

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate y'all being here.

Obviously coming off the game on Saturday, a lot of really good film to go back and watch. I was really pleased just with the fight from our players. I thought they really competed for 60 minutes.

Defensively probably our most complete performance that we've had. Just loved the effort, the energy, the physicality that showed up throughout the course of the game.

We knew we were going to see a variety of different looks and potential schemes in the game. I thought our guys did a good job of handling that. Really made it difficult for Syracuse to get anything rolling. Worked to get after the quarterback, not let him get into a rhythm.

I thought our defensive backs did a good job breaking up passes, playing with good leverage, good technique. It was a really good performance by our guys on that side of the ball.

Special teams, we were able to have some game-changing plays within those units. A few mistakes, things we need to clean up. Had a couple penalties that really cost us from just an absolute dominant performance.

It thought Keon's return was a big play. Obviously great to see that starting to show up. Back-to-back weeks with returns of over 30 yards. A lot of confidence that's building within that unit.

I thought Ryan was remarkable. All of his kickoffs were touchbacks. He did a great job kicking field goals. Really proud of him and the strides that he's continuing to make.

Alex was able to flip the field in our punt protection. I thought Ja'Khi Douglas really made a great impact in his coverage. C.J. Campbell, Kalen DeLoach, a lot of guys really showing up with great speed and energy down the field that's helping us in those units.

I was really pleased with the special teams units and how we played.

Offensively I thought we battled throughout. Started fast. Good to see some extraordinary plays that were made. I thought being able to go and get that first touchdown was big.

We had some mistakes that showed up. Not as consistent as I'd like us to be. Had probably the most missed assignments or missed signals or missed communication in that game as much as we had really in any. That was something that as a coaching staff that we've got to do a better job making sure that our guys are ready to go and execute in a lot of different situations. I'm going to take full ownership on that.

But I was proud of our guys, how we responded. That was a challenging defense what we played. A lot of different looks. A lot of pressure packages. Things in the defensive front, I thought we handled it well.

I thought our guys up front did a nice job. It was a defense that came into the game one of the top I think 10 teams in TFLs. We really were able to limit the negative plays we gave up, then still with the explosive plays showing up. I think we had 12 explosive plays for how we count things. That was big for us to be able to do and continue to battle and respond throughout the course of the game.

It was a good team win, one that we're coming out of it, I was pleased. Now being able to jump into this week. It's going to be a fun week. It's going to be one that there's a lot of energy.

Obviously you have all the elements around this game, homecoming game, Seminole Heritage Week, which obviously we take a lot of pride in. Obviously being here, sold-out crowd, prime time, 7:30, Doak Campbell Stadium, two ranked teams. What more can you ask for?

We're playing a really good football team. Duke has had a great year up to this point. They're one play away from being undefeated. You see just the mindset of how they play, what they do. It's impressive. Got a lot of respect for

Coach Elko. Coach Johns, offensive coordinator, we've worked together. It's a very well-coached team with really good players.

They've done a great job in what they're doing. Now we get a chance to go and compete here this Saturday night. So very excited for our players.

You could feel the energy and just the sense of urgency last night in our practice and our meetings. It's a team that's excited to get better. We're seeing some positive strides in that direction. Still things that we get to clean up and go improve upon.

Really proud of our players for what we've done through the halfway point of this regular season, and now it's time to take another step. They're working hard for it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. A couple weeks ago during the bye week, one of the things that Coach Fuller, the defensive players were talking about, was playing well at all times.

MIKE NORVELL: Just continued development. We play a good number of guys defensively. It's a lot of different combinations, communication. Guys developing fundamentally, technique, being able to face a variety of different things.

We have a talented defense. When you have talent, when you have size, speed, athleticism, you're going to see a variety of different ways to try to attack that, to keep you off balance. We've seen it all in the first half of this season. I'm sure there will be some new things that are going to probably be drawn up at some point.

I think our guys have really started to grow in their confidence of the adjustments, what they need to see, what they need to do. How important the finest details of communication are in a split-second moment. Then playing confidently through that.

