to have back, but I thought it was definitely a dominating performance.

We still missed opportunities, had a couple opportunities at creating takeaways, and we've got to improve on that, as well.

Special teams, I thought we were able to -- you had the surprise outside, which was something we had talked to our guys about throughout the course of the week, just when it showed up in the moment, there was a hesitation. We had a young player that you knew -- was confident in what was coming but had a hesitation in it and allowed them to recover the ball.

But I thought our coverage units did a really nice job. Actually it was just our kickoff coverage. They put good speed on the field, didn't have any opportunities there.

I thought it was great to see our punt return unit. There was some short kicks that we didn't have an opportunity to be able to return, but then we did have -- I think it was another 20-plus-yard return that showed up, and I think that's however many straight weeks that we've been able to have an explosive return within our punt return unit.

That was a big point of emphasis for us in the off-season, and I think you see that belief in our guys and what we're doing in regards to that.

But I thought all in all, it was a really good game. Guys came out of the game, and what I appreciated, I told them this yesterday, everybody is excited when you win, especially when you go -- it was a stretch there, we had some really close games and tough outcomes here in the middle part of the season, so when you win there's a great

celebration for that. It was great to be in the locker room with them and to be able to feel that, but also understanding there were still plays that we were not our best.

That is the standard. That is what we're pushing towards. That's what we came back to work yesterday, and I thought our guys had a great mindset and attitude.

It's Miami week. We know the opportunity that's ahead, and we're excited for what this game means to our program.

This is a great week for our team, for our fan base, for the rivalry that is I think one of the greatest in all of college football. It's my first opportunity to be able to go down there and play this game on the road. Unfortunately a few years ago due to COVID I wasn't able to make the trip. Probably one of the hardest experiences I've ever had in my life.

But we're excited about what this week means and just the opportunity and really looking forward to the week of preparation.

Q. You guys have obviously had a lot of success on offense this season, particularly Saturday but all season, both with the explosive plays but also sustained drives. When you look at the offense, do you still feel like there's still a long way to go, or are you guys getting close to where you need to be?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I like what we've shown. There's been -- we talked about it a little bit, even last week, just throughout -- when you go back and you look at the things that have hurt us in times and moments, it's really been a lot of self-inflicted issues.

I think you've seen growth from our offense. I think you've seen the explosiveness. I think you see guys that have a lot of confidence in what we're doing. We've been very balanced, which I love, and being able to establish the run, the explosive plays that have shown up in the passing game.

But it's those self-inflicted issues that you can't have, whether it's a dropped pass, whether it's a penalty, turning the ball over, putting the ball on the ground. Those things, that's what's hurt us in the times where we've not been successful.

But I think we're really close. We're playing at a high level, one of the most explosive offenses in the country, and that's something you have to earn each week.

We knew last week, you looked at Georgia Tech team, it was good, and they had a lot of good players, especially when you get out there on game day. You see their size, their speed. I thought our guys embraced the challenge for that, and they showed up and they played at a high level.

We had our mistakes and things that did cost us even in that game, but I really loved our response and how though guys -- you were able to go out there and compete and battle.

We know this week ahead we've got another great challenge, a defense that's been playing really well, and coming off a really dominant performance there on their end.

I know we're going to have to work at a high level, but I really like our guys. I like the way our guys have developed and grown and how they're pushing to kind of set themselves apart to what we believe we're capable of.

Q. There were a couple of pretty clear hustle plays from Jordan in the game, the fumble return and him going across the field and also getting out blocking on an option concept. I'm not sure if you guys necessarily want that, but for that guy to be at that position and making those plays, how important is that?

MIKE NORVELL: It was really good. Yesterday there was one play that I showed to our team, and it was the fumble, and as disappointing of a play as it was, it was a play that you can sit there and you can show identity, heart, the hustle, and Jordan, it was on the far sideline at the 2-yard line, and to sprint and to be able to get in on that tackle, to help give one more play -- and he's not the only one, which on TV you probably only see a smaller part of it, but when you watch all of the guys that are down in the end zone, that are turning and sprinting and running, that might be 40, 50 yards away from it, but the effort of how they pursued the ball, I respect that, and I told the team that.

The defense was put in an extremely tough situation there early in the game and they were able to hold Georgia Tech to a field goal, and I respected that because you didn't have guys on the sideline complaining or getting frustrated with each other. Nobody liked the fact that that happened, but I respect how they responded in the moment. They forced Georgia Tech to have to play the next snap, and then our defense did their part of it to be able to hold them to a field goal.

