

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: All right, good morning. Appreciate everybody being here.

Obviously excited to get to game week. Been a really, really good fall camp. Really proud of our football team, just the work that they put in. It all stretches back to January when we got started to push, to progress, to improve to get to this point.

I do feel like we have a team that is prepared at a very high level. They've worked extremely hard. The size, speed, athleticism, overall football intelligence I think have all improved within our team.

We're excited for the opportunity that's ahead, chance to go out with our first game, work to go put the best version of ourselves out on that field next Sunday night.

We talk a lot about the identity of a team. I see one that, like I said, has a great work ethic, really care about each other. They pushed and competed throughout. We still need every rep and every minute leading up to kickoff to continue to get better, to be ready for Sunday night. But so excited to be on this stage, opportunity to showcase our players, obviously this wonderful institution.

Health-wise going into this week, I like where we are. I think we're going to get a few guys that have kind of had some bumps and bruises along the way in fall camp, I think we're going to get most of them back here for this week.

We'll make an announcement, it wasn't on the depth chart. Ja'Khi Douglas will miss a few games here early in the season. Fully expect him back relatively soon. He will miss for sure this first contest, probably the first couple as we head into this season.

Like I said, I like where our team's at. We got a lot of work here throughout the course of this week in our final preparation. But really proud of this team, the coaching staff, for all the work that's gone in to get us to this point.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You guys had some great position battles, the preliminary depth chart is out, not set in stone, but when you look at the tight end position, what have Kyle and Jaheim showed you through pre-season to get the nods?

MIKE NORVELL: I think that entire tight end room, we're going to have at least four guys that play. Preston Daniel will also be able to make an impact within our team.

You see the versatility, just the consistency. Kyle has been really good. Just all the things that he can do, his approach, his physicality, what he does in the route game, great ball skills. He's a really good football player.

Jaheim, once again, his versatility, the explosiveness he shows. One of the things I've been proud of with him, coming in, it's easy to watch film, see what somebody does with the ball in their hands. I think Jaheim has really embraced the role of being better without the ball in his hands, as a blocker, some of the finer techniques and fundamentals.

I think Coach Thompson has done a great job with that group. Markeston had a great fall camp. He's such a big target. He's a threat. Over 280 pounds, but he runs very, very well. I think he's going to be somebody that is going to make a lot of great plays for us this year.

That's a position I've been pleased with, just the development of all those guys, what they can do for this team. Just adds different levels to that in our attack.

Q. Looks like based on the depth chart Destyn Hill has worked himself into having a pretty prominent role. What has he done as a true freshman?

MIKE NORVELL: He's kind of showcased it all. He's explosive. He's smart. He's done really good things with the ball in his hands. He's definitely a very willing blocker, something that we pride ourselves here with our receivers. He's a good route runner.

There's still going to be a lot of things he's going to figure

out along the way. He is a true freshman. Coming in, he's put himself in a position competing to start for us here early.

I think that just his mindset, his approach, all things. He's been productive. At the end of the day you have to go out there and you have to produce with that ability.

Definitely proud of him for the work he's put in. He's going to help this football team this year.

Q. Have you guys put a plan in place or preparations for the pending storm that may or may not come this way? Any update whether it might impact the game as of now?

MIKE NORVELL: Obviously something we're tracking just for our guys here. Got great communication with the university, athletic department, all things that we're aware of.

Right now, we always will have plans if things need to adapt or adjust. It's not something we think at this time is going to make a huge impact for our preparation this week or what it would be for the end of the week towards the game.

Q. Jared usually walking into practice, see him on the game field, how talkative he is. Is he that talkative away from football?

MIKE NORVELL: Jared likes to talk (smiling). He's a great young man. He plays this game with tremendous passion. To see where he was a year ago, the impact that he had on the field, really coming into this program.

I think his actions have spoken even louder than what his words are, just how much this team means to him and how much his teammates mean to him, the opportunity to get better. I think we've seen that.

That's where everybody has their style. For Jared, he likes to talk, but he's always been in control of himself in those situations. I think he's grown in that, he's matured in just his approach with that.

But I've loved the work. Expecting big things from him this year. If his actions speak louder than his words, then we're going to be in great shape here.

Q. You and Alex Atkins have talked about eight O-linemen you trust to win games. Where has that group taken a leap forward from a season ago maybe?

MIKE NORVELL: I think just the consistency and

execution, the ability, the size, the strength. I mean, those guys have all developed. Whether you have the newcomers that have joined, whether Jeremiah, Casey, KJ, those guys are all very experienced football players that have played at a high level. You look at the guys that have returned, even guys that were young in their process, just the way they've grown through their time here.

I think Alex has done a great job in the developmental part of it in knowing what to do, how to do it. Coach Storms and his staff, physical developments has really helped us.

These guys, they embrace the mental part of it. You're playing offensive line, you have to be versatile. The different combinations, the different things that can happen. If somebody goes down, somebody has to step up. Might mean playing multiple positions. We try to challenge our guys in those ways.

But they really embrace that part of it. I think when you see the way that they work to communicate with each other, whether it's two guys that have played one spot together or one has to flip to the other side, they understand the importance of that communication and the consistency of how they practice, obviously building the relationship with the guys that are lined up with them.

Q. This is the fourth straight year that Coach Kelly has coached against Jordan Travis. What is different about the guy he's going to see on Sunday compared to the guy in South Bend in 2020?

MIKE NORVELL: Jordan has always been an explosive player. I think when you look back, even to that game, he had a lot of explosive plays, really helped put us in a position to have some success that night.

You've seen the complete player, the explosiveness that he had with his legs, even the moments with his arms, the consistency of what he does in the passing game, the control of the offense, the confidence that he has in situations, what he's being asked to do, whether it's five receivers out, having to manage empty protections, or whether he's got to go under center and have run checks to what he might see, to having a dropback, pressure in his face, be able to step into the throw and make a precision pass. He's done it all now to this point.

That experience, then just the confidence of being in it. He's a tremendous worker. I think he literally earned everything he's gotten. I think that showed up in his game.

I love what I've seen. I love the way he's approached fall camp. I think we talked about Jared, but Jordan is such a great example of when your best player goes out there and



he plays at the level and practices at the level he does, it's hard for everyone else not to rise up to that.

He is literally, every practice, every rep, whether it was a day in helmets, a day in full pads, he has attacked every rep that he's had. I've just loved that. I think he's put himself in a position to have the best year he's had. Definitely is a special, special player.

Q. A lot of the transfers you've brought in have done more here than at the previous schools. How hard is it to prepare for a team that has a lot of transfers, not knowing what that is going to look like?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, we try to evaluate each player. One of the new elements of college football. When you're playing a team that has a lot of guys that played other places, you try to get the best sense of their skill set, things that they maybe like to do, reactionary movements, offensively, defensively. What are their strengths? What are areas that you've seen in the past where maybe you could try to take advantage of a thing or two?

Ultimately, when the game gets there, you got to go play. Just like our team has gotten better from where it was a year ago, fully expect LSU is going to be better than where they were as they ended the season.

It's going to be a great matchup. Guys that have come in from the outside that are now in their starting lineup, who are going to play a lot, we try to have as much information as possible.

You got to go out there and play the game, react to what you see. Fully expect every player you're going to step against is going to be better than what they've been. That's our challenge. We got to do the same.

Q. So many unknowns with that LSU team, entirely new coaching staff, new players. How valuable having that year to be able to study? What did you learn from the extensive study and how did that team grow last year into the off-season?

MIKE NORVELL: They're really good. That was a good team that we played in our week two. They ended up growing, gelling together. Obviously that's evidenced in winning the SEC West last year.

This is a team that they are very talented. Offensively they return a lot of production, some guys that were young that got thrown out there early. You saw them develop. Obviously Daniels is the quarterback, he's a very talented young man not only with his arm but what he can do with his legs. You have to account for him in every way.

You saw their running game continuing to take form as the season went on. Probably going to be one of the best receiving cores that we play all year here kicking off the season. It's a very talented and deep group.

They've got quality tight ends. On the defensive front, linebackers, Harold Perkins didn't play much against us last year. One of the more dynamic players in all of college football.

You see the elements of all things offensively and defensively. I mean, they did much of the same of what I believe we did: they got better throughout the course of year. They won some close games. Obviously they built their confidence in what they were being asked to do, how they were asked to do it.

I mean, it's going to be a heck of a matchup. It's going to have a championship-type feel to it just because you have two teams that have experience and I think are really talented.

Q. This will be the third straight year you're the first game of the year for a Brian Kelly-coached team. Is there enough familiarity that gives you comfort or still an element of surprise in the beginning of the game?

MIKE NORVELL: Coach Kelly is a great coach. He's done it for a long time, had success everywhere that he's ever been. Every year presents its own challenges. It's one of those things that you expect to go against, you understand there is familiarity. We've competed for years even before I was at Arizona State. Competed with him when I was at Tulsa. Got a chance to see how he operates and what he does within his program. He does a wonderful job in adapting to his personnel of who he has, what they do, whether it's offensively, defensively, special teams-wise.

That's what makes great coaches. He's established himself as that throughout his career. So we have to do a wonderful job in our preparation, in our adjustments throughout the course of the game.

First games, they're always unique in their own right. You end up preparing for so many different things that you got to truly focus on yourself.

That's one of our big points of emphasis, make sure that fundamentally, technique-wise, communication, situationally you're aware. We got to be at our best, then we'll be able to react to all the things that they do.