I think they've really taken some positive strides through that ownership. I was just proud of our guys. Being able to get Akeem Dent back really has been big. Watching Kevin Knowles, Kevin was a guy I pointed out to the football team, him, Shyheim Brown, I thought they did some good things the other day in the game.

You're seeing some emergence of young guys, Conrad, Tatum back at linebacker this week. Seeing just the overall group and depth, those guys are emerging and growing, it's helping us take the steps necessary.

I know the heart that our guys have. We've seen that throughout the course of the year when they have had their backs against the wall and needed to respond, and they have. Now it's about fighting for every yard, just bringing that mindset.

Nothing's going to come easy. We want to make sure that we do all the things necessary to force teams to have to earn it. I think they've done a good job of improving in that area. We've still got some steps that are necessary, some improvement that must occur.

I think our guys have taken a great ownership in that.

Q. You spoke of MA on offense. How much has injuries...

MIKE NORVELL: The offensive line, there weren't very many. There was a handful. We had more things happen on the perimeter. I thought our offensive line group of understanding, for what they were seeing, what we had to go against, I thought they prepared really well. I thought they did a really nice job of being on who we needed to be on.

There's some technique and fundamental things we have to get better at. Probably only a couple plays in the game where it's like, Oh, we missed that. Really, there was more things on the perimeter where it was either a busted route, missed signal, an assignment of who we were going to in a scheme. Things like that showed up in less-than-ideal moments. That hurt us.

But overall I thought our offensive line group, for having to play multiple guys, I've really been pleased for how they have worked through that. You don't like even having a couple of 'em, but I think those guys have done a nice job.

For what we faced, I thought they did a good job in at least understanding who to go to, what we needed to try to work to accomplish. That allowed us to have some success there as the game continued to progress.

Q. On the O-line, they were mixed and matched. Is it difficult at times to know what that five does best?

MIKE NORVELL: As we get into the season, there's an understanding of who and what. It's more a collection of our group in general. There might be a player that does one thing a little bit better than others. But when it comes to the offensive line group, I mean, we try to put our guys in the best position to play collectively as a group and as a unit, playing multiple guys.

I wouldn't say there's a huge difference between player A

or combination A and B and C. They're all growing. I think Coach Atkins does a wonderful job with those guys. They're much like our defense. As we've had the three newcomers that are getting more and more reps with each other. Guys that have been here, we get Bless back this week. He's going to be ready to go. He was very close last week. I think if it was an absolute emergency, he probably could have went in. We'll have him back this week. I think that's going to continue to help us.

We practiced towards the end of the week. We're excited about how those combinations are coming together. Darius went out in the game. We'll see where that goes this week. I think he'll have a good chance.

Obviously it's all part of things that having that depth allows for a lot of different combinations. Our guys embrace that and do a good job with it.

Q. Two defenders, Josh Farmer, Shyheim Brown, have that homegrown, organic talent develop, what does that mean?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, I love it. You sit there and you see guys from within an hour of here, a little plus with Shyheim. To see them come in and make the impact that they're making. Josh Farmer, what a big play. He's impacting the quarterback. Been impactful in the run game. He's playing better and better with each rep that he gets, each game.

What I love is just the mindset of what he's bringing in practice. He's making people around him better, too. You just see him grow throughout the program.

Shyheim Brown really got thrust into a key role this year. He's had a lot of positive moments. He's had his challenging moments, plays that maybe didn't look good or needed to be a little bit better.

His work and his response, I pointed him out as well. Just like I mentioned Kevin Knowles, he's another guy that came in and started as a true freshman. Now you're seeing him grow, being able to play multiple positions in what we're doing.

I like the development I'm seeing on that side of the ball.

I thought our defensive front was really good. Pat Payton was impactful. Jared was impactful. Brayden Fisk, Fabien, all those guys were really doing a nice job in disrupting what they were trying to do.

It's good to see those guys all playing together.

Q. Another defensive player, Omar Graham was up there in snaps this past week. Was that partly because of the nature of the game or...

