

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Josh Chapman, all of our sports medicine department was remarkable. Our staff did remarkable. They did an amazing job continuing to enhance the resources that we're providing for our student-athletes. We're going to give them a great program to be able to attack. We're seeing great returns.

It all comes down to the work of the student-athletes, and the buy-in that they have. They've made a tremendous investment with their time, with their commitment. They've really tried to push the consistency of what we're doing. We've seen great strides within the program, and I think that this is a team that is building in their confidence and they're building in their confidence because of work, because of the continuity that we've had, and really that sense of urgency for improvement.

We've had 19 newcomers that joined the program there in January and really been pleased with them. I believe every one of them -- we talk a lot about finding the right fit. Having them here for the last couple months, it's just been a confirmation that we got the right guys. All of them are in different places. Some guys have transferred. They have a lot of experience. Some guys are just coming out of high school that are jumping in that are figuring things out as they go.

But very talented group. Not just what they do in the workouts, but who they are. Excited about them being a part of the program.

It's been a really good winter program. Excited about the size, speed, and athleticism that's been put on display and the work that's going on in the classroom. Our guys are challenging themselves. We continue to push that standard of their best, and they're embracing those challenges. It's only getting amplified as we move forward with all the things in our program.

Excited about spring practice starting on Monday. There's been a lot of competition. We'll get three practices in before spring break, which will be good because those will be -- the first two are just going to be in helmets, and

there's not going to be a whole lot of physical. I want to see guys have a great focus on their communication, on their alignments, on their first step.

In everything that we do, I want to see them finish. I want to see that effort show off and be put on display as we're going to establish the identity of this team and all that we can do here in spring practice.

Then when we come back from -- we'll have our first padded practice will be on Friday, which we will plan on mixing it up pretty good there. We'll have spring break, and then we'll come back and kind of get into that rhythm for spring ball as we move towards the spring showcase there April 15th.

It's going to be a great spring with a lot of competition. There will be a few guys that will be limited, a couple guys that will be out. I'll give that to you probably on Monday. I want to make sure before I put that out, to just talk to the student-athletes and make sure they're good with that being out there.

We have a couple of guys that will be out for spring and some guys that will be limited just as they progress, but you'll really like the depth that we've been able to create and establish and excited to see guys go out there and do it on the field.

With that, I'll take questions.

Q. There's so many guys on the team, and you see them every day. Are there moments where you can reflect on how far individual guys have come? Does that hit you at times? Or because you see them all the time, does it not?

MIKE NORVELL: It's funny that you bring that up because we talk about that as coaches. We're watching -- we go through, and every workout that we have, it's like our tour of duty workouts. We had 11 of them here this spring. Everything's charted. Everything -- whether it's the GPS tracking, the workloads, the reps. And those workouts, the amount of -- the number of reps, the amount of work that's going into it, it's extreme.



The workload that's from this year to our first year, I mean, it's night and day. But it's also funny when you sit back and you go and you watch some of these newcomers that come in that are going through it, it's jumping on them because they are doing basically a culmination of three years of work, where you've got guys that had the same experience three years ago. Now these guys are -- it's still new to them.

So it's kind of a funny process to watch, but guys that have grown leaps and bounds. We've talked about it as a staff. Going back and watching those first couple of workouts and just where it was and what it looked like, it kind of gives you a reminder of some of the newcomers that come in, just the steps that are ahead for them.

I know I mentioned yesterday, somebody asked me, I think about Trey Benson a year ago. You feel him in every movement he has. He is so explosive and so powerful, just the confidence he has. If you remember 12 months ago he's still trying to build running, just the steps ahead of what he could do. He went through the tour of duty, and it's completely night and day where it was.

Some of them on the offensive line, the guys that we have that are returning that have been with the program, and just the way that they control their bodies, it's remarkable.

So, yes, big picture, we do take notice of that. But it's really top down that you see that improvement. It's also a good reflection of just some of the newcomers that are joining the program. When they hit that wall, it's because it's extreme workload. So just helping kind of build them to where they're going because of the steps that others have been able to live out.

Q. Based on last year how you guys finished up, a lot of expectations coming into this next year. How do you handle the expectations for a program that hasn't had to face them the last three or four years?

MIKE NORVELL: We've had to face from within because the expectations are always to be our best. I try not to get caught up on the outside. I am ecstatic that people are talking about Florida State nationally. They should. They should. This program deserves that. This program has earned that through the test of time.

