

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Coming off a game on Saturday night, had a chance to go back and watch the film. I thought it was a good game for us and one that we talked to our team beforehand about trying to put on display the identity of who we are. You have an emotional game week 1. You come down to week 2, short week, having to kind of condense our schedule in a few ways to get ready.

I thought our guys came out and did a good job throughout the game. We played for 60 minutes. I think we played 102 players, which is the most I've ever played in a game before, which was a great experience and a great opportunity for guys to kind of showcase where they are. A lot of young players got extensive experience, and that's something we can build upon.

I thought our defense, especially our first defense, was dominant throughout. That was an offense that's well coached. They have a talented back that I think is a very, very good player. They had some good skill position guys. I thought our defensive front was great, was a great forcing unit.

I thought we were improved in our communication in the back end. There's still two or three plays where we've got to be better just in certain adjustments where we let guys get free, but great pass rush, forced quick throws in those situations. I was really pleased with the way that our defense came out and the way that they were able to play for 60 minutes.

Offensively, I thought we did a good job of our response. We had some missed opportunities. There were some plays that we definitely left out there, but those guys continued to fight, continued to work.

I think we played maybe 50 snaps in the first half, which was kind of what we wanted to do. We wanted to try to push the tempo. We wanted to try to wear those guys down, knowing if we got in the second half to be able to really establish the run game.

I thought our backs ran hard. I thought our O-line did a good job creating some seams. Like I said, we had a few missed opportunities, and we had some great plays by guys out on the perimeter as well.

To come out of that game and to have some disappointing moments and still have the margin of victory of what it was -- I think the Southern Miss team is going to be a good team. I think they're going to compete in their conference. They played really hard. It was a good test for us. I was proud of our guys and their response.

That gets us into this week, open up ACC play. Going on the road playing a Boston College team that's tough, they're physical. Their offensive line is really -- they've got a lot of guys back. Last year they really dealt with a lot of injuries that was tough and challenging for them. They're going to try to create movement up front.

They made a switch at quarterback with Thomas Castellanos now starting at quarterback. Thomas is somebody we recruited. We were looking at him as a running back athlete as he was coming out. He's really done a nice job. He went to UCF, now transferred up to Boston College. You see the play-making ability that he has. He was a great player in high school. He's somebody that you absolutely have to work to contain.

They've got a couple of guys on the perimeter that can run and create separation. It's going to be a good matchup. It's one that our guys, we're excited to get started in conference.

We understand what we want to achieve and what we want to do. This is a first step when it comes to coming into conference play. This is a big game up at BC. This is their Bandanna Game. Welles Crowther, the young man that played for them years back and actually on September 11th lost his life helping others, going into the Towers before they collapsed. It's a game that we'll honor him and his legacy.

I talked to our team a little bit about that last night, just out of respect for Welles and just the family and all that he embodied. So this will be an emotional game.



I'm sure it will be a great atmosphere. It's an opportunity for us to go on the road and kick off conference play, which we're definitely excited about.

Q. Different kind of two-for-one. I'm going to ask about two different guys, but in one question. Darion Williamson has showed flashes of potential. How good was it to see him healthy and playing the way he did? Also, how far has Deuce Spann come?

MIKE NORVELL: Both of those guys, coming out of the game, I was really proud of. They didn't play perfect games. There's some mistakes they've got to clean up, but for Darion to have that first touchdown, he's a guy that's had to battle injuries. He's had to overcome challenging situations. He's really coming into his own as a player.

It was great to see him make that big play, obviously had a couple throughout the game. And just really like what he brings to our wide receiver room. He's explosive. He's big. He's fast. He's got great ball skills. I think he's a dynamic guy on special teams units too. So it was great to have him back out there.

Deuce Spann, when Deuce came here, we were basically starting from square one. Deuce was a transitioning quarterback, moving to the receiver position. So he's had to learn a lot. That process, it sometimes takes time. But if you watch him, I would say probably one of the most improved players on our football team when you take just his route running ability, the things that he's done.

He's definitely explosive when you get the ball in his hands. He's got great speed, probably one of the faster players on our football team. But to see him make the difficult catch coming across the middle and obviously with the speed sweep later in the game was an explosive play. I'm proud of him for his growth.

Adding him into the room that we have, it allows you to keep the guys fresh and be able to have a great rotation where we can always continue to apply pressure on defensive backfields.

We're hopeful that we'll get TRON back here soon. He's working through it. I know I mentioned Ja'Khi at the beginning last week. We were down a few guys. I thought Hykeem Williams came in and had a fourth down conversion, which I'm really proud of him for. The last three weeks, he's really taken some major leaps and bounds there at the receiver position.

You see just a variety of different guys. Vandrevius Jacobs scores a touchdown there late, which I was proud of him.