MIKE NORVELL: Right now obviously we have I'd say the top three, with D.J. Tatum and Kalen. Those guys are doing a great job. Like I said, it was good to get Tatum back there into that rotation.

You see Omar, as he's growing up, a redshirt freshman, he's playing faster. He played earlier in the year and there were a few plays where you saw a little bit of hesitation. In the right place, but maybe not just reacting as quick as what we wanted.

As these last few weeks have gone by, being thrust into it in the Virginia Tech game, but seeing it this last week, I mean, he's doing a really good job. He's a very smart football player. He's got a great sense of the game. He brings speed and physicality into the position. Real proud of him, the reps that he's earning out there with our defense.

Q. Jordan, was it a left hand? Is he all good coming into the week?

MIKE NORVELL: He's going to be good.

Q. Where is Johnny coming into this week?

MIKE NORVELL: I feel very good with Johnny. He progressed really well over the weekend. Able to get reps in practice. Planning on having him rolling here throughout the week.

Q. Duke's defense statistically it's mind-boggling how they play.

MIKE NORVELL: Great (laughter).

Q. What's the strength?

MIKE NORVELL: It's a really good football team in general. You watch them, they're well-coached. They play fast. They're confident with what they're being asked to do. Their defensive front, they roll 10 defensive linemen that can all play.

You look at the standard of good defenses. This is one that you would point to. All 11 guys on their defense tackle, they can run, cover. They're disruptive in the schemes that they present. Got really good pressure packages that challenge offenses.

They just play good. I mean, they're fitting where they're

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

supposed to fit. They tackle when they're supposed to tackle. You can see the confidence in how they play often with each other through the course of a game.

We definitely have our hands full this week and our preparation. These are the games you love being a part of. You love coaching 'em, you love playing 'em. It's going to be a lot of really good players and some fun X's and O's to see who can try to create any type of advantage.

Q. Does the preparation change due to Riley Leonard's ankle injury?

MIKE NORVELL: No, I know he went through pregame in the last game, just wasn't quite ready to go. We're going to prepare for him.

Obviously this last week, the way that they played offensively, hit some big plays, the way they were able to run the football. I know NC State's defense. You sit there and you watch how they were able to attack that. They stayed patient when they needed to be patient. They showed physicality, were able to create a couple big runs that hit, a couple vertical shots down the field.

It was impressive to see the 10 guys rally behind the quarterback. He made plays when he needed to make plays. That's a tribute to the coaching staff, a tribute to the kids they have out there playing.

Their receiver position, they've got some dynamic guys out there on the perimeter. The running backs, I mean, they're a handful. They are really good backs. They're patient, they're tough. I mean, they're physical. If you get them in an open field, they're tough to bring down.

Like I said, there's a reason why they're ranked. It's a really good football team.

Q. For the wide receivers, obviously Johnny Wilson out. You had a couple people, Hykeem Williams late in the game... How did they perform with Johnny out? What do you like from them? With Ja'Khi, how do you rebuild his confidence? He's had a couple struggles in games with drops.

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, for us, guys continue to grow, build confidence through work. We're going to do that with every player that we have. I think that's what you've seen through guys like Hakeem, Destyn. Tron really got a chance to get back in. I don't believe he had a catch in the game. Getting him back in there and rolling. Did some good things when he was out there.

It's always about you're just building it through the work. I

really like our receiver position. I like the depth we have. Darion had a couple nice catches in the game. I see that room pushing to get better. That's where ultimately we don't know what it's going to look like game in, game out, exactly how it's going to play with opportunities and catches and balls, but you got to be ready for them. It's about doing the little things, it's about continuing to prepare and push.

Specifically on Ja'Khi, he's made a lot of great plays in his career here in big-time moments and games. We're excited for him to be able to make a huge impact. He's going to continue to put himself in a position, to prepare, to make that happen.

Q. Back to Duke's defense. Have you gone up against Coach Elko before? Is it just execution or do they do much exotically?

MIKE NORVELL: We have not. This is the first time we've gone against each other.

It's a great combination. I mean, there's times that they'll play base defense. They play with an aggressive mindset in just how they play, what they do, whether it's line movement, whether it's how they fit. It's a well-coordinated approach. They execute really well. They have smart players that react quickly. They're tough, they're physical.

When they decide to blitz, I mean, there's challenges. They try to create an extra number in the run game on most all snaps. They're going to have an edge to their defense. They're going to be fast to fit. They want to be able to contain things. They've got good players to be able to mix it up inside, too.

Like I said, they do things the right way. Ironically Coach Johns and I, we were together there at Memphis. Coach Fuller and Coach Elko, they worked together in their past. There's some unique dynamics just in this game of guys that have relationships over the years.

A lot of respect goes to their staff because I know who they are. My time being around Coach Elko, he's a class act. Whether it's head coaches meetings, you can always understand his perspective of things because it's well thought out, usually very like minded individual.

Q. Is Keon in all ways even more than you thought when you were getting him? You had fun with your sprinting on the sideline with the punt return. What got you so excited about that?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, Keon, I mean, we knew that we were going to get a special player. You see the flashes.



He had a good year last year, previous institution. You saw that. It was kind of like with Johnny. When we first saw Johnny, Wait, I see how this guy can fit into this offense. It was something I felt great about. You get to know them, understand the work ethic, understand the passion and desire for more.

Being real, when he was coming, Hey, Keon, this punt return deal. We didn't talk about that. That wasn't a part of the conversation. But there was an opportunity there. Somebody that loves to work, somebody that wants to make an impact. I love seeing every time he gets the ball in his hand, that's another opportunity to impact it.

When it comes to our punt return game, we've been looking for that spark. I think we've done a good job throughout the year for the most part fielding things. We had the big return, 30 yarder against Virginia Tech that was a great spark. When you see him get out in the open field... I know the work our players put in. I love seeing the celebration.

When he got into the open field, all you saw was garnet jersey. Thought I'd join him, get down there as fast as I could. It's exciting. I love it. I love seeing our players. When you know the work, the preparation, then you see the way that it can play out...

Yeah, I mean, glad I didn't run into somebody (smiling).

Q. You guys week to week continue to handle your business, very similar to the teams that are ahead of you in the polls. What have you done to insulate your guys from feeling this pressure? Most folks in this program haven't been a part of a team that's had this kind of pressure.

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, I think it's about us. I said that a year ago, two years ago. Just the way you go through continuing to grow. I mean, there's always going to be pressure. If you don't play good, there's going to be pressure on that end. If you are playing good, there's going to be pressure to continue improvement and getting better.

Just focus on the things that you can control. We go out there every day and we have an opportunity to push to be our best. If we choose to go and give everything that we have to that, if we choose to prepare at an elite level, you're going to put yourself in a pretty good position for that to show up on game day.

I've said this to y'all before: hard work does not guarantee success, but it does put you in the best position to achieve it. With that, that's what I want for our players. You go and

pour it all into it. You get one opportunity, one chance.

Do I think there's players that feel the pressure? Oh, man, we're 6-0, here we go, we got to do this, this. Yeah, it's human nature to want to continue. But ultimately it's still about you can't get focused on the outside and the exterior. If you're willing to give your attention to that, the pressure that comes with that, you're going to miss out on the opportunity to grow and get better throughout the journey, the week, the game.

There's going to be bad plays in a game, disappointing moments that show up. You're going to get knocked down, have all of those things. When you can truly stay in the moment, not start thinking about the consequences, go get better, play the next snap, do the things necessary, I think that gives you a chance to be in the moment.

That's what I've asked of this team. I've been asking them of that for the last four years. I'm going to be asking them for as long as I get to coach. That's because I believe that's what helps you continue to grow and get better.

We've got a team that believes in that. I really, really think they're handling it in a good way. We still have to get better because there's plenty of distractions out there, there's plenty of noise out there. Sometimes the noise comes from within.

We've got to make sure that we're doing the things that we can do just to continue to grow.

Thank you, guys. Have a great day.

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