

# Florida State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach Mike Norvell

### Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate you being here. I'll go ahead and kind of reflect back for the weekend. It was a great win. Anytime you have a big emotional game, rivalry game, on the road, to go down and play and dominate like we did, it was definitely big for the program. It was big for the young men that are in that room. It's something that we talk about, being a year-round process to go and play your best in those games and in that game.

To be able to learn a lot of lessons, I thought we put together a complete game. It was a game that we played 60 minutes. It wasn't perfect. We had mistakes that showed up throughout, but the response of our guys, the mindset, the physicality, the toughness, it was a great game to be a part of.

I thought you saw a team that really played well together. It was complementary football. All three phases did their part, and I think that was indicative of the final score. But was proud of our team.

We got back yesterday. We enjoyed that game. The trip home was a nice one, and I thought our guys came to work on Sunday with a real purpose to get better.

We watched the film, celebrated the good, encouraged the steps that were taken throughout the course of last week. We've got to continue to grow from that, and you see the potential. You see the opportunities that we have when we play to that level, and now we get a chance to go get better.

That was a major part of our focus as a staff. It's still just about us. This week we play our last ACC game on the road, challenging place to play against another talented football team. Syracuse has done a really good job throughout this year. They've dealt with a couple of injuries here these last few weeks and have had some close games where they come up just a little short.

But there's no question about it, this is a really good team that we're going to go play. Once again, it's not so much

about them, it's about what we do and us as a football team, continuing to take the proper steps for improvement. But I'm very proud of our team, and I thought it was a great game, and I'm looking forward to watching them prepare here this week.

**Q. You praised the team after the game for the way they kind of went into the game with passion but also control. What did you see from them after the game and then also Sunday when you guys came back?**

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, it was the same. We want to celebrate the good. Anybody can point to being passionate whenever you're trying to correct somebody, but it's also whenever you see a young man execute with the right fundamentals, the right technique, when they prepare the right way -- I told them after the game, I knew in pregame, when we came off the field in pregame and we were in that locker room, it was -- like you felt it. You knew there was a purpose.

It's not that we haven't done that before, but it was just like, man, this is -- these guys are ready. It was an emotional beginning when you get to that game, but all our guys, I thought their focus, their control. There were many opportunities that showed up in that game where we could have been reactive and reacted, (indiscernible) that showed up, and we were able to learn through that, as well. But I thought our guys, the discipline, the focus, I mean, it was impressive.

When they came back yesterday, I thought last night, our Sunday practice was -- there was an intensity in that Sunday practice, and it was an opportunity for us to grow, and I thought we took advantage of that.

I'm looking forward to watching this week of work. Our guys have -- you build confidence through work. You build it through experiences that you have. It's about applying those lessons.

I think our guys understand the importance of this step that's in front of us, and we've got to go work for it.

**Q. With that in mind, what would it mean to take that**

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**next step of sustaining that type of businesslike approach this week and for the remainder of the season?**

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, that's what we want our program to be. You can have great moments, and we've experienced great moments in years past, but it's about that steady and consistent growth and improvement. That is our objective. That's our daily focus is that we can go out and be our best and continue to get better.

I believe that our players, they've seen times where we've done that well and then they've seen times where we've maybe lost focus in a moment or were not able to sustain that through the course of a game or even in a season.

Now we have an opportunity in front of us to do that this week. I can't talk to you about two weeks from now or three weeks from now or any of that, but I know that we can control this week. That is what I want to see, and that's what this team needs we need to do, because this is a great challenge that's ahead on Saturday.

For us, it's about being our best when we get to that point, but we've got to capitalize on every day this week.

**Q. I know later in the game your moment with Deuce Spann I think got caught on the broadcast. How do you balance the emotion of that moment? Not reading lips, but watching it, you handled it pretty well of being both stern and him not wanting to be too hard on himself. I doubt you drew up a play for him, but he caught the pass on the first play the next series. How nice is that, that that works out like that?**

MIKE NORVELL: I love Deuce. He's going to be such a great player for us in the future. At the time, in the moment, he had an uncharacteristic response to something that happened to him. He got a 15-yard penalty, and as he was coming off the field, the reasoning was about somebody else. It was about something that happened. That's where my emotions -- I always want our players to be in control of themselves because as you go through life, you're going to experience things that people do to you or things or circumstances or situations, some things that are in your control, some things that are not. But in that moment I want them to be able to be in control of that response.

