

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Saturday, April 15, 2023

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Alex Atkins

Press Conference



Q. Obviously you've seen a lot of the veterans play in that stadium before and on big, huge stages, but what did you see from some of the younger guys?

Obviously Brock and the young receivers, but you have young linemen too. What did you see out of the younger guys?

ALEX ATKINS: The main thing we want to see is growth. That's what we're looking for. We're looking for growth from practice 1 to practice 14. We're seeing guys starting to understand situation.

And the smaller things, even with the O-line starting to understand the down and distance of the stance they're in, from Brock understanding what he can and can't do. I saw him take some checkdowns to get first downs. That's good. Understanding the situation. We have some things to work on.

But all those young guys, what we're looking for is just growth and being a ballplayer and picking up the offense and understand how to operate in situations. That's the main thing.

I saw the quarterback taking the checkdown, which is big. I saw receivers getting to the sticks and getting first downs.

We still had a couple of deals knowing with like knowing when to throw it away, knowing when to tuck tail and take what it is and not take big losses and things like that, where they got bust or didn't get a check or things like that. You just can't create situations until we're in them.

As much as we can keep doing and progress, but I like the progress because the first scrimmage, we had a lot of TFLs and things that we didn't have to have.

I saw us advance the ball, and every drive wasn't a touchdown and things like that, but I saw us advance the ball and get out of some tough situations, which I was proud of that.

Q. Piggy-backing on that, you mentioned you get one

more practice. That's not a lot of programs where they have a spring game showcase and then have a practice after. What kind of opportunity is that for you guys to grow and teach and go into the off-season this summer and be able to be ready for that after this?

ALEX ATKINS: It's practice for a team in reality. We wanted to get that in and still have a practice of correction. Now we can go back and get it corrected and one more time go and correct things. Which is the goal, like we said, growth.

So we did the same thing. That's kind of how we've operated here. We always have that practice after. I think it's good because now you go back, review the film, grade it, have a meeting, and then go out there and correct things you saw from the spring game.

Most of the time it kind of just is what it is. You get the meetings, and you kind of roll. I like having that practice to go back, watch it, and evaluate the tape just like you would at a game and go out there and make some more corrections.

Q. You spoke highly about Kentron Poitier earlier this spring, and he had a really good day today. What have you seen from him throughout the entire spring? How big has it been he's been so consistent through 14 practices now?

ALEX ATKINS: You see the confidence with the quarterbacks trusting in him. If he gets run coverage, they're going to him because that's how much belief he's given those guys. You know you're doing a good job when it's a critical situation and the QB looks for you. When you get in that man coverage, that single coverage, now the quarterback has to make a decision, and he's going to Tron.

So to have that confidence in him shows where he is right now, and he makes the plays. It's one thing to go to a guy when he's not making the plays, but Tron is making the plays.

We've seen this all spring, though. We've had multiple

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

times where multiple offensive coaches have brought up his name, and we talk about that true development, that position man from a guy that got in here and had to fight through, whether it be being behind on the depth chart, other new guys coming in, he just kept fighting, and he's going to get to showcase what he can do and showcase the talent.

Q. What have you seen from C.J. Campbell this spring, now going into also the spring showcase. What have you seen him being a really high competitor, it seemed like, throughout this camp?

ALEX ATKINS: C.J., he always had a chip on his shoulder. Any time you get a walk-on guy that comes into Florida State, he always have something about him to know he's got to climb to the top. To see him go through what he went through last year with the injury and bounce back, the good thing about it is, when you see him have success, you see the team respond. And that's when you know they're riding for him and what he's been through.

C.J. is instrumental in so many things, whether it be recruiting or positive morale, all of that. He's done a phenomenal, phenomenal football job.

So to see him run hard and have that toughness, that's in his DNA because you're a walk-on and go to a guy that's getting carries with the one group, think about that struggle and that time. So I like what C.J. brings.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about the veteran leadership on this team, especially on this offense. You guys have brought in a lot of new young players, guys that could be contributors for you. Just guys like Jordan, guys like Johnny, Trey, guys who have been here for a year now. How have you seen them rubbing off on these younger guys coming in and trying to make a name for themselves?

ALEX ATKINS: Veteran leadership shows in uncomfortable conversations because there's a lot of pride and ego out there with the type of recruits we brought in, the level they are, and the guys we brought in with the older guys.

So when you see an older guy make a correction to a young guy, that young guy's response tells us where the relationship is. That's the reality of it. If that guy snaps back at him, that means they haven't developed a relationship. The first key to leadership is relationship. Now you know the person that's getting on you shows they have a relationship with them. You understand what I'm saying?

So what I like about it is, when you see our older guys, whether it be Maurice Smith getting on Julian Armella, whether it be Jordan getting on a receiver on a route or making a wrong deal, when you see a Tron getting on Deuce, when you see these things and there's no argument or bickering or back and forth on the sideline -- and you have a little bit of confrontation because we're all in a moment -- but when you that, then you know their relationship off the field is growing on the field because, when a player corrects a player in an uncomfortable situation, emotional situation, and you see that player's face, there's a respect level of eyes like I know, if he's saying it, it really means something to him.

So we've got to continue to build that. It's going to take some time. We've got some new guys here. And we've got to give some guys the confidence to lead. Like with Jaheim Bell, he's come in and just went to work. So he's earning that respect. You see him maybe not being a feature, but he's buying into it. So he'll continue to earn that respect and he can be a leadership role because I like the way he goes about his business.