Destyn Hill had a big catch. We've got a really good group. Winston Wright had a really nice return and still doing some good things there offensively.

I know that's a broader question, response to your question, but I'm excited about that group and continued growth and development. Like I said, we had some missed opportunities there where guys got the ball in their hands and we weren't able to finish it going to the ground.

We're looking at, just as coaches, to make sure we continue to implement drills to help with that because it wasn't just like -- there weren't a whole lot of just straight drops. Guys catch the ball, but when they got to the ground, just weren't able to secure that and finish the play.

Then there were some good plays that Southern Miss defensive backs made as well. They made a couple of vertical passes. That's something we're challenging our guys with and looking forward to seeing them get better.

Q. A follow-up to that. What is the message to Johnny Wilson this week to make sure he's in a good spot mentally and just moving forward?

MIKE NORVELL: Just go get better. Johnny is a great player. He did a good job on his routes. Obviously he put himself in a good position, just had a couple times when he hit the ground, the ball rattled loose. Nobody wants that in that moment. It's what happened.

You learn from it, you get better, and definitely excited for him to get a chance to respond. But he doesn't -- he knows what he needs to do. I love his attitude, his work ethic. He's going to come back, and he'll be in great shape for it.

Q. You talked a lot about the young defensive back group that you have. How much -- they got a lot of playing time. I think a couple of them in snaps. How big was that playing time for them, and what did you see from them this past game?

MIKE NORVELL: It's great. It's one thing to see them practice, but it's another thing when they have to go out there on the field. More than anything, it's the communication, and it's trusting your eyes, trusting your keys. There was some good and bad when it came to that.

For a young freshman, everybody wants to play. Everybody wants an opportunity to get out there and make an impact. There were some really good things that showed up. I thought we had two opportunities at interceptions that we've got to make sure we finish, but I thought those guys competed, they battled.

It was good to see a larger workload that they had to -- that they got to work through, but there's still some things with their eyes and just particular communication that was great for us to be able to go back yesterday and try to help build the confidence in what and how they need to do things. Definitely fired up about that.

I thought our linebackers, a guy that really stood out to me was Blake Nichelson. I know it's not defensive back, but he had an unbelievable play on a wheel route. On some of our special teams units, I'm really, really excited about where he's going.

I know Justin Cryer got some good work at linebacker as well, and DeMarco Ward. It was good to see the young linebackers get in there as well. I thought it was a good workload.

Q. Akeem Dent obviously went off. It looked like he was grabbing his hammy. Wonder if there's any update on him after the game.

MIKE NORVELL: We'll track how everything goes this week. We've got a couple of guys that missed the game. We were down Rob and Maurice on the offensive line. We'll see how that goes this week. Obviously Akeem went down in the game and was not able to return. Johnny went down and was not able to return.

We'll see how they progress. I thought they came in well last night, as we were able to start getting treatment and things like that. I'll give you a better sense of it as the week progresses.

Q. You talked about Hykeem, the catch he made. I know he had a really impressive block downfield on Brock's run as well. How have you seen him take to that? It seems like he enjoys that aspect of the game. When a guy is able to put in that kind of effort, how much does that help you be willing to play him more?

MIKE NORVELL: He's definitely put himself in position. For him, he's just getting in shape. His first nine months here, it was a process. But you see now that he's in shape, you see him starting to utilize his mind, his fundamentals, being able to apply the technique.

He's definitely got the want to, and that's something that he's a great young man. I think he's got a special future and definitely excited about what he's bringing to that receiver room. When you have that type of work ethic and that type of passion to get better, good things are going to happen.

Now that he's gotten to a point where he's in much better shape, we're able to see better flashes of what we think he's going to become.

Q. I know the answer to this is probably no, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Do you allow yourself to embrace what this program has become considering where it was two years ago, 18 months ago, when we were here interviewing you after games and before games? No. 3 team in the country, real championship aspirations. Do you allow yourself to appreciate how far it's climbed?

MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate or embrace?

Q. Take both.

MIKE NORVELL: Yes, there's an appreciation for how far we've come because I watch our players work. I see what they put into it. I see how hard our coaches coach. The program-wide investment to see guys believe, get better, and then you obviously respond to the situations that we have found ourselves in. So I appreciate that.

Embrace, there's no difference in how I -- oh, somebody says that we're highly rated or highly ranked, whatever you call it, or not. None of that matters. It's about what we're willing to do when we show up and when we go to work.

I believe in this team. I believe in this team for what they've been through. I believe in this team for the guys that have said yes to come be a part of it and the challenges that are presented to them when they were making that choice. We're very transparent. I want guys to know exactly what they're coming into when they come into this family.

For the ones that have said yes, I'm really proud of them. It's a daily challenge for us, and that's why last week was a big game for us. Nothing ever -- you can take nothing for granted. To me, we didn't play a perfect game. We had a big victory, and that was great, but it was more to see the approach, to see our guys work throughout the course of the week. There were some moments where it was up and down. I think I talked about that a little bit on Wednesday.

But watching them on Friday, seeing the GPS data, like that was the most explosive moments we had in a practice since we've been here in a game week. And to do that on a short week, that shows you intent. I respect that from our players.

So the new expectation needs to be better than that, and that's where you continue to push for best. I think our guys embrace it. They don't always like it. It's just like anything.

We all want to take a deep breath. We all want to be able to have a relaxing moment.

So, yes, there's an appreciation, but there's also a responsibility that comes with the steps we've taken to get better, and that's what we continue to push to do.

Q. You praised the run game earlier on. I guess what stood out about what you guys did well this past week? And specifically, Caziah Holmes, what did he do when he got his opportunities?

MIKE NORVELL: It was good. I thought there were some explosive runs. Offensive line did a really nice job. There were a few mistakes we had, guys playing in different positions, some guys getting more opportunity.

I thought Darius Washington, I just can't say enough about him. He's remarkable. He could literally play all five positions. To go in there at center, he managed the game well. Like I said, it wasn't a perfect game, but he really did a good job of going in there and making a positive impact.

It was a game, as we continued to go through it, we wanted to be able to continue to lean on -- we threw the ball a lot early. That was part of my thought process in being able to attack and force those guys to run and obviously to be able to have some of the tempo as we got up into the 40 and 50 plays. I thought we really started to lean on those guys pretty good and open up some big seams, and our backs did a great job of being able to convert on that.

Really every back had a good run in that game. Obviously Trey had the three touchdowns. Caziah, it was great seeing him get in the open field, have his touchdown. Rodney Hill had a big run. Lawrance Toafili had a great run. Even C.J. Campbell had a couple of nice runs. It was great to see those guys and how they were able to take advantage of it, but I thought our O-line did a really nice job alongside the tight ends.

Q. Kind of expanding on what Cory asked, just because this team is so highly ranked now, and I asked you about the maturity of them on Saturday, but who do you turn to? Do you have to direct them like, guys, stay focused? Is it an internal thing? Do they do that? What is the mind focus of this team right now?

MIKE NORVELL: It's all. It's coaches. It's all of us. For me, the mindset that I bring to practice, the mindset that I bring to meeting, I've got to work hard to live to be the example for them. And we've got great players. We've got great young men that want to achieve greatness. They

want to get better.

So we have the opportunity. It's just what we do with that opportunity. The older guys that have lived it, probably we've built that trust throughout time, but for the newcomers, sometimes you've got to paint the picture for them.

But when they see the older guys and the investment, the work -- like last night we did our developmental practice with some of the guys that don't get as many reps. Just a little extra time for those guys to be able to kind of showcase themselves, their growth. I thought it was one of our best days we've had since I've been there. Those young guys, they came in there, and it was impressive. The urgency, the drive, the fundamental focus that it came with.

That's necessary because you never know at what point we might be calling on one of those guys to go make a play, but it's everybody. That's what makes this game so special. If I'm just talking to one or I'm just talking to a couple and we only have 75 percent of our guys that are getting better, 25 is going to show up. Obviously we've got to make sure that there is that sense of urgency across our program, and that's never going to change. It's something that we talk about throughout the year.

That's why I always say Florida State is not for everybody. It's just for the real ones, the ones that truly desire to do something special. And you see that in the way that our guys are working.

Q. We talked to Jarrian a couple of weeks ago, and he said that, when he first got here, you guys had just gotten here, the program wasn't what it needed to be. He said over the last year or two he's really come to just trust you and the staff completely. Was he a guy, did you know he could be this kind of a leader in terms of -- Jared Verse says Jarrian was one of the guys that convinced him to come back. Did you see that when he first got here, or how has that relationship grown?

MIKE NORVELL: I love Jarrian, just who he is and the growth that I've seen. Leadership comes through example and experience. He's had to grow up. He's had to grow up a lot in his time here from day one to where he is now.

That was a really good moment. I loved watching him get that pick six the other day. He's faced adversity. He's had to overcome challenge. We talk about that buy-in and building trust, that's hard earned. He's made the choice because we're not changing to the standard how we're going to operate. He made the choice to.

When guys see that growth in an individual that has talent, that has ability, he's had to overcome some challenging moments where maybe people doubted or questioned, for him to be able to block that out and just focus on getting better, and now you're seeing his best game on display. He's still going to get better throughout the course of the season.

That's a young man who his leadership has come from his experience and the willingness to push and to overcome in those situations. Yeah, he's one that I think has earned the leadership role through that, and I'm just really proud of him.

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