It wasn't the best response by Deuce. Ultimately this is an emotional game. I'm emotional. We all go through those things, and in that moment I wanted him to understand the importance of what that response was, and he got frustrated.

When that happens, it's about me helping to get him back to where he's in control. Part of it was just tell him to breathe. Told him to look me in the eyes and breathe, because when you're just -- when you get to that point, your mind can race to a million different places, and I just wanted him to get back, take a deep breath, be understanding of what just happened because that is something that did hurt the team in the moment, but ultimately get back to where it is and then be ready to go play the next play.

The fact that he had an opportunity to get the ball in his hands, there was thought. I was glad that he was able to go -- even throughout in the moment, after the game, he came up to me and he apologized for his action. I just told him I love him. I love that through that -- and I didn't know it was caught on tape, all of the things that were caught on tape, this, that, that was a moment that was critical, whether it was here on the practice field or whether it's out there on a grand stage.

Those moments that young men go through, they need it, because we've all been there. We've all had those emotional reactions that don't necessarily -- they don't speak to who we are at that time. It's just there's some circumstance or something comes up that forces an action that maybe we're not -- we don't necessarily want to have. It's just how can we grow in those times.

Like I said, Deuce came up to me afterwards and I told him, man, we can all get better from that. It's going to be -- he's got a great future in front of him, and that one just happened to be on that stage, but you guys see it in practice when we get those opportunities throughout. It's just when young men embrace that, they're going to be in control of all the things that are ahead.

That's my job and that's my responsibility, to help prove to them that they can be in control even in the moment emotional situations. It's all a part of that process of growth.

**Q. Is Trey Benson literally getting better every time he touches the ball? I know he didn't have a lot of experience before this year --**

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. I mean, it has been -- it's something that we've talked about as a staff. You go from early in the year to where he's still proving to himself what he can do. Almost the same answer to the last question, it takes those experiences. It helps with having -- I think Coach Johnson is doing a great job with that running back room and you see the growth that they're having, and each individual is at their own different place. For Trey it's just, listen, you can do this. I mean, you see all the talent. You

see all the ability. But when you have a major setback, a major injury, something that you have to overcome, some adversity, and then you've not done it in college, but what is it going to look like? What is his role? What is his experience going to be? Every time he touches the ball you see growth.

I thought he ran as violent as he's run there Saturday, and that was fun to watch. He did some great things.

Even first thing after the game, he comes to find me, oh, Coach, on this play I should have done -- you'll keep coming. You'll just continue to trust your process of growth. Learn from the experience.

But you're seeing him grow as a player. You're seeing him grow in his confidence, in all things. It's just that's what's fun to be able to be a part of and watch in these young men as they go through their careers and their experiences. But there's no question about it, he's getting better with every rep that he gets out there on the field.

**Q. Part of being a head coach in 2022 is social media and it's the transfer portal. You had a player today that announced that he was in the portal, then took it down. Maybe not specifically about that, if you can get into it if you want, but just about being a head coach and dealing with so many personalities and trying to keep so many kids engaged even if they're not getting playing time?**

MIKE NORVELL: You know, for us, we support all of our players. It is such a hard time to play college athletics. It's hard for everybody. It's hard for players, for coaches, because with social media, with all the attention, with all the different opportunities that you can have just with everything that's out there, I think it's important that you just continue to paint the picture. You continue to be supportive. You continue to invest in these young men throughout the journey so that they can see the steps.

Everybody wants more. One of the things I commended -- after the game and I said it to the team yesterday, I was so proud of our receiving group there Saturday night. I mean, we had a dominant win, and I don't know what -- I don't know how many catches it was that the receivers had. It was probably a handful.

But the impact that they had on the game, the encouragement, the emotions, all the things that they could control, they did, and we were extremely efficient throwing the football, had some great big plays, some impact opportunities.

But they all wanted the ball every single time the ball was

snapped.

But it's still about trusting the process of what we're doing and continuing to take steps of what we can do to make a positive impact.

We've got young freshmen. Some are playing, some are not playing at all, some want to play more. If they didn't have that in them, then they're not supposed to be here. They're not supposed to be at Florida State.