Just having that real relationship off the field has been a benefit for us.

Q. You mentioned 14 practices now to mix and match and evaluate what you have on the offensive line. How do things change now with the amount of data you've had, looking at these guys over 14 practices, as a talent evaluator, as a team builder? How do things change for you once the off-season hits and trying to configure these five guys to get the best fit?

ALEX ATKINS: It's not difficult at all because, number one, the room makes those selections. We know who's taking care of business. We know who's putting in the work consistently and daily.

The first thing is we had a couple of new guys coming in. We've got guys going through their first off-season. Julian, this is his first off-season. Sapp, this is his first off-season. Jaylen Early, this is his first off-season. Then you add J.B., K.J., and all these other guys, Casey, like this is the fits time going through the offense.

What we're building here is the identity of what we want to be, knowing who we are, how we work, picking up the offense. Then we'll start figuring out that five based upon the information that we've collected of what we saw consistently day in and day out.

It's a good problem to have because we've got a lot of guys that play a lot of snaps. Also, those snaps are in the past. Now is what you're doing here lately. That's what I love

about Coach in his position is all that stuff goes away. Those snaps gain experience, but it's about what you did today, and that's what's going to make the determinative factor.

So you've still got to bring it every day and still continue to prove or you can get lapped too. So it's fun to create a competition, but I think the continuity will start to show up as we go back and watch it and see who's making less mistakes, who's in position, and things like that. And it will start to clear up once we get to about that third week of camp.

Q. With all the guys you had coming back this season, all the veterans who played a lot -- Coach talked earlier about wanting -- they need to have that same edge they had last year now that everybody's talking about them. What have you seen now that you've been through several months since the end of last season and the spring in terms of like those older guys not just being back, but really trying to go to another level?

ALEX ATKINS: They don't have a choice really. Coach creates an environment of improvement. Even looking at this room, we have our goal boards up and things like that. They have no choice.

I remember leaving the second scrimmage, he challenged the coaches on just making sure our older guys are taking that next step. That's what he was looking for in particular, to make sure they were straining it to get that 1 percent better.

When the culture creates that, it gives you a chance to set the examples for the other guys. Man, look how he's coaching Jordan. Look how he's coaching Johnny. Look how he's coaching Trey. I'd better be on top of my game because, if he's coaching him like that, I haven't even had a carry in the game. So it creates that environment of improvement.

Also, like we go back to the first question of leadership. If we don't have that from in the locker room and that push and that desire and it's got to be coach led, we're going to have a lot more problems than we bargained for anyway.

We've done a good job of establishing the culture of improvement and accountability. So we've just got to make sure we're taking that next step to keep bleeding as we keep adding people to the roster.

Q. Today felt like as big of an example as you've seen, the depth you all have gradually built really on both sides of the ball. You can talk about the offense, the

offensive line and the offense as a whole, what's that do having that level of functional depth and reaping the rewards of those years of work now?

ALEX ATKINS: I tell my guys the best defensive line you're going to face in the country is the one we see every day. You go out there and compete with those guys and keep getting them better. Then they tell us -- I was on the sideline with Jared, and he's like them boys are getting better. He was out there on the first one, it's a little difficult out there.

I think we're creating that competition with building our fronts. If you watch us play ball, man, we're going to play through the fronts. We're an edge team culture and how we play and how we play physical. So if you come back to practice and watch the drills, we do a lot of half line. We do a lot of one-on-ones. We do a lot of toughness type drills, and it's starting to pay off.

It's also clean drills. We've still got guys going in the spring, that started in the spring, and they're going now. You see in spring practice, guys out there, I thought we've done a good job of attacking each other and getting that toughness, still keeping each other off the ground and staying up and playing fast. We're learning how to take care of each other too and not take cheap shots.

It's going the way it should be going when you're going into year four. We've got to make sure we keep the daily growth and that mind focus of what's it's going to be moving forward with daily growth. That's got to be the mentality. If we don't, it will show up. Those flaws and those skeletons will come out if we're not attacking it that way.

Q. You guys always talk about the response, the response, but how great was it to see Brock Glenn after the first couple series didn't go his way, to come back in one of the final series and get that score? How big was it for the freshman to do that?

ALEX ATKINS: And we've got to show the confidence in the package that we're sending in to him. Just because you did that, we're not going to go out here and run isos six plays in a row. We still believe in you. A couple of balls settled on him. But to come back and attack it again and go back and have a touchdown drive, that just shows who he is and what he's about.

And that response we're talking about. Even like with Rodney, he had one he put on the ground with a fourth down, and I said, man, you've got to come back, and he came back with some tough runs there toward the end with great ball security. That's what the practice is. Learning

from those mistakes and creating those environments of response.

Like Coach always says, we're going to respond. We want to swing first. We don't want to be two minute responses. But when bad stuff happens, we've got to make sure we have the mindset to keep swinging and keep going because that's what you've got to have when you get in those close games, man. You've got to keep swinging.

Q. After 14 practices, how do you feel about the quarterback two competition, how the returnees and how Brock handled it?

ALEX ATKINS: It's going to be fun to watch because we've got some guys in that room that have some good talent and starting to pick it up, and I saw flashes out there. We're going to really start to see the competitive juices start to come out there and start to flow and showing up in moments that needs to show up.

I think we've got guys that are going to embrace it and go get it. So I can't wait to see the growth from when they get this film to what they do the next practice and moving forward throughout the summer. They know what it is now and know what they've got to be. So I'm excited to watch it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports