

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate you being here. Definitely missed you guys over the bye weekend. Good to see everybody back for this week.

It was a good bye week. We talked last Wednesday, I thought our guys really did a nice job in how they approached the work. I thought they had two really good practices, were physical, tough. We got a lot of good speed against ones on ones, twos on twos, trying to get a lot of situational work. Some of the things we look back at the bye week of just areas that we have to improve, I know we talked about just the conversion downs in the last two games have really hurt us. It's hurt our overall snap counts. I think right now we're the lowest per-game snaps offensively.

There's twofold to that. I think we've had on average about 11 explosive plays a game, so we've been explosive. We've had a little bit over three 35-plus yard plays per game offensively, so we're seeing the explosiveness, we're seeing some of the positives, but ultimately we've got to do a better job of 3rd down conversions, continuing to extend drives, and then defensively obviously we've got to do a better job of getting off the field in those situations.

I thought we did a good job there in the second half of last week's game, but we've allowed more extensive drives that have kept us on the field more than what we need to be.

We got some of that work there last week, continuing to emphasize our red zone. I think that's been one of the overall strengths of our team. Doing a good job when we get down there, really on both sides of the ball. Then just continuing to work fundamentals, technique, and pushing to get better.

Guys came back last night. We gave them a few days off, got good rest, got good treatment. We think we're going to have a chance to get a couple guys back here this week. I know Akeem Dent did more last night. I feel very confident where that could go as the week progresses. Obviously we've got to see how that plays out.

Rob Scott I think is getting close. We'll see ultimately what that's going to be this week. I feel more confident than what I have the last few weeks what that is looking like coming back.

I know Deuce Spann missed the last game. We had the last few weeks of game weeks, we've dealt with some sicknesses going around, just really as much around the community, so we had a couple guys that have missed games just due to that, but I think everybody is in a good spot as we head into this game week.

Excited to see our guys continue to work. I thought last night was good, like I said, and there's a sense of urgency for us to get back on the field and to go play our best game. We want to put together a complete game.

This is a Virginia Tech team that's coming off a great performance. They were dominant against Pitt. Really did an outstanding job of running the football. You saw toughness, you saw physicality. You really liked the quarterback, what he was able to do. He's a big kid. I think he's close to almost 240 pounds there. He's got the right mindset and how to play.

They did some direct quarterback runs with him. That's going to be a big part of what they do, but the running back, offensive line did a nice job there at the line of scrimmage. You saw toughness. It was put on display, and then they showed some of the explosiveness being able to throw the ball down the field.

It presents a challenge for us, but defensively it's a very well-coached team. Obviously we know Chris Marve, defensive coordinator, Coach Pry obviously, that's his background, and all that he's done and all the success in his career. Very sound, aggressive attack style defense in what they do.

A lot of movement with their guys up front. They were disruptive last week. Then obviously in special teams, this is a program that's known for great special teams play, and it's going to be a big battle for us.

As we go into this week, we're continuing to focus on us

and just going to be the best Florida State team that we can be and continuing to grow as we move through the season.

Q. Seems like in a couple games earlier this year teams have tried to control the clock and keep your offense from getting on the field. Are there things you can do defensively to force the issue and expedite that process to get the offense back on the field?

MIKE NORVELL: Obviously creating takeaways, getting 3rd down stops. Those are the biggest things that we've had a point of emphasis in, and you look at the first two games, and that was something that we did really well.

At the end of the day, when you have teams that -- we have an explosive offense. We've got good players, and it's something that I've seen throughout my coaching career whenever you're going against different opponents, then we'll try to control the clock, and obviously that's something that has shown up.

But we play a role in that, as well. Like I said, we've got to get off the field when we get opportunities, and we've got to sustain drives. The offensive part of it, as we went back, and I think we could still be better on 3rd downs, but we've been as good as we've been on 4th downs. I believe we're 7 of 9 and really had a couple situations where we had conversions but due to self-inflicted penalty, a bad alignment there last week, that hurt us.

But I think we're executing at a high level in those situations, so we have been able to do that.

But just we could still be better. But yeah, it's come down to creating takeaways and then obviously being able to get off the field in those conversion downs, as high a percentage as we can.

Q. With the 3rd down conversions on offense, are you guys finding that you're in a lot of 3rd and longs?

MIKE NORVELL: Really for me, my mindset over the last few years, I think I might have mentioned this last week, is what are you doing on conversion downs. Ultimately if you have a 3rd and 8 and you get six yards to a 4th and 2 and then you convert on a 4th and 2, that is a positive set. You did what you needed to do to put yourself in that situation.

Yes, everybody wants to get the -- if it's 3rd and 8, you want to get the eight yards, but ultimately there's times that you can have that type of thought process, and we're going to continue to push.

We want to convert over 50 percent of the time that you get

in those cash down situations. If your 3rd and 4th down -- if the 3rd down helps you to get a 4th down conversion, then ultimately that's still a positive play in our thought process.

We've been good. We can be better. That's ultimately just the mindset, the approach of what we're trying to take is good execute to the best of our ability. Let's eliminate the mistakes.

You've got to give credit, we played a couple good defenses in those situations that have forced us -- we've had some mistakes in those situations, so those are things that we've just got to be able to have better execution but then also make sure that as a coaching staff we're continuing to develop plans that help put our guys in the best situation possible.

Q. You guys obviously want to establish the run this week. I think Virginia Tech allowed 38 yards last week to Pittsburgh. What do you need to do to get the run game going? What did you see that they did last week to kind of limit Pittsburgh?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, they did a good job of attacking on their defensive front. Linebackers -- you look at their team, they're big, great length, speed. They really fly around. On the defensive front, they're going to move, twist games, stunts, blitz, all different things. They were very impactful.

At the end of the day, it's going to be a challenge for us. We're coming off one of the lowest rushing performances that we've had since we've been here, and got to give credit to a good job by our last opponent, but also there were a lot of opportunities that we went back and were able to see where it's just a tiny detail, a fundamental, making sure that we're taking the proper steps to put ourselves in the right position to go and be what we're capable of.

Every week we want to establish the run. But we're also going to take what the defense gives us, and that's something that we've got to be able to have a balance, but it's going to come down to what I want to see is I want to see us go out there with our technique, fundamentals and communication, go out there and execute the way that we can.

Where we go from that, as long as it's the best we can be in that situation, then I've got confidence that we'll get back on track.

But at the end of the day, this is a team that they're going to force a lot of eight-man front. They're going to try to get

those hats down. They're always going to try to have plus one in the run game, so you've got to do a good job of making sure that you execute, that you do a good job playing with your eyes, and then obviously quarterback just taking what they're giving you in those situations.

Q. With the run game, are you guys seeing teams consistently try to take away Jordan with the read option stuff? Are they committing to that?

MIKE NORVELL: Teams account for Jordan. If you don't, it's going to result in pretty good plays. I thought there was a couple times, that run pass option there a few times in the last game where it was really in Jordan's hand to what he sees, and there was probably a couple plays where he could have got some yards there on the run and took an opportunity with the pass and didn't work out for us as well.

But we're going to continue to make sure that we present options. I think if teams are accounting for Jordan, that's going to create more space for us in the run game, and obviously we've got to do a great job up front. Everybody has got to handle their man, their responsibility, but Jordan is always a threat.

There's going to be times we're going to be smart on how much we are trying to run him. I don't think it's -- it wasn't a secret that he was dealing with kind of playing a little bit banged up there. I thought he showed great toughness, and there were some runs that we did have with him.

But mostly we've got to be smart with him, too. He's definitely feeling good. The bye week hit at a good time for him, so excited to see him back out there, and we'll see what this game plan and obviously how this match-up plays out on how much they're going to account for him.

Q. You mentioned the Virginia Tech quarterback. I think he had over 20 carries in the Pitt game. What does another dual-threat quarterback present challenge wise for the defense going into this game?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, we faced one a few weeks ago that hurt us. Ultimately he did a good job -- they had some designed quarterback runs that got out on us, so I'm sure they're going to look at a lot of those things.

He's got a strong arm. He can throw it all over the field. I think he had a big 60-yard touchdown pass that was placed perfectly to one of his big receivers. This is a team that can present challenges for what they're doing.

They're coming off their best game here this last week. They kind of got into a rhythm. They were able to attack the Pittsburgh front and were creating some movement,

and the quarterback, he is a tough runner. He's not one of those guys that's just looking to get a few yards. If he gets an opportunity, he's going to try to run over you. You see that toughness. You saw that put on display.

Definitely you've got to come with all you have, and when you get there, we've got a lot of garnet jerseys that are tracking with you to make sure we get these guys down because they do run tough.

Q. You talked last week about how the defense in the second half seemed more aggressive, made Clemson react to you instead of the other way around. Is that something moving forward you want this defense to be, like not wait until halftime, not wait until a team establishes something, come out of the gate making the offense react to you?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, and that doesn't always come down to blitzing. That's one of those things, you say in how you attack. Playing with confidence in what you see and what you react -- obviously there were a few things that we saw that were different. They did some quad sets and just different things you've got to react to, kind of get into the flow of the game with where that went.

But I want to see our guys, yes, go out and absolutely play with confidence, attack, whether that means pressures at times, whether that means just rushing for and still just how we fit, how we communicate and the sense of urgency with which we play is important.

I thought in the game against Clemson, I thought we did a good job of stopping the run there early. They got one that got out there later, but I thought we did a good job in that, but we still had some things that we had to clean up there in the back end that got us -- did a good job with getting their backs out.

We did see some things that we thought we could expose, and I thought there were some good adjustments that were made that allowed us to be more aggressive there in the second half.

But we want to have that mindset regardless. That's one of the things that we talk to our team about. We've got to come out and start fast.

I think when you look defensively, that's got to apply because we have not started games well here really in the first three.

I know we had the goal line stand in the opener that was big, but still, there was a couple plays that allowed them to get down into that area of the field.

But we've got to come out and we've got to start games obviously faster on that side, and if we do that, I've got a lot of confidence in what it will look like.

Q. Because of the injuries up front, you guys have had to work some different combinations on the offensive line. Some of these guys are new to Florida State. They've been here for months, but first few games. Has this first month given you a better idea of what each guy can do and how to best use their strengths?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. Really we played three guys up front that are newcomers. They've shown really good and then there's been times that we've had some areas that we have to get better.

Bless Harris has done a good job there on the left side in place of Rob Scott, and really he's been here for a good amount of time, but he missed all of last season, so really getting his first true extensive game reps, so that's actually another one that you still count in.

Now we have a four-game kind of pool of examples of what we've done at a high level and things that we've got to improve upon.

It's good that we're getting -- we got Maurice back in the last game. Hopefully got Rob back into the fold. Now you add that talent, that experience, and really just a combination of a better understanding of what our guys can do and trying to put them in those best situations.

But yeah, it's all about building from that and having guys that are more confident in some of the combinations and some of the -- just the fundamental aspects of what we do up front, how they have to work together, and just being able to react maybe just half a step quicker than what we did.

It's all good in some games where maybe that slightest step does not get exposed. When you're playing really good people, when you play teams that attack, it's going to show up. That's where we go back and look at it, and we've had some opportunities, we've just got to be better.

I think with last week and what we were able to do and then obviously coming into this week, more time and a better sense of our guys, I think that's definitely going to help.

Q. It sounds like you expect Virginia Tech's defense to be pretty aggressive. I wonder with you as a play caller and a guy that's trying to play the chess match, maybe they're aggressive against other teams, but you

have to figure out, okay, how are they going to defend us because not everybody has Johnny Wilson and Keon Coleman. How much does that go into your game plan for a week and what we've seen on film might be different because they haven't faced an offense like what they're going to see on Saturday?

MIKE NORVELL: That's always the plan A, B, C. What are you going to see; what are they looking at to think of what's the best way to do -- with their talent level or their scheme, see how they want to try to defend you, and what are the adjustments throughout.

I love that part of it. It's always a weekly battle for me. You look at them, but then what are the things that they have shown schematically, and for me, I go back years, just looking at different things to try to help best prepare our guys.

If it's not A, then we kind of move on to B, and then if it ever gets beyond that -- even last week, we spent a lot of time or the last game, we spent a good amount of time preparing for something they had shown two years ago -- different coordinator, but because of the potential of what we thought we might see.

It showed up a little bit, but that's always one of those -- the great debate of where you're working through it, but also it takes those in-game adjustments and being able to adapt to what you are getting throughout.

Q. You mentioned Deuce returning this week. We saw Ja'Khi on the depth chart this week. Getting that full allotment of wide receivers, how can that help you in terms of match-ups?

MIKE NORVELL: Ja'Khi, he practiced last night. I think what that workload is going to look like, but we're definitely excited about getting him as he's getting back. Kentron is one that we've missed, too. That was a -- he's been out for the better part of this season so far.

Having two guys that were pushing to be starters, and Ja'Khi started a lot of games here, Kentron has made a lot of great plays here. We've been down a few guys; now others have stepped up and I think played at a good level there.

But man, I'm excited to see those guys get out on the field, and I think they're going to continue to build to our depth and to the play-making ability that we have, and definitely excited for what they're going to bring here as we continue on in the year.

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