

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Head Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



Q. You made the comment last week talking about Jordan and how much he has grown from last season to the spring and from then until now. How much more can a guy grow that's been in college football for up to six years?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, I think the challenge is when you have been a part of something, when you have seen growth, you come into success, the challenge is there's an element of human nature that wants to be complacent, that wants to be comfortable. It's something we battle with every single day.

You sit there and you look at the great ones, the ones that are remembered, the ones that separate themselves from all the rest. Those are the guys that embraced improvement throughout the journey, and it allowed them not only to do what they did at a high level, but they continued to get better throughout the process.

I think that's what I've been pleased about, and I talked about the spring and what Jordan has done. Even seeing him in the summer, I mean, in our very first meeting coming back, not talking anything football-wise. He has a notebook, a pad, a pen. He has heard a day one meeting before, but he wants to be on point, and he wants to be better than he has ever been. So that's going to be the challenge for him.

I believe he's got that mindset. I believe our football team has that mindset, and it's critical for us to achieve being the best we can be is that you have to constantly get better. He is a wonderful leader because he is willing to embrace that responsibility and expectation and to put it in action.

So I think he can improve in a lot of areas, and I think I've seen improvement in a lot of areas, but more than anything, it's just the consistency of how he shows up is what is going to help push our football team and push himself to go out there and letting that show up on a day-to-day basis.

Q. I know you mentioned the outside expectations,

outside noise that you guys don't worry about, but is there a different feel, different excitement in the locker room for yourself and here at Florida State?

MIKE NORVELL: I hope I'm more excited today than I was yesterday, and Lord willing, I wake up tomorrow more excited tomorrow than I was today.

Every chance that we get to be together, every chance we get to positively impact on this journey, there should be a sense of excitement. I'm grateful for who I get to coach. I'm grateful for who I get to coach with. I'm grateful for what I get to represent.

That builds because when you pour your heart into it, when you pour your work into it, all of the passion that you have, I mean, it's that ownership. I believe in these young men. I believe in the work that I've seen them do.

We have a responsibility to honor that work with how we play, with how we carry ourselves, for the position that they're going to put themselves in and that we can assist with as coaches.

So I'm more excited right now than I've ever been because of the work that's gone into it. But when it comes to expectations, like I say, there's nothing on the outside that we don't have a higher desire than on the inside. We're excited for the opportunity.

Q. Coach, you said that the sense of urgency was obvious. Have there been any specific examples that have highlighted that to you and made it apparent?

MIKE NORVELL: It shows up in the mindset of work. I think you have an eight-week summer program. There's some challenging days intentionally.

We tried to make it difficult. Guys know walking into the building what they're about to face, and I think the body language, the attitude, the energy which they bring, you always have a choice of what you want it to look like.

I can hold you accountable to doing the work, but the urgency, the excitement, the passion of what you do the

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

work, you've got to make that choice. That's where when I see our team, they're embracing heart. They embrace the challenge. That's something that has to continue.

I told them this morning this is going to be a real camp. We are going to push, and we have some experienced players that have been through camps before, and we have guys that have done it different places. Some newcomers that are coming in from high school that have no clue what to expect.

We are going to push, and there's going to be great competition. There's going to be unbelievable challenges that are presented, and they need to be presented from within because we have to show up every day, and we have to improve. That is the objective. That is the expectation.

That's where you see sense of urgency because anybody can come and check a box to say, well, I did that workout today, but what did it really look like? What did you do in preparation of that to be better than what you had been?

Then in the moment when it gets tough, what does that response look like? That's what real life urgency, that's how I think it gets put on display. I've been proud of what I've seen from our team in that.

Q. I know the season is about to start, but obviously you had a busy summer. Recruiting has been really good. The messages I get from a lot of recruits is just what your players do as far as when these kids visit, just the impact they have. I guess talk about the impact they have in just recruiting, but also your feelings about the excitement level of this recruiting class so far.

MIKE NORVELL: I tell people all the time, the best recruiters that we have are our players because our players were the ones that live it.

Any coach can go and give a speech or they can try to paint a picture of a vision for what is there. The players are the ones that get to live it. All I ever ask our players to do is just be honest, be real, let them know exactly what to expect when they come here. Tell them how we work. Tell them the things that asked for them to do outside of just playing a game and the challenges that are presented because it's still -- I've said it since the first day I got here. It's about finding the right fit.