Q. Obviously Maason Smith is out for this game. What impact does him not playing have? How deep is

that room on the defensive line?

MIKE NORVELL: It's one of the better defensive lines in the country. Truly is. Unfortunate for that young man to miss this game. He's a special player. In our game last year, I think it was the sixth, seventh play of the game when he got hurt. He's one of those guys that for everything I've ever known of him, I mean, he's a guy that you want to root for in how he does things. Just unfortunate that he's not going to be able to be a part of this game. It does make an impact because he is very impactful.

When you look at their defensive line, this is a deep room. This is one that's very talented. They know how to impact the quarterback. They've done a wonderful job throughout the years. Even some of the other newcomers that have joined the program, we got a chance to see from their previous institutions. This is going to be a deep group that definitely has talent.

Q. Do you have an update on Darrell Jackson, his eligibility?

MIKE NORVELL: That's something we're continuing to seek more guidance from on any reevaluation of the process. With due respect to decisions that are made, I mean, I still find it unfortunate for the young man. In December is when he chose for his situation to go into the transfer portal. There in January, a new standard was signed in with the NCAA, January 11th, he had been enrolled here. I'm hopeful that that's something that is still getting looked at. It's one of the things that we're continuing to check back on.

But Darrell is practicing. He's preparing. You never know how things are going to go. If it upholds where he's not eligible to play, then he's going to at this point to prepare to be his best. I've respected so much his attitude and approach throughout this fall camp after finding out the news that it was denied.

Obviously always hopeful that that's something that will be reevaluated by the powers that be. If he does get cleared, whether it's before the game or whether it's at some point during the season, he'll be ready. We're going to continue to go through that. Just hopeful.

Q. On the depth chart, Ryan Fitzgerald won the kicking job. Talk about that battle between him and Tyler. Also talk about Keon at punt returner.

MIKE NORVELL: I think Ryan has done a remarkable job. So has Tyler. Those guys, probably as tight of a battle of any position battle we've had. You talk about competition

within our team, I think that's one of those competitions, I mean, it was two really, really good performances. Ryan was a little bit more consistent throughout, has earned the opportunity to be our starting kicker.

Tyler is a wonderful player. He will be prepared. He will be ready if need be. But it still goes back to what's been done during practice and how guys have performed.

I know those guys, they've enjoyed the competition with each other. They definitely helped each other and supported each other. Excited about where that room is right now.

Keon as a punt returner, obviously he's a dynamic athlete. He is a bigger punt returner, 6'4", 215 pounds. He's got great confidence back there, has really, really good range to be able to get to a lot of different kicks. It's one of the things that has been a great competition. Lawrance Taofili, Destyn Hill, those guys, Dre Jacobs, all guys that have been a part of that. We got some other guys that we do think have great futures back there in that role.

Keon I think gives us a wonderful chance to be able to help create some explosive plays in that regard. Definitely excited about what I've seen from him.

Q. Can you describe how far DJ Lundy has come since you got here to now, for him to be?

MIKE NORVELL: DJ, he's played so much football since his true freshman year. He's been in it. I think when you see DJ when he was in high school, his junior year, basically he was all running back. That's what was his main priority. Started playing linebacker senior year in high school. Very talented young man. He's done so much to help this team really on both sides of the ball being utilized as a fullback.

He's one of our best football players. I think the mindset, approach. He's going to play a lot. I view it as we have three starting linebackers. I really love what I'm seeing from Omar Graham. I think Blake Nichelson is going to play this year. Justin Cryer is going to play this year. That's been a group that I think is by far the most depth we've had since we've been here.

Also top-quality players, young men, the way that they operate together. You're going to see the combination of those three in a lot of different ways. But I think DJ has definitely performed as good as anybody probably on our football team. Just the growth of what he's been able to do. Understanding kind of the same thing we talked about the confidence of what he's being asked to do, then the finer details of how to do it. He's tough, he's fast, he's

physical. I love where he's at right now.

Q. Obviously Winston Wright has come a long way since the car accident. What was his reaction when he found out he was the co-starter? How big is it for him to be in this situation right now?

MIKE NORVELL: Winston knows he's put himself in a position to help this football team. That's something that a year ago we were all hopeful. I mean, he had to go through a long and tough journey to get back to this point.

To see him confident, to see his speed, the explosiveness, being put back on display. He had a great play Sunday night. Those are the moments when you have the game taken away from you; there is a question whether you're maybe ever going to play again. To be able to get back out and see and feel what you were, it was a hard journey for him.

I mean, I compliment him, his family. His dad and I, we text all the time. I got that phone call the night when it happened. I'll never forget talking to his dad. To see him back on the field, having a chance to be able to help this football team, is really special.

I'm grateful for Winston and just the work he's put in, but excited to see him get out there and play.

Thank you, guys.

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