

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 23, 2023

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



COACH NORVELL: Good morning, appreciate you all being here. Coming off the game a little bit on Saturday, really proud of our team for the way they battled. It was a game that had momentum swings. It was a hard-fought contest.

We knew going into it playing a talented team and we saw that, the way that they competed defensively, there were some things that they did that were challenging to face.

But I thought offensively did a really good job, had balance. We stayed consistent in trying to establish the run. And then we knew as the game progressed we would have opportunities to hit some big plays.

I thought it was a really good job by our offense being able to execute and just the response that they had throughout the course of the game.

There were a couple of fourth downs we didn't make and obviously we had the turnover there early. But other than that, I thought our guys did a great job. Scored touchdowns on three of four second-half possessions. Really able to establish some long drives, which is challenging against a good defense.

But I thought Jordan was remarkable. Especially in the second half, really just did a wonderful job with his arms, legs, decision-making and all things.

Defensively we didn't start off the way we wanted. The ball got to the edge a few times on the defense. Gave up a couple of explosive runs. There were some challenges and adversity that showed up where we've got to be better at making sure we do have an edge, and whether it's fighting off blocks, a couple times you guys were restricted.

And I thought it made it even that much tougher, but at the end of the day I thought our defense played an exceptional game.

It was a tough, physical team. Their offensive line, they've done a good job. They're leading the ACC in rushing. We

knew that would be a challenge. I thought their backs were really good, as advertised, what we expected.

I thought our defensive backs did a really nice job being able to kind of contain a couple of talented receivers they had.

Special teams, so proud of our guys. The kickoff return for a touchdown, something that we've been emphasizing, working to see it all come together -- Rodney on the one before was really close to break it on his first return.

And then after the pick-6, it was a momentum swing, but what an incredible response. And the blocking of the 10 other guys was really impressive. Some great effort from guys there.

And then when Deuce got in the open field he trusted it, he hit it, and impressive to see him take it back 99 yards for a big play in the game.

And our crowd was remarkable. You have three straight home games, three straight sellouts. And that was really a special atmosphere. It was a prime time game, homecoming, Seminole heritage celebration -- all those things kind of put into that game. And it was just a remarkable atmosphere and something I'm definitely grateful for all of our fans, and just what that meant for the university and to be able to put the best of Florida State on showcase for the world to see.

As we go into this week, we get to go back on the road playing a Wake Forest team, coming off a hard-fought victory, one they showed a lot of toughness. They had a few games where they'd struggled previously.

To see them battle and to be able to come back and win that game the way they did shows a lot of heart. I know it's going to be a confidence boost for them. It's a very well-coached team. It's a defense that's playing at a very high level, especially the last few weeks.

They attack. They show multiple looks. A lot of different things. The guys play really hard. Two of the better safeties in our league, in how they play. And then

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obviously they're looking to make an impact. I think they had nine or 10 tackles for loss last week.

You see some of these last few weeks, teams are very aggressive in their approach and mindset of what they do schematically and that doesn't change this week.

So offensively they're down, I think their third quarterback last week. And he did a great job and being able to come in and just try to work and operate throughout the system. Had a two-minute drive to take them down to score at the end.

What to expect this week, we're going to obviously plan for their starting quarterback. Mitch Griffis, I know he was day to day for this last week. We'll plan for him and be able to adjust to whatever shows up and whatever the situation is.

They've got talented receivers. What they do schematically offensively is really tough, just with the slow mesh read, it's something that's unique to their program, is really unique to college football and how they operate it.

We know we've got our hands full and need a great week of preparation. But for us it's about continued improvement. That's what we talked to the team about last night.

I'm glad to be able to say it each Monday, but I love the approach and urgency from our guys. Last night's practice, they came in. They went to work. They're battling to get better. And we're going to need to see that here this week.

As you look across college football, if you don't bring it every week, you put yourself in a position to be exposed. And ultimately we're focused on ourselves, continuing to get better, but I've been proud of our guys how they've approached that process of getting better.

Q. I knew a lot of us were focusing on Jordan running late in that game. But looking back at the game, he seemed like he had a great game throwing the football and all the different throws and different places he attacked. But did you guys also feel like, because the way Duke was playing defense, you might have to use him as a runner?

COACH NORVELL: We knew going into it -- they do such a good job of fitting the run and they're going to have edges. They're going to make sure their numbers are right. So sometimes the way to get that back is to have to incorporate the quarterback some or to force another read to where maybe he could be protected in the run game.

It played out well. We knew that Jordan would have

opportunities. And however many that was throughout the course of the game, I knew once we got in the second half, it was something we really wanted to push towards a little bit more. We were able to do that.

I know the 95-play drive, some things are reads, which -- there was one time it was a safety blitz and the safety came to play the running back which gave Jordan a soft edge to be able to run. That was good. And Jordan trusted his read, trusted what he saw.

But there's also times that we are trying to create the opportunity for him and to give him some space. I thought he did a wonderful job with that as well.

We have those components in each game. And some games it's needed more than others. But he played -- he was lights out. There was a couple of missed throws -- I say misconnections, because we had to throw early, just he put the ball right where it needed to be.

I thought there were a few times where, at receiver, where we've got to continue to push to the mark. And that was something that's a rhythm and timing thing. But I thought he was lights out in how he played.

Q. I guess Fabien stood up at halftime and said something. I don't know how demonstrative it was. But for him in general his growth as a young man since he got here and to now in this program?