That was a big point of emphasis for us, and we try to point those points out throughout the course of the season, whether it's us or it's another team and another opponent

that those effort plays, where they do show up. Those are those identity moments, and I think that our team, and yes, our quarterback, showed that identity in that situation.

Q. When it comes to evaluating Miami, two weeks ago they had eight turnovers, last week no touchdowns and four overtimes. How do you evaluate them? Do you watch past games or how do you evaluate them to get ready for that one?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, you look at the total package of their season. Obviously they've had -- the quarterback was hurt and that's been something -- anytime a quarterback goes down, it's a challenge. But this is a very talented football team, with Van Dyke, we're expecting him to play this week. We're going to go through -- obviously playing for Garcia, and for him, two guys that are very talented. Van Dyke is one of the top quarterbacks in the country, and they've got weapons.

This is a team, this is a talented football team we're playing. They were the preseason pick to win the division, and it's not -- that wasn't just because of hope for it. This is a team that we know the ability that they have. It can be a very explosive offense, just like anybody, if there's mistakes that show up it's going to hurt them.

In the Duke game, it was tough. You turn the ball over eight times, it's hard to have much success. They're going to address that. They're going to continue to go.

I know yesterday or I guess it was Saturday's game, new starting quarterback, some things you work through with that. But they found a way to win the game. To do that on the road, you respect that.

Ultimately we've got to continue to focus on us. We watch everything from this year, you study the personnel from last year, guys that have come from different places, just to try to get as much information as possible.

But this is a talented team.

Q. Did Johnny apologize to that DB for that vicious offensive pass interference? What do you say in the moment --

MIKE NORVELL: You don't want to know what I said in the moment. (Laughter.)

Q. Talking about response, that play in particular, it was what it was. We all saw it. The very next play to go hit and score a touchdown, is that what you're talking about when you're trying to see growth and what this team can be?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely, and it's not just that. It's also who it was, too. Because the previous drive, Lawrence, uncharacteristic of him, he put the ball on the ground. We had a turnover the previous drive. We get the ball, go, obviously the big play with Cam, we get called for the penalty. No matter what your feelings are about it, yes, I had my emotional moment, but you still go to the next play, and for our football team, all the things you step back (indiscernible) they played the next play, and they were able to go out and execute and got the ball into the end zone on the very next play. That is response, and it's response in the moment. It's also a response for LT and from the negative play to go out there and make an exceptional play, that shows growth. It shows that you're not going to let one play negatively affect you on the next play.

That's what we have to continue to be consistent in.

I think that also showed up throughout the course of -- you look early in the first quarter, we had talked about, we talked about it within media, within our team of like, you get to this point of the season and there's some teams that -- a bad play will continue to stack upon itself because of little fundamental issues. That's why you have to stay so tuned in to those little things as the season progresses of what's important, what do you want to be able to execute and how you're growing throughout the season.

When one bad thing happens, you see those stacking up in a lot of college football games here late in the season.

For us, we didn't start the game we wanted to, and we had a couple drops early. We got down to the 1-yard line, we fumble. That was a terrible start. But our guys kept playing. They kept believing, and they ended up having one of the best offensive performances, overcoming that, because we didn't hang our head in that moment because we made the corrections that were necessary.

I think we are seeing growth, and we've got to continue to see that growth as we progress along.

Q. Watching the game, going back and watching the game, really impressed by the linebacker play. I know you thought what they could be coming into the year. What's it been like watching them and what's that a testament to and how those guys feed off each other?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's a really talented group. It's a group that they love playing the game. You're seeing great growth, great leadership, Kalen, Tatum, DJ, Brendan Gant got in there. I was really pleased seeing Amari Gainer get back on the field and the way he flew around there late



because he missed I guess it was four or five weeks of the season with an injury. But to see him go out there and play with the speed and physicality that he did, excited about getting him back more into the fold of what we're doing defensively.

We tried to even move him around. He played a little bit of defensive end, rush end, and I liked that. But I like that group. I like how they're taking to the coaching. I think we're doing a good job schematically in what we're trying to do to be able to free them up, and then obviously get the defensive front does -- when they're doing their job, it allows those guys to be able to really run around. Fabian, it was great having him back. You felt his presence on the felt. You saw what he brings. A lot of those guys up front were maybe on a limited snap count, but they were very productive in what they did and helped open up some things for the linebackers.

Q. How did Fabian do coming out of the game as far as the foot? And Treshaun Ward and Jazston Turnetine left the game...

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, Fabian came out really well. To be honest, there in the game he actually had his other foot -- had a big toe got stepped on, so he wasn't real comfortable. But it wasn't anything to do with his injury that he was coming off of.