But with that, it's about just trusting the process of that growth, trusting the process of what they're doing, and then being able to control really in a very similar sense much what we're talking about with Deuce, being able to control the emotional reaction of man, this is not looking exactly like what I want it to be right now, but you don't need to do this or that, but you can just continue to trust the process of what you can control to get better and to put yourself closer to ultimately what you want it to be.

That's being a head coach in today's age of college athletics with roster management, with all the things that are going on, and it's challenging. But that's one of my favorite parts of it. I would have never thought that seven years ago before I was able to be in this position because being able to paint the picture, show the vision, see the growth, see the steps, and for guys that might not have -- whether it's a Trey Benson or a young player that we have, when they are able to take those steps and achieve even more than what they believe they could because of the experience that they have, that's what makes it such an incredible joy.

I mean, it's challenging, but I embrace that and try to help them through it. It is a new age in college athletics. We're here to go through that with these guys and help them in every way that we can.

**Q. Is it hard to control your emotions when it's done publicly? There's a lot of players that are unhappy.**

MIKE NORVELL: No, and it's like -- I'm no different than the players. There's plenty of things that are done that I want to have -- I want to have my own emotional reaction, and there's sometimes that I do and I don't control the reaction as well as I might want.

But I also understand, I'm working -- I get a great opportunity to work with 18- to 23-year-old kids, and they're young men, and they're obviously all growing, but I also put myself in their shoes. I was there. I had some emotional reactions to things, and thankfully I had people that -- coaches that helped support me and helped me grow and develop through that.

But we didn't have social media like it is now. We didn't have all the outside that pours in to creating doubt or to making -- creating unrest in things that you might have to go through.

Everybody will have a solution to what -- everybody will be able to point out a problem. Very few people have a solution to what needs to be done. That's where we get to come in.

That's what I try to keep on my mind is as a player is going through a challenge, whether it's on the field, off the field, there's a lot of things that that same emotion will show up that has nothing to do with playing football. It's still part of my responsibility to help these guys through that, and it's what I embrace about this job.

**Q. Four games in a row I believe of 200 yards rushing or more, and a part of the dominant performance against Miami felt like it was the offensive line carve out space for you guys. What is working about the ground game and the way the offensive line has played?**

MIKE NORVELL: I think those guys have done a great job throughout the course of the year. You see the work, you see the growth, the technique, the fundamentals. Even on Saturday, Jaz was available but really didn't practice much, so Darius got the start there at right tackle, did a great job in what he did.

You saw -- I thought Dillan Gibbons maybe played his best game since he's been here. I thought he was remarkable. You saw against a very challenging defensive line that's really talented, I thought our guys did a great job of creating space. That's part of our responsibility as a coaching staff, to help put them in a position to be successful, but they have to go out there and they have to execute. They've got to be able to adapt and adjust to the different looks that they might see.

I think Coach Atkins is doing a wonderful job with them, and I think our guys are building a great deal of confidence in what they can do.

They've been huge in our production on the ground game. I think our tight ends have really been a big part of that, as well. I thought Cam McDonald blocked his butt off the other night. You see Markeston, Preston Daniel. Those guys are really coming into their own, and then also with the receivers.

Everybody takes a big part of creating success in the run game.

I think everybody did their job when it came to that on Saturday, and we've got to continue that with another challenging team in rush defense this week.

But they're working really hard, and I'm really proud of that group.

**Q. Kind of zeroing in on you talked about Darius, I know the last time he got thrown in there it didn't go as well for him when he stepped in for Rob. How did you see him handle the last few weeks and refocus to handle the opportunity better?**

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it's been a challenging year for Darius, just coming off the spring, the injury where he wasn't available until really all the way up to through fall camp and really until the season started, he's had to battle and work in his rehab and all things.

Obviously he is a utility weapon of being able to play every position on the offensive line. He's really embraced that.

I thought that he went out and he competed at a high level. The amount of preparation that he has to put into a game is as much as any person up front. The center has to make so many calls and so many different things, but for him, he's got to know all those calls, and then basically everything that each player up front is doing. He got put in the starting lineup there at right tackle, and I thought he was prepared and went out and executed at a high level.

Just really proud of Darius and excited as he continues to get that strength and development back, just where this is going to take him not only now but for the future, as well.