We want the most talented, biggest, strongest, fastest, best fit for Florida State, and I think that's what we're attracting. Guys that are highly sought after, guys that could really pick or choose where they want to go, they're choosing to

be a part of this because of what's been done and obviously what we believe is here in the future, and they can see themselves as a part of that journey.

So each year I think we're continuing to grow, and each year we're continuing to attract the right guys into our program. It's something that we're very selective. We try to be very particular in the characteristics and the skill sets of what we need because every class is going to be a little bit different because every room is going to be unique to itself for what might be going or what might need to come in as we try to continue to elevate this team.

So I really like where we are and excited for what the future is for this class and the future classes.

Q. What are your thoughts on conference realignment and what it means for Florida State in the future?

MIKE NORVELL: Obviously we're excited about the opportunity that we have this season and with this team. That is our focus.

We have an incredible brand. We have an incredible program, university to represent the in all the things that we do. We've got a great relationship with the ACC and what our program has been able to accomplish in the ACC.

That is our sole focus when it comes to our football program and what we're doing is to just go be our best, but ultimately there's always going to be outside conversation, and that's for the outside. For us we're locked in and focused on what we have ahead and just grateful for where we are and what we get to represent.

Q. You had some guys that were injured last fall and maybe some that were even through the spring. How has the offseason been, and what's the health of your team going into the fall?

MIKE NORVELL: It's been really good, and we had some guys that were unavailable in the spring that I think have done a great job putting themselves in position to be ready for summer training.

We feel like we're going to have the vast majority of our guys that are going to be ready to go here starting tomorrow. There are still guys that are working return-to-play protocols that we have full expectations of them being 100% come game one, but we want to make sure that we build them through the process to where they're going.

We're going to intentionally probably restrict some guys from certain things. Even maybe here early in fall camp

just because their return-to-play protocol might stretch in a little bit more.

I think the health of our team is in a really good place, which is a tribute to Josh Chapman, our athletic training staff, and to our players and what they've done. We have a great sports medicine team. Some guys that had offseason issues that had to be resolved and rehabbed through, they've done a great job in it. They've had a great summer work of training.

Q. You guys recently added Nick O'Leary to the staff. We saw him helping out a little bit in summer camps. What's it kind of like having a guy with that recent NFL experience helping out?

MIKE NORVELL: It's great, and we're excited about Nick being on staff and what he brings to the program and what he has meant to the program.

He was the greatest tight end to play during his time in all of college football. I think you see how that has translated for him getting the opportunity at the next level and just really as much of who he is. He is a worker. He is tough. He wants to make a difference in young people's lives.

We had some conversations in the offseason about exploring what that could look like. I'm just grateful to have him back here in Tallahassee and helping impact these young guys that really -- I mean, he is on the walls here. He has lived it. He has done it. To be able to share the message of what set him apart, but also being a part of a championship team and what were some of the characteristics that were a part of those teams and some of those individuals I think is big.

But excited for him to start his coaching career and be able to help him along with that journey.

Q. You guys are about a month out; 32, 31 days from the LSU game. Over this next month with camp starting up, what is the primary shared focus for the team in general?

MIKE NORVELL: I think for us, and it's for game one, but it's also for the season is just our consistency. Can we consistently get better? Can we consistently improve in the fundamentals and our situational awareness of our execution?

There's been some changes in the rules that's allowed more during the summers. We can go out, and we can do plays on air. We can't go against anybody, but you can also throw and catch and to have a ball, and all those things have allowed us to probably accelerate the process

for some of the newcomers, but now come tomorrow you're going to have to line up against somebody. You're going to have to be able to translate that into action.

So to see guys to consistently get better and utilizing fundamentals, understanding the situational awareness, going and executing the things that they're being asked to do, that's a program necessity.

You look back a year ago, there were some really good moments where we showed up the capability to do that at a high level, and then there were times we were inconsistent. Whether it's in a moment of a game or a certain situation, that's where we have to continue to get better.

That's going to be our focus. If we can consistently improve and we can have that sense of urgency in the little things, I mean, we'll put ourselves in a great position because we're going to have incredible competition.

I do think we're going to have a great deal of depth across the board at all positions. Everybody is going to be fighting for more, but the thing about it is you have to go earn it.

Q. Jammie Robinson is a big piece to replace on defense. You have spoken in the past about Shyheim Brown taking the next step, but what else is there at safety about young guys stepping into a reserve role to help out?

