

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 9, 2023

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate you being here. Kind of wrapping up Saturday's game, was really pleased with the overall outcome of how we finished. We talked to the guys throughout last week as really wanting to come out and get off to a fast start. I mentioned that in my postgame, and I thought, you know, couldn't have played much better during the first quarter.

Loved the energy. Loved the intensity, the execution. I think their first offensive drive was 14 plays. Did a great job mixing run and pass, being able to jump out to that lead.

Second quarter, had some adversity, some mishaps that happened, really, on both sides. Wasn't as clean as it needed to be. As we were going through that, you look at the last two minutes of the first half, obviously gave up a touchdown. Weren't able to get things in our two-minute drive. Took a negative on the first play.

You know, decided to go to the half and then the opening kickoff, the second half, was about as bad of a start as we could have but you know it was, like I said Saturday, I was really pleased with the response. And the defense not to give up a point in the second half, ultimately it wasn't the cleanest play that we had. There are still some details and some things that we've got to clean up that we were able to address yesterday.

But to not give up a point offensively, to really be able to finish the game. Doing a great job in the run game. Guys were really battling up front. We saw a great physicality. Up front, tight ends, running backs and the way that they ran, and then receivers, I thought showed up really big.

Keon Coleman, I pointed him out to the team yesterday, I thought he had two huge blocks on the long touchdown runs by Trey Benson. Those are the things that you really celebrate just that type of play with what guys are doing without the ball in their hands.

But I was pleased with our team. I thought they responded well. I thought we were very efficient with what we did

offensively throughout the course of the game. I did a good job, over 50 percent, when you looked at the third and fourth down conversions, how we -- you look at that, being able to extend drives, defensively, great response in our third downs, did have a couple fourth down conversions that you've got to be able to clean up and keep them in those longer yardage situations. But.

Thought our guys played hard and I thought they played tough throughout. We definitely are happy to get the victory. Sets up for another conference home game.

It's going to be an early start there Saturday. But we're excited about it. I know we're going to have an incredible crowd. Encourage everybody to get here early and get ready to roll. Our fan base is incredible and makes such a wonderful impact to the game. We're going to need another great atmosphere. It was special there Saturday.

We know that we've got to have a big impact here this weekend, and definitely excited to compete against a talented Syracuse team that's coming off of a couple losses. But as they showed throughout the beginning part of the season, this is a very explosive team and they are going to attack in all that they do. They have a very experienced quarterback and definitely present challenges with how he plays with his arm and his legs. Definitely we've seen him the last few years and he's a really, really good player and he's got good skill around him.

Defensively, Coach Long is the new defensive coordinator. He's a legend in this business. You know, he's as good as they come when it comes to the aggressive approach and how to attack. They are going to show you every front. Every blitz, you've got to do a wonderful job playing disciplined, playing with your eyes and being able to respond to whatever he's going to throw at you we have our hands full for the week of preparation but definitely excited to see our guys continue to grow and go compete.

Q. Johnny Wilson, any update with regards to him leaving the game?

MIKE NORVELL: You know, this is going to be something that we see as we go throughout the course of the week.

Johnny was feeling better yesterday and so we're excited about where we think it can go but ultimately, you take it day-by-day this week.

You know, I thought he did a wonderful job there in the first half on Saturday, and really has taken his game to another level just in how he played and what he's been able to do. So hopeful to be able to get him back rolling here earlier in the week.

Q. Was Keon an effective blocker when he came here or is that something he's worked on since he's been here?

MIKE NORVELL: I think he embraces being a complete player. You know, he's shown moments of the willingness, but taking that ownership is something that I'm proud of him for. You know, as a receiver, you guys have seen our teams. It's something that we really harp on, and I think Coach Dugans does a great job of building that mentality into the room.

You know, guys embrace that and Keon was a great example of that there on Saturday. Those were huge plays and it's a huge difference between a 10- or 20-yard run to a, whatever, 65-, 85-yard run. Just being able to get out there and take care of guys on that next level.

So I'm proud of all our guys at receiver. I mean, just how them brace that work and that mentality, and then you know, obviously it shows great unselfishness just being able to go and physically do your job when it comes to those times.

Q. Syracuse has recorded a lot of sacks as a defense. Seems like they bring pressure from a lot of different areas. You guys had a couple pass protection issues last week. What challenges do they present?

MIKE NORVELL: It's going to be a great challenge. You're not going to see a team that brings more variations of pressures. Just the different looks from three down to four down to -- they can blitz everybody on the field at some point. It really does -- you have to be great with your eyes. You have to be great with your technique. We had a couple slow reactions where we gave up pressures there the other day.

All in all, I think our offensive line has done a great job throughout the course of the season in being able to protect Jordan and to work to get him time. But the other day, we had a few times that we had pressure on him, and you know, it's opportunities for us to see, to learn and one of them was just a pure bust in communication of assignment. We can't have those in those situations.

But there's very correctible things that we can improve upon and our guys know the sense of urgency because this week you're going to see it all.

Q. Watching that game back, did you see anything you liked from the offensive line in terms of blocking, especially for the run game to open up holes?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I thought they did a great job at the point of contact of being physical, of being able to create space, is one of the things we knew.

You know, last week's opponent, their defensive front, I mean, they were athletic and they were going to try to penetrate with different movements. You saw the week prior of how effective they were in that, and we knew that we had to try to do a great job of creating the space when we had it and make sure that we are playing with our eyes and not behind on blocks. I thought our guys did a really nice job with that. They embraced that challenge and gave Trey some great running room to be able to get to the next level.

That's what allowed receivers to have those impactful moments. Obviously Trey took care of the rest. I thought LT did a wonderful job. He had a couple big runs. His touchdown run was as good as you'll see, just a way to finish. But I thought he ran tough, physical throughout the day. I really liked what the O-line did in being able to present some of those holes.

Q. I have two quick ones. Conrad, what has he shown you as a freshman and what can Saturday do for him as he's continuing to build? And Syracuse offensively, Shrader is obviously well-known but their personnel seems different than what you guys have faced the last couple years.

MIKE NORVELL: Conrad, being able to come in, we talked about him last week. He was coming off of really two weeks, the bye week and last week's practice, where he took some really positive steps.

We knew we were going to get him in. We wanted to make sure that we got to see him in that space, and I thought he played confident in it. You know, there was obviously some things as a true freshman, you get out there, starts moving fast and there was a few things that he's going to have improve upon.

But what I loved is there was no hesitation when it came to when he saw the ball, when he got a chance to go and attack, he definitely did that. Threw his body around. Had the big hit on the swing play and obviously being able to

create the take way there late was big, and I think that's just going to continue to build his confidence and it's just finding the details. Making sure he's on point in all areas of what he can do to continue to get better.

We feel really good about where he's going to be going just as a player and as he continues to mature in the defense and all the things we're asking him to do.

When you look at Syracuse, they have had an injury, Gadsden, the tight end, obviously he's out for the year. He was a great player, but you look at them and they have got great size. When you look outside at the receiver position, wonderful body control, ball skills. They can definitely present challenges. Guys with great long speed. If you let them out and let them get going, they can really stretch the field vertical. They are going to be very balanced in what they can do in the run game. They can attack you in a lot of different ways. Their running backs catch the ball well out of the back field.

And then Shrader is such a challenge. I mean, two years ago when he came here, I think it was one of his first starts there at Syracuse. I mean, he's running just a bootleg, and I mean, he's got 250-pound guys bouncing off him and had some really explosive runs in that game.

Obviously you look at the course of work that he's done over the last couple years, he's a very talented player and can do a lot of great things with his arm. If you account for everybody in the passing game and don't have eyes and a body on him, definitely make you pay as a runner.

Q. An emphasis going into the week was third down, you were 5-of-5 and scored three touchdowns on third downs. Was that the response you wanted to see on third downs?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. We want to make sure that every opportunity we get to convert, we want to convert and some of those times it might be a third down that gets us to a fourth and short and puts us in position.

I know the fourth down conversion with Jordan, it's about continuing to move the chains, and we talked about trying to have -- to keep possession of the ball, to be able to control the ball a little bit. You saw that in the first quarter. Defensively we got three straight three-and-outs and offense was able to put together some drives.

In the second half, didn't really show up as much on that because we had explosive plays, a two-play drive, a one-play drive, so you're not going to get -- I like those, too.

But I thought our guys did a good job of preparing for the

third-down situations and being able to execute in those moments.

Q. Can you talk about the two-point play? Was that a call you were planning on doing throughout the week or you saw a look and were executing from there?

MIKE NORVELL: It's obviously something we practice and prepare for. We had a look that we thought could put us in a decent number count and they defended it pretty well. They had secondary late pressure. We had a lot of space with Brian. I thought Brian, that was a really tough run. We knew we had to try and gain leverage. He did have a pass option off it if it presented itself.

But as he got leverage, he did a great job of being able to lower his shoulder and finishing in the zone. Brian is a high school quarterback, so pretty heavy in the quarterback run game coming out.

So I felt pretty confident when I saw him getting his legs moving that he would find it in the end zone and he did.

Q. Jaheim didn't play a ton in that game Saturday. What went into that and how did you see Kyle and Markeston take advantage of that and the benefit of having three guys that you trust to go out there?

MIKE NORVELL: Jaheim, first off, he was banged up last week, very limited in practice. I appreciate him and just how he was able to prepare to make himself available. We knew he was going to be a very limited snap count. I think he made maybe seven plays in the game.

Being able to get himself to where he can go out there and play, I respected just the work that he put in, and getting rehab, doing all they could in practice. But we knew it was going to be limited.

Kyle, I think Kyle is just continue to go get better. I'm so excited about the growth I've seen from him. To get four catches and was able to do a lot of good things to the blocker. You saw he had a couple blocks with great finishes. Being able to create that space we were talking about earlier.

Markeston did some good things. I think he's continuing to grow as a player in his consistency. Being able to have that core of guys that can attack at the tight end position, it really opens up so many doors for us in what we can do, not only in the passing game but also in the running game, creating gaps, creating leverage, different angles to be able to attack with.

It was definitely a good thing to see those guys continue to



grow.

Q. Was the plan going in to maybe have Jordan run a little more than he had? And then also on his run, something I was just curious about, there's been a couple times where he's ducked down really quickly and he's been hit in the head including the game where the kid got kicked out of the game. Is that what y'all want him to do, or is that something spur of the moment? You don't see a lot of quarterbacks duck down quite as quickly in traffic like he does.

MIKE NORVELL: For Jordan, we had options in that game just like we have in most games for the potential of him to be able to run. Those things presented themselves a few times. Jordan is definitely a dynamic runner as he gets in space, you can make people miss. You saw that show up even a few times yesterday.

But as things are converging down on him, I'm not trying to see how many times he can go try to maybe run over people, so you get what you can get, get down, go to the next play. It's still forcing the defense having to account for him and when you get that, then you see that possibility, because if they don't have somebody on him, you know, I think we have all seen over the years just what he can do in open field and open space.

But when you have teams that have to now account for him, it takes one less hat away from Trey or the running backs or different things that we're doing there. So I'm really pleased with how he's managed the game. I thought he was extremely efficient there the other day, as in the run game and passing game; he playing at such a high level. Just excited about what he's doing.

But yeah, I tell him, if he gets going and he's got multiple guys converging down on him, go ahead and get to the next play. You've already gained positive yards. Let's get to the next one, and let's not take any unnecessary shots.

Q. Wanted to check on a couple other guys that we didn't see much of Saturday. Obviously Bless didn't play and Tatum wasn't available much and how Robert Scott came out of that game?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, Robert came out, you know, it was his first extensive action. I think he played maybe ten plays in the LSU game. He came out of the game even better than what we thought he would. That's going to be really good for him moving forward, and I expect -- I liked what we saw. We were able to use a three-man rotation there. I thought Darius played at a high level there on Saturday. Jeremiah Byers is continuing to grow, continuing to build confidence.

But I like being able to play all three of those guys. Bus was unavailable for the game and we'll see how he progresses throughout the course of this week to see his availability for Saturday.

Tatum, he was close, and he kind of got banged up a little bit the week prior and he was available but we were, you know, it was one of those situations where it could have had a small number count but if we could avoid from having to play him, I mean, then you know, I thought we were going to be in good shape and we were able to do that. I thought Omar Graham, obviously D.J. and Kalen did a great job. But Omar Graham, Blake Nicholson got in, got some good work in Tatum's absence. We're very confident he'll be back and rolling this week.

Q. I was going to ask the same question but I have a follow-up instead. Can you talk about what that means to a person like Nicholson, or Graham who is really young, to get in and play when the game is consequential?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's huge. I think it was Saturday I was asked the question about those guys, you know, the plan to get them in. I'm not going to put anybody on the field that we don't believe can go out there and execute and play at a very high level. There's just too much work and too much investment that's gone in over the years.

And so when guys get on that field, there's a responsibility they have, and there needs to be a sense of urgency for everything that they are doing and how they prepare and how they communicate and the overall execution when the ball is snapped. To see those guys get the earn those opportunities, I'm really proud of.

Have had, I think it was three or four true freshmen the other day that made impactful plays in impactful moments, and you like seeing that. You like seeing those guys get the experience it. Wasn't all right in what they do, their technique and their fundamentals, but you see and you get to address, all right, well, why; how do you get this better, and their ownership of applying those lessons and to be able to continue to grow through the process.

But that experience, it's invaluable for what it's going to mean for their future but also when they are out there, you've got the same responsibility of a fifth-year senior that's been here. You've got to go play at an elite level and it's what makes it challenging but it also forces the maturity for how they need to prepare and what they need to do.

Q. I guess, I don't know if either of them recorded a catch they both seemed to play a decent amount,

Ja'Khi and Kentron, getting back. The timing that have seems pretty good with building the depth in that room with the questions in the week coming with Johnny and Jaheim and obviously the Winston Wright news last night.

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I was really pleased. Kentron probably had as good of spring as anybody that we had. Just so much confidence-building and it was unfortunate he had the injury in fall camp that he was unavailable in the early part of the season.

But seeing him, when he got in there he played fast -- when Johnny went down, like I said, didn't record a catch but he showed the burst and the route running that it was good to see. He blocked really well.

Ja'Khi had a couple missed opportunities there in the game. But what I loved, getting him back out in practice last week, you saw the explosiveness, you saw the play-making ability. Now getting -- building back that confidence there on game day is great, Hill made a huge play, great catch there on a wheel route there. He's continuing to get better in all things that we're asking him to do, and seeing that depth in that room, a lot of guys that have played meaningful snaps that are there, you're able to contribute.

And also seeing -- being able to spread the ball around. I can't remember the exact numbers, eight, nine guys that recorded a catch in the game. I think Jordan is doing a good job when it comes to that and just continuing to build that timing, the confidence and all those guys. Definitely great things for this offense.

Q. Are you able to characterize Winston's decision to leave the program? Did it catch you by surprise? Was it something you guys had been talking about?

MIKE NORVELL: Everybody's got one chance going through this journey. Winston, I love him. He's a great young man. Wish all the best in his future. He's been through challenging situations.

Obviously what he went through last year. It was hard and it was hard for everybody. Having to see him, just the ebb and flow of rehabbing to get back, and it doesn't go necessarily how you want. But ultimately he was back and he was working and continuing to build to increase a role and as we move forward, as I tell all of our players, right, this is very competitive. I mean, you're here at Florida State. Every day is going to be a challenge. You're going to get pushed.

All I ask is whatever your situation, whatever the

circumstance, you pour it all into it. Winston is going to have a great future in front of him. Whatever decision I makes, whether it's to continue on another engineer of eligibility he can utilize; I'm going to cheer for that kid forever. You support him as he makes decisions but no matter where you are, if you can't put all into it or there's other things that are going on, then I support them in whatever they choose to do.

I'll forever love that young man for the journey he's been on and just who he is.

Q. I don't know how many control head coaches have in their schedules, their non-conference schedules. In football, seems like some other sports may be more so. Would you prefer to not have the first month of the season you guys had this year? In terms of like you see some other schools that get basically a month or two or three weeks to work into their tougher games, what challenges does that present when you have a first month like you guys did this year?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, I mean, yes and no. To come out of the gate and play on a national stage, that spotlight, there's a lot of benefits that come to it and just the way that you have to prepare through the off-season, we've already played three conference games.

We've got a stretch here, just really the dynamic of two non-conference games to start, two non-conference to end. When you get in the mix of it is -- I mean, you've got to roll, and especially this year not having divisions, there's no week that -- you can't slip. You've got to bring it every week. Every week you still find out things about your team throughout that journey.

But there's no question, the schedule we had, it challenged us early, which I do think builds confidence. And especially starting off 4-0 or how it was there in the month of September, I mean, it built some confidence of some of the things that we could overcome.

But on the flip side of it, you're still a work-in-progress and we're still on that journey right now of working to get better and you know I think every team is different. Every team has their own dynamics and to start off with the schedule that we did,

I mean, it's definitely hardened our football team, and we know that we've got great talent, we've got great ability, but the growth that's from us can really take us to another level because we've had to do it against good people. You know, I'm excited about where this team and how this team works.

Last night's practice, coming off the win on Saturday, I mean, there was a definite sense of urgency, and we want to fight for our improvement every day and what we're doing. You look at the conference slate, you have a 4-2 Syracuse team that's coming in here that's going to give us everything we have.

Ultimately we have all the respect for them, but it's not about them. It's about us. It's about what we do. It's about how we execute and it's about how we play. I think our guys are buying into that process of just getting better. And it's been the same message regardless of who shows up as our opponent. I think our guys are handling that well but continuing to improve.

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