**Q. The success you're having offensively this season is kind of lining in line with what you've experienced most of your career as a coach. How much of it is finally having all the necessary pieces and being able to execute the full breadth of your offense? How much of it is uniquely Jordan Travis and what he's doing for you?**

MIKE NORVELL: This is an offense that's built for playmakers. I've said that since I got here. It's great to see those guys, whether it's the offensive line up front, to the guys on the perimeter, to who we have in the backfield. Now, there's no secret that Jordan Travis is an incredible playmaker, and he has played at an exceptional level, and he's got great pieces around him.

Are allowing him to really showcase all that he can do.

It's an all-inclusive approach to what allows you to play



quality offense. That's what I love about it.

Each week is going to be a little bit different. You never know who's going to be called upon and who's going to be thrust into action to have to make a play, and you do those things, but our guys prepare at a high level, and I think you see that translate because we are balanced. It's not just -- we're not just doing one thing well. We're doing multiple things at a high level, and we've got to continue to grow from that.

**Q. Following up on that, just on Jordan, last week we talked about his added -- I guess not intensity of practice. You said sometimes he looked like he's out there pissed off a little bit. Do you see that tracking with other guys, that they see that and are almost attacking with an extra intensity as they want to finish the season the right way?**

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, I think collectively it's a team approach in how they're trying to do that.

I think defensively you feel that in the prep. I think we played really good defense this year. But there's been times or certain situations that in a game maybe didn't show up as well or weren't as consistent or we had a play or a handful of plays or maybe we didn't communicate or trust a fundamental like we could have.

You go back to the game on Saturday, and that was one of the top passing offenses in the country coming in, and we did a really good job of limiting them throughout the game.

I think they had one or two explosive plays that they were able to hit, but even on those, go watch the pursuit that showed up. One of my favorite things from the defense in the game, and I showed it Sunday night, was we found ourselves there at the 1-yard line, where our feet were in the end zone, and we did a great job of stopping a 1st-down run, then 2nd down was the play with Jamie where he was able to tackle the quarterback and create a negative, and then 3rd down provided an opportunity for the ball to be on the ground, and we were able to go create the takeaway.

Even though that was the worst drive that we faced all night in some of the things that we did, we still gave ourselves the opportunity to play one more. Even off the big run that they had coming off the goal line, it was -- go watch our guys pursue the ball on that one.

I talked about the previous week with Jordan and some of the guys chasing when we fumble the ball, but you go watch the guys turn and pursue whenever their running back got into the open field. We gave ourselves another

play.

Anytime that we can do that, you've got a chance for good things to happen, and I think our defense is preparing at a high level and really kind of bringing that same mentality. Everybody on this team wants to get better. We want to live up to what our potential is, whatever that might be. If we can go get better working to be our best, then that's going to show up, and that's what's showing up on that practice field in how they're preparing in media rooms and all the things we're asking them to do on and off the field.

**Q. I know you can't speak about individual recruits, but I would imagine you had some positive feedback to the performance, and what kind of things in terms of validating decisions guys have already made or maybe opening eyes of guys that haven't.**

MIKE NORVELL: No, it was a great opportunity for us. There were a lot of great recruits that were at that game and we had a lot of fun communication there with them afterward. They took notice. It's something that -- we know South Florida is important to us. The state of Florida is important to us as well as this region.

But when you get an opportunity to play on a stage like that in that game, it's big. Not only what you do on the field but how you do it, how you play. Young men that are evaluating options, they want to be able to see themselves in a program, and I think that's one of the things that's coming across really well is these kids can see it now. It's not a hope that this is going to happen. They can see it tangibly.

If I put myself in that situation, this is how I'm going to be coached. This is how I'm going to be taken care of. This is the opportunities I'm going to be provided.

Like I said earlier, sometimes there's a process that goes with that, but when young men can see that and continue to visualize that, with that experience is going to be, and then to be able to build the relationships, that's what makes things special.

We've seen a lot of growth with that in recruiting in South Florida and obviously throughout the state, and it was definitely a good night for us when it came to how we were able to play in front of them there live.

**Q. With Syracuse offensively, how different are they, whether it's Shrader or Del Rio, and defensively what is it they do the best?**

MIKE NORVELL: Well, you look at them offensively, and it's an offense that does have great weapons. Shrader is

just such a tough match-up in what he does. He's big, he's strong, he's fast as a runner. He's throwing the ball really efficiently and pushed the ball down the field well this year.