MIKE NORVELL: I'm excited about that group. I think I mentioned last week, Kevin Knowles is a guy that brings great playmaking ability. He started at nickel for the last two years. He is up to pushing near 190 pounds. He has done a great job physically.

When he got here, he was he was about 160 pounds starting at nickel and has been very productive for us, but he can really do it all.

With him, Hykeem, and all the experience that he has, we have some newcomers that have joined the program that I think are ahead of schedule from what you would traditionally think of where they would be.

But I mean, K.J. Kirkland was here this spring, and he really stood out it us. We think we have got an impressive player there.

Ashlynd Barker came in this summer and extremely impressed with his work ethic, the athletic tools which he brings, you know, just the mindset that he has. I think he is going to be a guy that's going to push for early playing time, and definitely excited about that.

Conrad Hussey was one of our top guys we went after a year ago in recruiting. He has not disappointed at all since he has been on campus. His athleticism I think is elite. He has to learn a lot of things in a short period of time, but those guys are going to get thrown out there, and I'm definitely excited about what I've seen up to this point.

Then we have so much versatility on that defensive back group. I mean, guys that -- you look at the corner position. I think we're going to be two, three deep that we're going to be able to play multiple personnel packages.

You look at the nickel position. I mean, we're going to be able to put playmakers in great places to be able to make an impact. That versatility is one of the strengths of our defensive backfield, and looking forward to seeing how that all plays out.

Q. It looked like last season you experimented with the pull fullback position using DJ Lundy in those short yardage situations. It seems like Jaheim Bell is a guy that could fit that role. Can you speak to the value of that position in today's game?

MIKE NORVELL: There's no experimentation with it. We love using a fullback. I take a great deal of pride. That's my top secondary job is fullback coach.

No, I love using a fullback. Jaheim, he can do it all. I think you look at him as an H, to be able to split out, to be able to attach. He could probably do a lot of different things.

DJ Lundy I think has been great for us in that fullback role. I think we've got some guys that we could also look at as we're continuing to grow.

I've always liked taking defensive players from previous stops. Just to be able to utilize those guys at that position just for their versatility.

If they've got a unique skill set like DJ, I mean, he was a high school running back for most of his career. He just has a great knack for it.

We'll see where it goes, but there are some young guys that I think can be really special as well and being able to utilize that. We'll use that position when we need or when we feel like it brings a competitive advantage, and it's been pretty productive for us here these last few years.

Q. Talk a little special teams. I know you've brought in another kicker. But in addition to that, just special teams in general, what will be the emphasis there?

MIKE NORVELL: It's going to be great competition there as well. You talk about Tyler is here this spring. Obviously Ryan returning. Both those guys have unique journeys to get to this point. They've seen highs; they've seen lows. They've had to respond to situations.

You looks at Alex returning. I guess three-, four-year starter now coming into it, and a guy that's really been productive for us, but can still have opportunities for growth.

You know, Mac, who is competing against him. Those kicking battles are going to be fun to watch and just how guys elevate their performance in those situations.

You look at the return game. I'm really excited. I think kick return -- a guy that I'm -- you look at the kick returners that we have. I think it can be special.

Winston Wright showed throughout his career he can be special in that situation. You know, Caziaah Holmes. But a guy that -- Duece Spann, seeing this summer what he has done, I'm excited for him just in his game in general.

Obviously we all know what Trey can do and being able to be impactful in those moments. When it goes to punt returner, that's a big position that we need to have somebody rise up in that.

Lawrence Toafili has taken a lot of ownership there, which I think is an ideal hinge. Ja'Khi Douglas, Destyn Hill have really worked hard at that here throughout the course of the summer.

We have other guys that are getting a lot of work there as well, but I like that group. I think it's got a chance to be dependable guys, but also guys with the opportunity that can really change the game there in the return game.

That's something that we want to have a great deal of impact on, and we take a lot of pride in how we play in our special teams. Obviously all of that, coupled with our coverage units, which I think should be as good as we've been, and they continue to get better.

Q. Obviously Jordan was more limited during the spring. What's the plan for him in the fall? Is he going to be full go? What's the situation behind him? How are you going to get the backup ready, and is there a competition right now for the immediate backup position behind Jordan?

MIKE NORVELL: There's always competition. We're always continuing to build to see which guy is going to be able to separate themselves and be the most consistent

and working to seize an opportunity.

I'm really excited about that quarterback room. I think we've got very, very talented players. To think that we've got four guys in that room and the ability that they have, the knowledge that they bring, the way they like to compete and help each other, it's really a special quarterback room.