We got away from it for a little bit, but the work by the young men I get to coach and what they've done have put us back in that national conversation. I don't plan on that going away. That's something that we want to happen. It's something that's important to this program for what we represent.

But when it comes to expectations, there's no outside expectations that are bigger than our expectations because that's what we relied on. Then we're putting the things that we aspire for based off other people. It's about us. It's about our growth, our improvement, all the things that we know that we can accomplish.

I do believe that was something that helped us a year ago when maybe the outside wasn't talking as much about what we could do, but now this year we have to get better. We have to improve in all phases. You have some great examples of what can be done, but it's still about the consistency of how we're doing that.

Last year was not a perfect season. This is a new team this year. We've got a lot of steps and a lot of errors we have to -- it's critical that we improve in. Our guys have that sense of urgency, and we need to have that sense of urgency every single day in all that we do. So we have high expectations within, and we're going to continue to push that every single day.

Q. You spoke yesterday about transfer O-linemen that stand out. What does it mean for this group to have as much returning experience combined with those guys coming in with the two deep line?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, competition and growth. We knew it last year. You saw it in practice with the guys that were playing, but also you looked at that second group and even some of the freshmen that didn't have to play a ton but that were getting the quality reps.

Now you see guys, Julian Armella, Jaylen Early, Qae'shon Sapp, those guys are really, they're growing up, and I'm excited about what they're going to be able to do. Getting Bless Harris back. Bless was -- we tend to forget, Bless was our starting right tackle for the first season. I was so excited about what he was going to do, and then he missed the rest of the year. It was good, as he was rehabbing towards the end of last season, he was able to get back fully involved. Now he's fully cleared and the ability for him to go and grow.

Now you have that competition on top of bringing in three guys with a lot of experience. Guys who are definitely very capable as players, but just incredible in that group and in that locker room. I love the leadership I've seen. The three guys I mentioned that transferred in, they want to be a part of this not just for themselves, but to help this overall group.

When you have that type of mindset, especially up front. We saw that with Dillan Gibbons. Dillan came in, and that

was one of the -- Dillan didn't have the playing experience as much coming in, but he still had the passion to make an impact within that group.

Now we have guys that are really bringing both into this, and there's a lot of competition but also a lot of excitement about where this group can go and the depth we've been able to create.

Q. You talked a minute ago about the sense of urgency. How do you ensure you guys have that? You talked about a breakthrough season. How do you keep pushing forward?

MIKE NORVELL: It's focus. It's still what this program is built on, and it's not -- I've said before, if all you do is focus on a game or a moment, and about which you have like, well, there's an opponent. There's times we win games -- we've won games and not played to the level we're capable of and I'm pissed off about because it's still not about all the other things.

The sense of urgency is to be better. It's to improve. It's to challenge yourself to go beyond what you even think that you can accomplish. So if you don't have that urgency every day, then you're giving somebody else the opportunity to take advantage of that competition that you're going to face.

So really it is about us and waking up with a daily focus of I've got to go put all that I have out there. It doesn't guarantee that I'm going to be successful, but if you don't have that urgency, you're missing out. That's the focus with the team.

I don't care where you are or what things are going on in your life, all the challenges this world can throw at you, you'd better wake up and bring all that you have so that you can improve and you can overcome the challenges, the bumps that might show up on that field.

Q. Coach, you have more depth and experience than you've had coming into a spring. Do you see the physicality of the contact this spring maybe being more?

MIKE NORVELL: We pride ourselves on being physical regardless. We've had pretty physical springs and developing the toughness that I think has shown up. Our guys embrace -- we're going to be smart with our players, and we're going to -- obviously there's guys that played a lot of college football that they still have to improve. There's going to be a time, a place of how we do that and continue to create that explosiveness and that power just from the techniques and fundamentals that they use.

We've got a very competitive spring ahead, and there's going to be -- with having the number of players that we have on the roster, it's going to allow us to be unique in how we kind of structure that and making sure that plenty of reps are going to be able to be dispersed, but also plenty of opportunity to show where they are and also the potential of where they could go.

Q. You guys lose Ontaria Wilson and the group of wide receivers. What is the competition for those, to fill those positions so far this off-season?

MIKE NORVELL: It's been great. I wanted to talk a little bit about Darion Williamson. I think he's got an elite level of protection. We've seen flashes of it. Unfortunately, he's had some injuries that he's had to overcome.

Deuce Spann is somebody that I'm really excited about. I think he's shown a lot of big play capability. Just transitioning to the receiver position when he got here, so excited about where that can go.

I know yesterday I mentioned Kentron and just who he is. I mean, I'm very excited about him as well. Then you throw in some of the newcomers and obviously get Winston back. That versatility of guys, I mean, you look at the guys that played quite a bit, Mycah, Ja'Khi, Johnny, and those guys were productive.

Now you throw in Hykeem Williams, it's going to be fun watching him this spring. He's one of those guys I was talking about earlier. You see -- he shows up every day, and he goes to work. Vandrevius, he shows up every day and goes to work. There's times where they hit that wall, and there's some challenges that they got to go through that, but I mean, there's no doubt the explosiveness and what you feel with them within the workout.

I'm excited to see how that's going to translate out there to the field. So it's going to be great competition. I like even the opportunity that we're going to have with different personnel groups. You can see Kyle and Jaheim coming in, Jerrale Powers, Markeston, what he did towards the end of the season, Preston, all those guys at the tight end position, they're all very unique in their skill set. So it's going to be fun to see how this team, what we're able to do with that. Same thing with the running back position.

I'm looking forward to this spring to kind of see a little bit of that potential that we have with the different groupings, but also the competition in all those positions. We're fighting to be able to make their own opportunities.

Q. Talk about the depth you got with the returning



players you've had since you've been here, but also on the coaching staff you've got a lot of continuity. Every assistant, coaching personnel coming back, other than obviously Coach Surtain. What is that continuity on your staff? You go into practice making it a lot more efficient. How does it help?

MIKE NORVELL: It's great when you have continuity. It's something I talked about the last few years. It was critically important for our program. It was important for the players. It was important for the staff. Also, it builds confidence.

When you've been able to go through experiences with people and you see their response, you see the work, you get a sense of who you are but also the areas of where we can all probe. That same sense of urgency that I talk about with the players, the same sense of urgency we have as a coaching staff.

It's one thing to talk about what we're doing with our players. It's another thing to talk about what we've done within ourselves. You've got top 15 offense, top 15 defense, and special teams who has made great improvements, but there's still so many areas to probe.

So what are we doing, what are we implementing to continue to help elevate the positions that we're putting our players in, but also the things, the finer details so that we can show up more consistently in how we're executing. So I've been pleased with our coaching staff and just that same sense of urgency. Really excited.

Coach Surtain, he is an impressive, impressive coach and an impressive man. He absolutely fits our program. You can feel his energy, his excitement, the relationships he's building with the players, and he was the right fit to come in. I think he's going to continue to push and elevate our staff and what we're able to do.

Q. D-line with so many returning (no microphone).

MIKE NORVELL: You're spot on with that. I think that has a chance to be the strength of this entire team. When you look at the guys that we have up front, the size, power, speed, athleticism, I mean, it's the best we've had since we've been here.

You know what, it's a great -- it should be an expectation. You say when you look at Florida State and all the great defensive lines that we've had, but we go out and identify and bring in the right guys, whether it's high school level, guys that have grown and developed. You see a Josh Farmer. You see a Malcolm Ray that's kind of grown up through it. You see a Daniel Lyons, who I think has the world's potential.

Then coupled with that, some of the veteran players that are returning, Dennis Briggs, Fabien Lovett. Obviously all the guys that are out there on the edge. You can talk about Pat and Derrick McLendon. That is exciting to have those guys that are here, and then bringing in newcomers that are going to absolutely challenge them.

Go watch the championship game from last year. The team that won it, go watch the rotation they had on defense. There's not a play that's happening where guys are just going through the motions. Guys are staying fresh. Guys are making impacts. They're finding their role and opportunity together with a group that that's what we want, and that's what we need to get to.

There's been an overall excitement within our team for that, but it also means you've got to show up every day and you'd better bring it. Someone is definitely going to be vying for those reps and being able to capitalize on the opportunities that are given.

Q. Talk about the coaching staff. Last week you have the news that they all signed an extension, and then the addition coming into the staff. Over the last year there's been increasing resources devoted and the football facility being built. Did you, when you took the job -- I'm sure you had that conversation along those lines. How pleased have you been with Florida State's commitment to the program?

MIKE NORVELL: Our administration is in alignment with what we're doing. It's special. Forever grateful to every person that helped bring me to Florida State a few years ago and bring this staff to Florida State. Just the passion for the university played a big role, what our university stands for and what we're all about.

As we transition with new leadership, I mean, we've hit a home run. From the president to the board of trustees to Michael in the athletic department, this is -- it's a remarkable place. To be able to go out and represent this university, we know the responsibility we have, but the commitment and support behind that is something that is special.

When you look at our staff, we've been able to hire a great staff, and we've had guys that have been able to show and bring great value to what we're doing. Then obviously we've had a lot of coaches that have had plenty of other opportunities. Guys on the field, guys off the field.

I think we look at even guys who are not on the field coaches that have made tremendous impacts just in a system where the whole thing is whether it's an area of

evaluation or things that they're doing. We have guys that have turned down on the field positions at Division I schools just to be here with what we're doing. That's an exciting thing. And that couldn't happen if we didn't have resources, if we were not supported in that.

So I'm grateful for all of our administration and just board of trustees and all that we do and their belief in what we're continuing to build here. So it's definitely -- like I said, I'm very appreciative of it.

Q. (Indiscernible) probably is the biggest defensive piece you replaced on that side of the ball. How excited are you with having so many pieces to work with this spring? Particularly Fentrell Cypress. I know he's a corner, but coming in with the success he's had.

MIKE NORVELL: Fentrell's done a great job. I was asked about some of the newcomers, and he's one. He just hits the ground running. He's really done a remarkable job of how he's transitioned. Fits that room. He's smart, athletic, explosive, all the things that he's doing. He's also provided some flexibility for us.

I talked about Omarion Cooper, and you look at the person, and I think our back line is one of our greatest strengths. You've got guys like Jarrian Jones, who's a corner, he can play nickel, he can do it all. He's really coming in at the best of his career. He's had some really good performances.

Renardo green who's played all over our defensive backfield already. He can do so many things. Young guys like Azareye'h Thomas, he's changing his body, and he's going to be a great player here.

Then you bring in some of the newcomers who are here right now. I've been so excited about K.J. Kirkland, watching him, and Quindarius, those guys, they're very talented. You look at the nickel position with Brady and obviously Kevin Knowles and all the reps he's had, that group can really do so much.

When you see that -- and Akeem Dent coming back was big for us. Akeem, he's transitioned through. He started off at corner when he first got to Florida State. Even last year, to be honest with you, I thought he was pressing a little bit at the beginning of the year in some of the things he was doing and playing, but he was just getting better as the season went on. For him coming back for his last year, that was big.

Jamie did so many things and was a special player, but to be able to have a little bit of that leadership. And then having a guy like Shyheim Brown, who's been active and

played a lot, now he's got to take another step.

I like that group a lot. I like the newcomers that have come in. I'm excited to see them out there on the field, how they're going to perform.

Q. Coach, you talk about guys that are coming back, Jared Verse, I mean, not only what he's going to bring you guys on the field, but his leadership with this team too. How key was that that he decided to come back?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's huge. When you have a great player, which Jared has all the potential of being a great player, but that cares about people, that's what makes him special. You feel that energy. Jared likes to talk, and everybody knows he likes to talk. It's also for the time whenever he's challenging guys or trying to find that competitive edge or spirit, go watch him encourage his teammates. That's what I love.

It's not just about him because him coming back and him being a part of it -- if it was just about him, he'd have probably taken his talents and went to the next level, but it's who he gets to do it with. When guys get to see that, when they get to feel that, when they're around that, it just -- that's culture. That's family. That's what this is all about.

He has a responsibility that he needs to be better, and it's all these -- anybody that came back, anybody that's coming in, I don't care what their journey is, it's still about that because leadership will be about action. And any player on our team can stand up and say a few words. I can get up and talk in front of our team, but if my actions don't follow up to what I'm saying, it doesn't matter. So that's what I love.

We had some guys who go through whatever program. Things happen, you get all different things with guys building their bodies, but it's fun. Like Akeem Dent -- I'm not going to talk about any -- yesterday was his first workout. He's done some other things, rehabbing for something, but I was so happy to see him on the last one, which yesterday was the highest load that we did, and the last one he got in and was able to get himself back to do that the last workout. That was so impressive to me.

Jared's done the same thing and Jordan -- all guys that we're getting on with the season, you work through a lot of different factors. But you see guys who are able to go through those workouts and push themselves, it's impressive. We've got to make sure that not only it's seen, but it's felt and it's heard because actions are always going to speak louder than words.

It's big for the leadership of this team, and there are some

guys, like I said, that won't be able to go through spring. Still what is the impact they're willing to make? What is the impact they're going to make? That's so big for our program.

Even some of the newcomers. We knew with Braden coming in, he's not going to get through a whole lot of the physical out there on the field this spring, but just seeing his mentality, how he attacks his rehab, how he is in the meeting room, how he is around our team and program, that's a real guy. That's what we need.