It's good, and I saw him yesterday, and he was walking a little gingerly on the other toe. But we kind of just smiled like all right, let's go get it.

But he's going to be great going into this week.

Just with Jaz and coming out of the game, we'll see how he progresses through the week, and then Treshaun, he was more active yesterday. We're expecting him to hopefully be available. He did a lot there on Friday, just wasn't ready to play in the game. We'll see where he goes throughout the course of the week and any other guys that -- we didn't really have anything big picture. But we'll see how it all goes through this week.

Q. You spoke earlier on Miami's defense and said they were dominant against Virginia. What do they do so well and who are a couple guys that kind of get your eye?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I think for them it starts up front. They've got a big, strong, athletic defensive front. They play a good number of guys. Seven or eight defensive linemen, they roll them good, they keep them fresh. Those guys are very active. They create the negative play. Definitely going to be a challenge for us up front.

You look at them in the defensive backfield, they've got great length, guys that have really good experience and do a good job of getting hands on receivers, trying to disrupt timing.

They're aggressive in how they play, and then their linebackers have been active this year, and those guys can run around. Obviously they've got some newcomers that have joined the program on the defensive side of the ball that have made a really good impact, and this is -- like I said, it's a talented defense that has pretty good depth.

Q. What did you see the win over Miami do for you guys last year as a program, and how have you guys kind of grown since that moment do you think?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, that was a big game for us a year ago. Going into the game, we had had a challenging start and really were kind of coming into our own, but we needed that type of game. We had just come off of a challenging stretch, but we had seen some good. We had seen some bad.

That rivalry game and just the emotion and all the things that went into it, to see our guys overcome, in a game that had swings in it. We started really well. Miami made their comeback and took the lead and then our guys were able to respond there at the end.

It was just big for this football team. I think it was a confidence builder. It had been a few challenging years before, and we know the importance of this game. Everybody in this program, this is a game you'll remember the rest of your life.

The preparation of it didn't begin just yesterday. This is a year-long preparation for this game. There's only two teams that I talk about in our very first team meeting, and this is one of them, and understanding the things that are necessary to be ready when this week gets here, what you need to do from day one to now, and it's that continued growth, that continued development, and now this week we've got to have our best week and our preparation and all things being ready to go on the road and go play our best game.

Q. In that same vein, I know the game is ultimately between the two teams that are on the field, but their coach is on the first year of a rebuild, he's trying to prove to his fan base and constituents that he's the right man and you're also in year three of the rebuild. There's so much riding on this game. How do you process the opportunity and just what this game can mean for you, and it's also a recruiting heads up and

you're trying to convince kids off the field, as well?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it's a big game, and it's a big game because it's this game. Every year, it doesn't matter what's happened up until that point. This is a game that you want to win. You want to go out and you want to play your best.

I think that there's a lot of excitement around our program for what we've shown and the path of where we're going. That's something that -- it doesn't all point to one game, but you've got to be able to continue to show those steps.

I think our guys have done that. We're excited for the opportunity to compete in this one.

Really what they're doing and their process, that's for them. I care about what we're doing and the steps, what we're investing in all aspects to be the best we can be.

But I promise you, we're going to put everything we have into this to go be our best this week because it is a huge game not only for this team but for our fan base and for everything that this game deserves for the great rivalry that it is.

Q. You already brought it up, but two years ago when you guys went down there and you had to stay home, you talked about how tough that was and how difficult it was to just watch that game from afar. From where your program is now to where it was then in your second game as head coach, where do you feel like your program has grown the most?

MIKE NORVELL: In all ways. It's night and day different. We were at the beginning of trying to develop some sort of identity, some sort of standard. We were coming off -- it was a difficult time for our program just for all the change that we had seen, and then dealing with COVID, and each game, we were coming off of a difficult first loss, and then I don't get to make the trip. It all sucked. I don't know a better way to put it. It was awful.

To see -- going through those experiences, they still all were necessary experiences for us to grow. I think that our team -- I'm proud of this team. I told them last night, I love guys that are willing to believe in something and then willing to work to go and achieve, to get better.

This team, we touched on it, the identity. They care. They really care about each other. They really care about their performance. They really care about trying to get better and to represent this football program the way it deserves to be represented.

We've had to go through it, and it's not been an easy stretch, but it's been one that -- it's very gratifying to be able to stand in that locker room -- and not just the times where you get a chance to have a victory, but the time even in those challenging moments, but you know the heart, you know the character, you know the investment, you know just how much these guys are pouring into it and you see how close it is.

That's what has me so excited about our future. I know where we're going. But these are those moments where you get to take another step. We need to do that here again this week.

Q. I know when Jordan was first starting out as the starting quarterback, he had to learn how to not take those hits and maintain his body. The couple blocks he threw, is that something you talk to him about being wary of doing that, or you want to take that passion how he plays in all facets and you don't control him in that regard?

MIKE NORVELL: I want him to be smart. I appreciate effort. I appreciate physicality. I appreciate toughness that he puts on display. But there's great times and places for that as a quarterback that you need to be aware of, and Jordan got up and he had a big smile. I have a feeling what my facial expression was to him, but he smiled and gave me a thumbs up.

Jordan is a competitor and he's going to do the things necessary to help us achieve success. When you're sitting there and you're a running back or you're an offensive lineman or receiver and you see your quarterback go and throwing his body into a defender to help gain a couple yards, you respect that, too.

But definitely talked about it.

Q. With Jordan and the way he's played, obviously he's been one of the better quarterbacks in the country. I know you referred to him as one of the best players, clearly, in the country. He seems on the field to be a little more demonstrative, whether it's on the sidelines or having called the time out down there on that first red zone, and you said he was practicing angry. Has his personality changed in that regard? I know he always took it seriously, but have you seen any sign of --

MIKE NORVELL: I wouldn't say personality change, but he's always had that -- you feel it with him because he wants it so bad, and he works for it. He really does.

But I think that his ownership of the impact that he gets to

make is what's really kind of grown because he knows that -- he means so much to this team. He means so much to this team on and off the field. I think the second half of the Louisville game. He couldn't step on the field, but he made an impact in that game by the presence that he brought to the sideline and the passion that he has to want and to will this team to win.

He wants to play at the elite level, so yes, last week, I felt that he -- he was going to do it, and I think even you guys, there was guys that asked me last week, just watching practice, like man, he's coming out and he's -- it was impressive watching him practice. It wasn't a shock the way that he played Saturday.

But I love that urgency. He's practiced so well throughout this year, but it's like, dang, let's -- it's time to go. I love that passion that he showed. I guess angry was the best word that I could use to describe it because that's what you feel. He's pissed off to go be better, and that's a great, great quality to have in a leader. Guys fuel off of that.

I appreciate his work when it comes to that, and I don't think it's changed his personality, but I would say his ownership is just continuing to grow in it.

Q. This game, I know one game doesn't determine everything in recruiting, but how big is this game in recruiting because it's played down there, also? And then also, when you guys are looking at numbers in recruiting right now, the transfer portal has become such a big deal. Do you set a limit on how many high school guys you're going to take, or if they're players you want, you've got to take them and figure out the rest later?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, you've got to evaluate in the -- our roster and roster management is as -- it's as unique a time as there's ever been. You try to project what you think could happen but then you always have to respond to what the reality becomes.

You've got -- I've spent a lot of time with this and just the different -- part of the reason why we've expanded our personnel department, just to be able to explore all different options. Derek and I, we talk about this a lot, during the bye week we spend a great amount of time, how this could project for this year, next year, and even future classes. We're going to take the best fits for Florida State. There's times you've got to have real conversations in recruiting of guys that you recruit that it might start off in one way and then a number changes or something comes up and you've got to have real conversations.

But for us, we don't have just a target number saying we

know guys that can come in and help our program immediately, guys are going to be great for our program. They're going to come in from the high school ranks, and just being able to fill the needs that we have and that we could have.

If there's a right player that is in the transfer portal, if there's a right player that might have a little more experience or can come in and make that immediate impact, that still fits our locker room and what we're building, then obviously we're going to -- we will explore all those things as they come.

When it comes to this game, yes, it's huge. The state of Florida is the greatest state in the country when it comes to talent and quality players that we get to recruit, and we've done a great job, I think, this year in guys that we've been able to attract, and you look at a lot of the great players that are here currently on our roster that are making careers here. I'm excited about (indiscernible) but this is a big game because every kid in the state of Florida, this is one of those games that they're going to watch and they're going to make sure that whatever side they grow up cheering for, there's going to be -- it's bragging rights. It's something you're going to hear about for the next 365 days, and it's a big game for our program.

We want to go and we want to play our best. That's what we want to do. To be able to go do it on the road, it's an exciting week in preparation, but it is big for recruiting. It's big for our program and just continuing to take those steps.

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