Jordan, there's going to be -- he is going to get the work. He got a great deal of work there last spring. It's just the approach of every rep. There's going to be some situations that I'm going to force the other quarterbacks to have to go in and show what they can do with different units because if that ever needs to show up, they've got to be comfortable this in that.

It was the same thing we did a year ago, and I think it helped in a game where that was something that became our reality. We're going to continue with the plan that we have. We've got some players that have played a lot of snaps that we have to make sure that they're consistent, they're ready to go, but also we have to see some guys that are in the depth that prove themselves and being able to secure an opportunity.

Q. Mike, you have maybe the most experienced team in the country coming back. Certainly in the top two or three. I know Phil Steele said it's the most experienced team he has ever charted. The benefits of that are obvious. What could be some of the challenges of having so much returning experience coming back?

MIKE NORVELL: It's a great question. It kind of goes back to really the first question that we had today. It comes down to you have to fight human nature because when you have experience, when you think you've been there and you've done that, that complacency is something that you have to fight against.

It's all about mindset and approach, and it also comes down to competition because we're going to have guys on this team that have started games that might not be starters this year. How do you handle yourself in that moment?

Everybody can sound good and feel good, but the moment of truth is when something doesn't go the way you expected.

I think we have a football team that's very confident right now, and they should be confident because of the work they've put in. I believe in that. I believe in who they are, and I mean, there are no limits to what I think this team can accomplish.

But with experience there's that inner pressure or that expectation that, well, how are you going to respond when maybe you have a bad play? How are you going to respond when a negative situation shows up? How are you going to respond when the positive shows up because we're going to have a lot of positive with this team, but do you take a deep breath and relax or continue to push?

That's why it goes back to that consistency. That is going to be the most critical thing for our team. Can we get birth on a consistent basis? Because when you talk about desired identity and how we finish, that's got to show up.

You bring an experienced team in, well, we've got to continue to grow with an unbelievable sense of urgency throughout this journey. There's going to be good moments and challenging moments. Can we embrace the challenge and respond with the real identity of who we are?

That's where you have to have those type of relationships, and you have to constantly put in the work because with a team that has this type of experience, I mean, everybody is fighting for more, and it should be a great asset for us, but there's also some unique challenges.

Q. Looking at the weight changes, obviously there were a lot of significant ones, but Jaylen Early lost something like 20-something pounds. Is he one of the standouts? He probably had more to lose, but what kind of effort that you saw from him and some other guys. We saw the video of Tatum breaking the rock. What have you seen out of Tatum this summer?

MIKE NORVELL: When you look at the body weight -- you know, number is one thing. Sometimes I try not to get caught up too much in the number because there's times we have guys that have gained one or two or lost one or two pounds but they've totally changed the complexion of their body.

In a case like Jaylen Early, I'm really proud of him. He came in as a freshman. Obviously had some of the young freshman weight that needed to be continued to work and develop upon.

He has dropped close to 20 pounds. He is moving great. Now he is going to put himself in a position to continue to grow, to be better in his fundamentals, to be -- because he'll be in shape to be able to consistently do that throughout the course of a practice, throughout the course of a season.

I'm excited about what he brings. I think that young offensive line group, we have some really, really talented

guys in that group that's going to be pushing to establish a role. When you have guys that are making that type of investment, it's exciting.

You mentioned Tatum. I think Tatum is one of those guys that's the heart of this team. He has been here for over a year now. I mean, he has jumped all in. I felt very confident when he chose to come here just in our conversations. There was a previous relationship from just Coach Shannon coaching him there at his previous place, so we had a pretty good sense of what would be coming in.

But, man, I just love his influence and the responsibility he takes within this team. Coach Storms at the end of every summer picks a guy that kind of has emulated that, and I'm glad Tatum has earned that.

There's a lot of guys that could have broke the rock there at the end of the summer. It's always a hard choice, but Tatum is a guy that, man, he is one of those heart beats, and he will help set the tone for what it is on a daily basis. He is going to work with his actions to try to be the best example of that, and that's what we need.

Like I said, anybody can get up and give a speech or try to have a rallying crying, but if you're not doing with it your actions, not many people are going to follow. We're going to be action-based.

I think Tatum is a guy that's really done that in his time here, and it's what's earned that respect of his teammates, his coaches, and really everybody that's around the program. Looking forward to seeing more guys ascend in their roles as we get going here in fall camp.

Thank you, guys. Go, Knowles.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports