

# Florida State University Football Media Conference

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## Coach Mike Norvell

### Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate you being here. Coming off of Saturday, like I said after the game, was probably a little bit of relief, first conference game on the road to come out with a victory.

Honestly didn't play to the best of our ability for 60 minutes of that game. There were some really positive moments, but ultimately just too much inconsistency. Didn't start the way we wanted to start defensively, gave up a couple of big plays, had a couple of communication issues, things that we worked, things that had been right in practice, and ultimately in the moment did not execute.

We've got to continue to improve there. I think the response was good, even though we started off down. To get back to 31-10 was a positive. You look at what they did, I mean, Boston College did a good job controlling the clock. They had time of possession. We didn't have our second offensive possession until the second quarter. It was almost 50 minutes of real time.

Part of that is, one, we've got to get off the field on third downs on defense. But then offensively, you've got to make sure you make the most of all opportunities. Their offense scored, I think it was on five of their first six possessions. The two-minute drive at the end of the first half was the only one that they did not score on.

We got there to the end of the third quarter, fourth quarter, and on each of those drives, we had a correctible mistake that showed up, but it's still a mistake in its own right. We had the turnover for a touchdown. That really hurt us. We had a couple penalties on potential big plays that hurt us. Ultimately, we've got to do a better job of finishing offensively when we get in the fourth quarter.

Defensively I think you look, and you see -- just disappointed in our third-down performance. Very similar game to that -- on third down a year ago and one that we came up short in. We'd been outstanding in those situations throughout the year up to this point, but did not execute very well.

There's a variety of different issues. Some things, technique, couple of communication issues. Then ultimately just a few times we've just got to finish the play when we're in a position to be able to make it.

They had way too much offense there in third down -- I think it was close to 240 yards in third-down situations. That's unacceptable for how we want to play and what we want to do. But coaches, players, everybody involved, we get an opportunity to go get better.

Special teams-wise, obviously we had the turnover on the onside squib kick. That's something that I've got to do a better job of making sure I put our guys in those situations, things we talk about. But there in the moment, we didn't all execute exactly the things that we wanted to do in that moment. I've got to do a better job of coaching that.

Really proud of Ryan for how he's operated, how he's kicked. He's done a great job to start off this season. Our coverage units, I think we've done some good things. I think Alex has punted the ball well, been able to flip the field. Our kickoff coverage unit, doing a good job putting speed down the field. I like what I'm seeing there.

And I think we're really close on our return units. Obviously we had a critical mistake there late. Didn't have the best judgment there on the last punt. Fortunately, it didn't hurt us. But those are things that you've got to be on point with. And obviously we have to learn from it.

A lot of things to be able to learn from from that game. I definitely -- our players were upset -- you know, we're all glad we won, but players are upset for some of the things that we put on film that we've stayed away from early in the season. A great opportunity to go correct it.

I thought they came back with a great edge in practice last night. I thought there was a great effort. It's never been about the work. I mean, these guys, they embrace the work. But there in the course of that game, I don't know that we always played with the edge that we're accustomed to.

You look at the game, I thought we played very disciplined



for the majority part of it. We had five penalties, and ironically, the first penalty was when the score hit 31-10. Four of the five penalties were focus penalties.

As you get to that point of the game and you're doing a lot of really good things and you have a lapse in focus, a lapse in that edge, which I talked about, that showed up there late. We pointed that out. We addressed it. Ultimately, like I said, I was proud of our guys.

Defensively there, that last drive was big, to be able to get the stops, to get a couple of sacks. I thought Coach Fuller put them in a good position, and guys went out and executed in the moment. Ultimately, that game didn't need to be what it was, but maybe it was just the thing that we needed to show the importance of every snap and every rep and every opportunity.

So I think our guys, they got the message, and now we have to go do something about it.

**Q. One of the things this defense was really good about last year was not giving up the explosive plays. It seems like this year there have been some, especially in the passing game. I know there was a big emphasis in the off-season trying to create more plays defensively. Is there any correlation there, or is it something else?**

MIKE NORVELL: No, I think we're a talented defense. I think, when you can run, I think teams have done a good job of trying to create some of the misdirection things in the passing game. And we've got to -- there's nothing we haven't worked. It's just, in the moment, making sure that we're able to go out there and communicate with that sense of urgency and the confidence and to be able to apply that.

That's shown up too much in the first three games. It's something that is definitely being addressed. It's something that we've got to understand what people are going to try to do against us for how we play and what we do. But they've done a good job with some of the misdirection and our eyes have not been right a few times and allowed guys to get space.

Then there's times you have all the right intention. We had a third-and-17 the other day that I think was one of the plays of the game, up 31-10. You sit there, and a rep we'd looked. Ten guys checked immediately to the coverage, and the defensive play and structure we wanted to run. Ten guys got it. One guy didn't. It just happened to be where the ball was thrown.

That's where it's like -- we talk about it afterwards. Why did

that happen? There's all different types of things. Nobody wants to make a mistake in that moment. Nobody wants to not be on the same page -- to be on the same page.

But that's where, whether it's during the walkthrough, whether it's during the practice rep, whether it's your rep or not, we've all got to be on the same page in those adjustments.

It's something we look at as coaches, we look at as players, and we all take ownership in it. It's all part of how can we be better at executing the things we're being asked to do? Then you've got to go out there and do it.

**Q. With the play to Morlock, it would have maybe almost iced the game at that point. Did Keon engage too early? Was that a mistake by him?**

MIKE NORVELL: It's one of those things, it's a slip screen back to the tight end. You go back and watch it, and it's -- Kyle thought he was behind the line of scrimmage. He was slightly in front of it. There was a potential, versus man, to be able to take the guy and run him off.

There's all different factors that can go into that, but that's one of those plays that's just where we've got to be that much better.

We don't always control it. I've seen that called a lot of different ways over the years with something that was that close, but it was the call that was made. Now we have to make sure we improve from that.

On L.T.'s fumble, we had a miscommunication on that. That's a play that's there and has the chance for a big game, but unfortunately it's just like those are the things that showed up there in the fourth quarter that, I mean, you're a couple of inches away from really blowing that game out of the water for how we should finish.

But we didn't. So that's where we all get to look back and say, all right, why did this happen? How can we make it better? Then we go to work and work to fix it.

**Q. I want to ask about Keon. I don't know how many games he's had in his life where he had zero catches. Have you talked to him after the game? He's such a special guy and such a big part of this offense. What was his mindset? What was your mindset with him? Obviously you've got some huge games coming up.**

MIKE NORVELL: That's part of football sometimes. We don't go into games thinking we're going to get this great player the ball.

When you look at it, there's a little bit of give and take. We snapped the ball 58 times, and he was targeted, I think it was three, four times throughout the contest and unfortunately didn't result in any catches. That's part of it.

You look at the week before, Jaheim Bell didn't have a catch. We scored 66 points and Johnny Wilson didn't have a catch. Other guys took advantage of opportunities.

We want to get our play makers the ball. There were a couple of opportunities we had, and whether it's different things we can do to make sure we're finishing those plays, whether it's -- obviously I've got to do a good job to make sure -- not to say force, but you want to make sure those guys get active in the game. It's just one of those things that occurred.

There's a lot of plays where he is a primary option, but if they give you something that's a little bit cleaner or more open -- like I said, we scored on five of our first six drives. So it wasn't like, oh, well, this was not working because we didn't get him the ball early. But ultimately, yes, we want to get all of our play makers opportunities to be able to do that.

For what Johnny, I guess, lacked in production a week ago, he made up for it in the 100-yard receiving game this game. Jaheim Bell with a couple of really big games.

There's always going to be an ebb and flow with that. I thought Keon, his attitude and his approach, he's a real one. He's an absolute real ballplayer that wants to make an impact. He wants to have a big game. He wants to help this team win. That's what makes him special.

Definitely excited to see his continued growth, our continued growth. And it's the same thing with every player that we have.

**Q. How did Jordan feel physically leaving the game, his expectation to be able to go this week?**

MIKE NORVELL: I was proud of him coming back. He got hit there on the last two-minute drive, laid on the ground awkwardly, was uncomfortable probably physically going into the second half. But he came out, first two drives, you had touchdown drives, made some really good throws. He had some runs there late that were really good.

He was sore after the game, but I don't -- I'm not worried about what his health will be here moving forward.

**Q. From an offensive run-game standpoint, do you feel like the offense has struggled with bread-and-butter plays that maybe they had success**

**with a year ago? And just in general, the O-line you used multiple people with some injuries up there. How is that group gelling through three?**

MIKE NORVELL: I don't think necessarily struggle with bread and butter. I mean, ultimately you're trying to create space, trying to get run saves. I think we've done a good job of that early in the season for a lot of situations.

Ultimately, as teams try to adapt and adjust to what we're doing, I don't look at our offensive performance and say, well, this was really bad. I think we've done well collectively.

You look in the first half of the LSU game, we didn't run the ball very well, but we were able to throw the ball. Then in the second half, really, I think, finished the game because of our run game with some of the, I guess, bread-and-butter calls that we have that we run.

Second game we ran for 300 yards, really did a nice job within that. Then in the last game, it was a mixed bag. I thought we had some explosive run opportunities. I was really pleased with Rodney Hill, I thought, came in and did a nice job, had a couple of really good, explosive runs.

I thought Trey had -- you know, he was really close on a few. Ultimately, he's continuing to push. I know that, for what he did the week prior, there was a couple of those runs that were one block, one -- and it works with everybody. There was a couple times that we mis-ID'd maybe with receivers on how we were trying to get to the force that would have opened up just a little bit more of a seam.

I think it's just that's the fun of the run game. As you're trying to work and create the best looks and advantages for your guys, it's just that's that constant repetition.

No, I'm not really worried about where we are in that right now, and I don't think it's been something that's been terrible. But there are obviously areas for improvement.

**Q. Looking forward to Clemson a little bit, you've faced Will Shipley a few times. I don't think Klubnik has started against you guys. But what do you see from them, and how do you guys defend them this week?**

MIKE NORVELL: It's a talented team. You look at their offense, you've got a new offensive coordinator, really sharp, knows how to put his guys in position to make plays. The versatility of Shipley is what makes him special. He can catch the ball. He can run the ball. He's tough. He's physical. We've seen him firsthand the last couple of

years, really been an X factor in our game. So we know that we're going to have to gear up. We've got to control him.

The other back, Phil, he is really talented as well. Big, strong, tough-nosed running back, but if they get in the open field, they've got the speed to take it the distance.

They're an experienced offensive line. Cade is a really talented quarterback. He can locate the ball. He can make every throw. He's probably more athletic than people give him credit for, just what he can do, just extending plays, being able to move. You can see the growth in the receiving corps.

It's going to be a great challenge for us. Obviously you look at some of the early, probably the first six quarters of the season, they had some uncharacteristic turnovers. I think they turned the ball over three times within the 10 yard line or coming out with no points in those situations, had an early turnover in the first quarter. I think he threw a pick six.

Then since that, the last six quarters of football, they played at a very high level. So you could see that all that -- kind of coming into play for them. So it's going to be a great challenge, but I know our guys are excited about it and looking forward to a wonderful week of work and get a chance to go play there on Saturday.

**Q. Coach, you talk about how your guys are looking forward to Clemson. I guess what kind of extra intensity are you hoping to see out of them? This is a big rivalry, and I know how much of a big deal it would be for this program to finally get a win over Clemson.**

MIKE NORVELL: I just want to see us go play our best game. It is a standard expectation, but if you don't -- everybody knows this is a big game. You've got a team that the last however many years has pretty much led the ACC in how they've played and what they've done.

But I'm not sitting here just talking about Clemson. I mean, it's about us. It's about how we play, what we're able to do and how we're able to execute.

We know they're a talented football team, and it's going to be a great atmosphere. It's going to be a great, an exciting game to be able to play in. You've got to prepare like that.

It was the same expectations of how we needed to prepare last week and how you have to play for 60 minutes. But you learn from each experience, and you build towards what's ahead. But I don't think there's going to be a whole lot of motivational talks needed, but I'm sure going to give

them because I just want our guys better than they've ever been.

That's the opportunity that we'll be able to sit here 3:30, 3:45 on Saturday and know whether we accomplished that or we didn't. If that's the case, I've got a lot of confidence in what we'll be able to do, and I'll be able to live with whatever the result it.

But we're going to play our best game. That's what I want to see. I believe in this team. I believe in who I coach. I believe in the coaches that we have. So I'm excited about this week of preparation and really looking forward to them capitalizing on the moment.

**Q. You guys have really defended traditional running games very well so far this year, in terms of just running backs, not running quarterbacks. I guess that might be traditional now. But looking at what Clemson does, is it more than just the fact those are two really talented backs? What do they do -- what challenges do they present as a running game?**

MIKE NORVELL: I think there are some similarities. I think with what you do in the passing game, the creativity of utilizing your play makers and trying to create space in the passing game, whether it's with route concepts, with the spacing, with the angles of what you're trying to do in the run game, it all has to tie together.

I mean, there's some offenses you watch, and people like to call plays. It looks good, but there's not a whole lot of coordination in it. I think they do a good job of coordinating their attack. Whether it's you get a certain look and you might see these handful of runs out of it, but then if you tie somebody down to try to cheat a hat, then they're going to create an advantage in the passing game and be able to take advantage of that as well.

I think they do a good job of playing numbers, but they also do a good job of creating good leverage and to be able to attack in the run game. When you have tough, physical, hard-nosed backs that can run, it makes it a challenge. When you have a gap, you've got to win your gap, and you've got to make a tackle if that's where the ball comes.

Obviously there's going to be some space plays. That's something that shows up in this offense. So we've got to do a good job -- and I don't think we did a very good job of making those space plays a week ago. That's something that we've got to improve on.

Ultimately, I know we're going to put a lot of emphasis and continue to emphasize that because that's the game of college football now. We've got to do a good job of being



able to get people down when we get those situations.

**Q. Do you feel a game you played at Boston College where it was a little bit more challenging and you faced a little bit more adversity going into the Clemson game? It's going to put you in a better place, maybe more than you expected in the preseason.**

MIKE NORVELL: I'm grateful for all experiences, especially the ones we win. You get to look back, and nobody wanted it to be a two-point game, but it was. We had to respond in that situation. We had to feel that. We had to -- especially being on the road. That was good for us.

And we knew it was going to be an emotional atmosphere last week, and you've got to give credit to Boston College. They played really hard.

Their quarterback made some big plays in big moments. For us, it's something we look at. It's, why did this happen? How do you get it corrected? You'd better take the steps necessary so it doesn't show up again.

Playing a perennial championship-caliber team is what Clemson has been these last however many years, you know it's going to be a challenge.

I'm excited about all that we've had -- and we've played in big games. It's not like we're coming into this game unknown of what we've faced. I think LSU is a pretty good football team. I don't know, I didn't watch the game, but I saw the score. They responded pretty well since ours.

We know we played quality opponents. We've seen a variety of different looks. Now it's time to go play our best game here this week on the road against a really good opponent. So it's about our work.

**Q. Kind of following up on that, as a coach, how do you find the balance of -- you talk about lessons. There's obvious obviously lessons that you learned in the negative sense up in Boston. But also you went on a 28-0 run when you started slowly, and you went on a 38-3 run against a team that, on Saturday at least, looked like the best team in the country, what they did to Mississippi State. Do you have to remind the team, guys, when you play poorly, clearly you can lose to anyone, but when you play well, you might just be the best team in the country. How do you get that message to them?**

MIKE NORVELL: You can't be afraid of the confrontation. There's so many coaches out there that it's -- when things are going good, you check it off, and you move forward.

It's all.

You celebrate the positive, but you have to correct the things, whether it's a lapse, whether it's technique, whether it's a fundamental. There's never a play that it's okay not to coach. I think that's how you build confidence. That's how you build trust.

If it's not right, as the head coach, I've got to stand up and tell -- it is on me. Everything that we see within our program, whether it's a miscommunication, whether it's a bust, whether it's a really positive response to a situation, you've got to take ownership of why did that happen. How do we build upon that, whether it's good or bad? You've got to be able to have that real talk, and you have to be honest.

That's one of my favorite things from yesterday is I sit in there, we're in the meetings, and you turn on a play where -- there's a defense we called we practiced 190-plus times since we started in fall camp, and we busted it three times in the game. Like, that's probably, as much as we've done it, like for that to show up, with three MAs, why does that happen? What occurred?

Our players, like I heard ownership yesterday. When you're an 18- to 22-year-old and willing to stand up in front of your peers and say, look, I made the mistake there. For whatever the reason that it was, I understand that. I accept it. I'm fixing it. It will not happen again. That's a step in the right direction.

You can find a million different excuses or reasons why it did or this motion was this or that happened. But ultimately, with the ownership of the action and then the humility in the correction or the improvement, that's something that we have to have.

That's what I love about this game because it mimics life so much. Nobody wants to come up short. Nobody wants to have an embarrassing moment. Nobody wants to not look or perform at a level that you're capable of. But when it happens, what steps are you willing to take to get better from it?

That's where I was proud because you make the run to go from, whatever it was, 10-3 to 31-10. That was grit and response. But when it got 31-10, where did we go from there? Why did we have four focus penalties that showed up from that point to the end of the game? Why did we turn the ball over two times from that point to the end of the game? Why did we have a couple certain things that happened in critical situations, a couple mistakes where we missed a single or missed -- why did that happen at that point?

Because just like in human nature, you get to a point, and you're, like, whew. You start off a game, and you're down -- we didn't sit there in a hotel thinking, hey, just wait until they go down to score on the first drive and we bust two opportunities in communication. Nobody thinks about that.

When it shows up, there is an uncomfortable feeling. The response to it, to get back to 31-10, there was still a quarter and a half left to go in the game, and that's the edge I'm talking about.

Like that's -- I told the team after the game, that's where the killer instinct has to set up. Like, this is done. I'm going to finish better than what it was, pissed off at the fact that we started off not as good as we needed to.

And we didn't have that. Now you address it. You point it out. And now what do we need to do from Sunday night at practice to throughout the course of the week in how we prepare to Friday night meetings to Saturday morning when you wake up, all of it? Then you go get better.

And when you have a team and you have coaches and you have a group that's in it together, that's willing to pour into each other, that's willing to hold each other to that standard and embrace that standard, then you've got a chance.

I believe that's what we have in this team, but just saying it, that's one thing. Going out there and doing it, we'll get to see Saturday.

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