I know he's been banged up, missed the last week and a half. It's kind of limited him, not being available, but he can really do it all. We experienced that last year. He had a couple of explosive plays against us that -- he is a real challenge.

With Del Rio, the young quarterback coming in, I've been really impressed with what I've seen from him. He is athletic. He's fast. He's a very talented young man when it comes to what he can do also throwing the football.

They're going to have their plan of attack for whichever quarterback steps on the field. They've got one of the best running backs in the country there in the backfield, Gadsden, the tight end flex receiver. He is a match-up problem for everybody that they face. They've got big receivers that can run. They've got some talented guys on the offensive line.

This is a group that can really do some challenging things. I think they do a great job schematically.

We've got our work cut out for us on that end. Defensively it's one of the more unique defenses we've faced this year. It's a hybrid defense. To say it's a 3-3, yes, but they do it all. They're four-down, 3-3 stack, 3-4, bare, you pick it, they've done it. They don't have the most size up front on that defensive front, but it's one of the most athletic, active defensive fronts that you see. They're going to twist, blitz, pop. There's nothing you won't see this week.

I think -- I know they're one of the top defenses in the country this year. I think they're only giving up a little bit more than 300 yards a game. They've really done a wonderful job in their plan of attack but also utilizing the personnel.

It's going to be a heck of a match-up for us in just the chess match of what's to come to help put our guys in the best position to achieve success.

**Q. You mentioned the stop that Jamie had near the goal line. How impressive was that play, and what is he doing well during that stretch from a versatility standpoint?**

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, his versatility is what makes Jamie special. When he first got here he was our starting nickel. As Kevin Knowles emerged he was able to move back to the back end. You see him line up everywhere. He's done a remarkable job in coverage, as a blitzer, the

things he does in his run game fits. He played at a high level, and he's been playing at a high level throughout the course of this year.

Sometimes it hasn't always showed up in the stat line, but really like what I'm seeing from him and his continued growth. But that play, I texted him early there Sunday morning, and I told him, I go, that play and that highlight, that's going to be one that's going to be forever with the Florida State-Miami rivalry. When you go back and you see -- that's going to be one that shows up. He did his job, but when he got there he did it with the right intentions, too.

Just the work that he's putting in and the growth that he's having here and throughout the course of the season, I'm proud of him. He wants to be pushed, and he wants to continue to grow, to continue to showcase all that he can do in helping this football team win games. I'm really proud of some of the steps that he's taken.

**Q. After the game, Jared Verse said this is the most fun he's ever had playing football, and last week before the game Tatum Bethune said the same thing. Did you notice that before the season, in the off-season when you guys were working, the work you guys put in, and when you hear that, what does it tell you?**

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, I love it. This is some of the most fun I've ever had coaching the game of football. That's what it should be.

You know what, we work hard and we challenge guys and we push them. But these guys all aspire for more. They all have dreams. They all have goals. They all have aspirations. When you can take it from just an individual pursuit to something that you get to be a part of with others that are like-minded that want to do it together, that's where the fun comes in, because if it's just about you, then you're going to be the only person that's going to be able to gain in the experience.

But when you do it with others, then you have people that are encouraging you to continue to grow. You're getting to be an example for them. You're going to be able to be there to lift them up.

Even when times like -- you talk about Jared. He's had some challenge this year having to deal with his availability, whether it was an injury that he was overcoming. He's done such a great job through that, but he's also had people that supported him through that process, and that makes it fun when when you feel that and you know you're with like-minded individuals, that's what makes it special.

That's why I've said multiple times, I love coaching this team. It's not just, oh, well, hey, we won a game and now I love them. No, I love all the things that we've had to go through, the challenges. They appreciate the role and the expectation of what I try to put on them as they have to go through the good and the bad, and that's where you start developing trust.

I never ask a player to trust me. It's not something that I believe. I think that has to be earned. They've got to see that, and they've got to see it consistently. To know that they can trust the process of it, sometimes that takes time to be able to grow through.

You talk about new players that just came into this year, into the program this year, well, they're having more fun because there's probably a little bit different experience than anything they've been through, and that's what I want this program to stand for. Yes, all the dreams, all the goals, all the individual things that you want to accomplish, you're going to be able to accomplish them here at Florida State, but you're also going to be able to do it with people that are like-minded, that care about you and the experience that you have, on the field, off the field. It's what makes this a special place and a special opportunity.

These guys are being able to live that out.

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