So leadership comes in a lot of different forms and fashions, but Jared is definitely one that has done a nice job of living that out.

Q. Jordan Travis, what is the next step for him in his evolution?

MIKE NORVELL: It's continued consistency in all those little things. Funny, I was talking to Tony about it this morning, like it's fun watching him and the emphasis that he puts in his own work. Like he approaches a meeting like it's a day one meeting. You want that from great players.

Just some of the finer detail things that we point out to him -- because you go back and you watch an entire season, and you're able to -- it's going to help confirm a lot of the things that you might talk about being important and say, well, this is just a little area where we can improve, and then you see the application of it.

That's what Jordan is -- he's remarkable because it's allowed him to go out there and do what he's done, but it's also what excites me about the potential for his future. He's done a wonderful job. I'm excited to see him continue to grow in that consistency. I love him, but he's got great days ahead of him.

Q. Coach, you mentioned how important rotations were in the championship ball games, in the playoffs, the rotations of players. You're going into spring with depth, so you're going to get guys reps to try to build that rotation, right? But you also have the transfer portal now that looms out there, and there's guys who maybe if they're fourth on the depth chart or third, how do you balance that to be sure that guys have the opportunity and know their value?

MIKE NORVELL: You're going to make the opportunity. For players, part of their job is to force us to play them. It really is. Going out there and executing at a high level and putting ourselves in position to be the best we can be because that's what's going to win games.

With the transfer portal, I think that it is a very -- it is a positive thing because it does provide opportunities for guys. If they get to a certain point in their career and they -- if it's something that -- I'm going to be honest with them, and there might be guys that we sit there and have a conversation and say, look, this is where it's at. This is what it's going to look like. You still have an opportunity to go and improve, but when you have all these reps that have gone into it, these are steps that need to be taken.

It does open a door for some guys to go and explore different situations. On the flip side of it, one of the things that's a negative of the transfer portal is sometimes guys are very early in their careers or very early in their process. Freshmen are freshmen. There are some freshmen that come in and they're able to play quickly in their career because of unique opportunities -- well, unique skill sets are what they provide.

You hate to see guys that give up on a situation or an opportunity that they have because they can't see past what the short term is. This is a special place. We've had a lot of guys that chose to come to Florida State, to stay at Florida State, to return to Florida State because of how we do things, because of what their experience here is. They love being Seminoles. They love the opportunity to grow and develop within, what we're doing within the program.

Could some guys probably go and maybe log more snaps somewhere else? Sure, that's out there. But it's also what are you doing? What does that experience hold for them? What is the opportunity? Because every one of these guys on our team, they don't want their last rep to be in college. They want to play at the next level. They want to maximize that career as well. So it's about continuing to build and develop for them to get better so that they do get that opportunity.

When they get there, they have the longevity in what that career can be as well. So it's a twofold balance, but I'm -- our focus is going to be on all things we can do to put together the best team and continue to build that for what this year's team is going to be.

Q. Quarterback room, you talked about Jordan. How excited are you to see the way the other three quarterbacks kind of develop?

MIKE NORVELL: Good question. That's one of the things I'm excited about for this spring. You've got Jordan, who's played a lot of football, obviously he has a responsibility, and it's a necessity for him to get better here in the spring. Timing, continuity, all those things are important.

But with him returning, there's still going to be a chance for a lot of these guys -- whether it's Tate, A.J., Brock coming in, I want to see them get out there and operate. There's been a lot of competition in that room because you look at last year's Louisville game. We're down 7 1/2, and guess what, Tate Rodemaker has to go out there and do it. I believed in what he could do, but it was his opportunity. He had to be ready for that.

It didn't start great, but it finished remarkable. It's something I'll always remember, but he had to earn that. He'd earned the confidence with the staff, with himself, and with the team to be able to go do it. That's a big part of this spring as well.

How much better is he going to be? How much better is A.J.? A.J. has been busting his butt. I'm so proud of the maturity I've seen him continue to go grow. Brock has hit the ground running. That's a real guy. I love that quarterback room that we have. Now it's competition, it's execution, it's consistency. And this spring's going to allow a unique opportunity with just the experience that Jordan has.

I'm going to get to see all of them at some point in the spring. What are you going to do with them? Then obviously we still have a lot of time until kickoff in August in fall camp and then obviously our first game in September.

But each of these reps are going to help position that to what it's going to look like as we get closer to the fall.

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