COACH NORVELL: I think that's one of the things, you see his investment in the program. And I wasn't in there at the time. We were doing coaches adjustments.

But I think that's one of the things I love about this team is you see the passion and the care that they have because they've worked so hard. They want the same thing. They want their best to be put on display.

And to be willing to step up say that, anybody can say words but are your actions going to follow up with that? I thought Fabien played one of his better games. Was impactful. You could see him continue to get better as the season's going on.

But that's one of the things as an entire team you hope to see guys that have that ownership, have that buy-in, are willing to step out there with how they play and what they do and what they're willing to invest. And then when they speak, people will listen.

You have to earn that, I guess, how you're received from all those messages.

And I think Fabien's done that. He's continuing to work at a high level. He's pushing himself. He's really hard on himself, too, and some of the things where he knows he can be better. And I think that's one of the reasons why you're seeing that progress.

Q. Jordan talking to him after the game, you talked to him about his meeting with you after the Syracuse game, the night after the Syracuse game. How did that come about? Was that a mutual -- you talked about finding the fun in the game. But there was a lot of pressure comes with his role and kind of finding the fun. How did you see it benefit him all last week leading up to that game?

COACH NORVELL: As we go through the season, you try to find each week is different guys that I will talk to and different things that I see. I just thought it was a good time midway through the season.

It's easy to get caught up when you're 6-0 and you ride the wave and this is what we're doing and everything's going good.

But if you see opportunities to get better, you have to get better. And I know Jordan puts a lot on himself, and it's what makes him really good and it also, sometimes it can -- that can catch up with you.

I love the way he's been playing, but I just thought it was a good point, midpoint through the season, six games into it, just to have a reminder, these are things, areas where I think we can continue to get better. But also just a reminder of go out there and be you.

And each win, each week, all circumstances you're going to face, there's going to be pressure that's going to be there. That's part of college football. If you don't, I've said it many times, if you don't embrace that, this is definitely not the place for you.

But we go and we put a lot into it. But I don't ever want to see a guy -- and this is a team in general -- I talked to the team about this -- I don't want to see you go through a season and have all the success in the world but not enjoy it.

Going out there Saturday night, one of the points I told the guys, you go start that legacy walk. You take a moment. You look around. It was unbelievable walking through our fan base there before the game.

Then you get out on the field, that was a special atmosphere. And I just want them to receive all of that and to enjoy that and to not get caught up in just the game.

Take all of it in. Go have fun playing this game that you worked so hard for.

Q. Questions about the fourth down. Fourth-down calls. On the first one with Jordan, it's a QB sneak but he doesn't go straight ahead. He kind of goes to the left a little, which he's done before. But if had he gone --

COACH NORVELL: He made the right decision on -- the guy knifed in. We were a little bit late getting off in one position, and they stemmed the gap defense. If you go straight ahead, there's not a whole lot of room to get there.

Guy came through, grabbed his foot. His knee got down just half an inch before he had the first down. It's one of those things that ultimately -- would I do it again? Absolutely.

And he made the right decision. Sometimes, if you go left, you go right. It's all kind of part of it. But we came up a couple inches short.

Q. Would you do it again from your own 36?

COACH NORVELL: I think all things -- as you go into a game, you're trying to maximize each drive. We have fourth and one. The numbers speak to yes. Early in the game, yes. I feel like that's one of those things, you're up, you're down.

Obviously all those things you take into it. We're down seven. I felt good about what we have. We don't execute it very well, and we get a TFL in that situation.

But I still felt good about the decision and ultimately it was a three-point swing. Our defense did a good job. They went out got a stop. Forced a long field goal. They executed.

But we're trying to maximize the possessions we have. That's one of the things, you look in college football, I mean, especially playing really good teams, you've got to capitalize on them.

Now, there's been times that I've been fourth-and-one situations and I've punted the ball. It's like it all equates to the game. But in that moment, I felt confident in what we would do. Obviously that did not play out. But also our defense did a good job kind of having our back and really holding it to three and forcing a long field goal, and our guys were able to overcome that.

Q. Adding on to that, you guys were really good third-down red zone. What do you think the key was

against a really good third-down team, good red-zone team?

COACH NORVELL: Our guys did a great job in their preparation, their planning. Part of the reason why I felt pretty good about some of those fourth-down decisions, it's a big-picture balance.

But I liked our plan in that situation. I thought our guys did a really good job in the way that they worked. And we're good in third downs. We're good in the red zone. And sometimes you go good on good and you've got to go out there and execute. Our guys executed at a high level. I think that was one of the keys to the game.

We talked to the guys last night about our objectives. Our defense did a great job in third downs, third- and fourth-down situations we did a really good job in third-down situations, not so much fourth. And then when you got down in the red zone, we held them to one field goal and two attempts.

And obviously we were 4-for-4 with three touchdowns when we got down there. That's one of the differences in the game.

Q. On that Jordan Travis interception, what was he looking for? What did you see when you rewatched that play and was there something he could have done differently there?

COACH NORVELL: Not really. They dropped eight. He had time. Went through the progression. Had a window. Sometimes when teams drop eight, there's going to be -- anytime the teams drop eight there's going to be tighter windows.

We thought we had opportunity there. The defensive back did a good job. Ball kind of got tight in on Keon. And obviously it popped up in the air.

Do we want to be better? Yes, we do. And a couple other elements to technique, things that we could do better. But it wasn't, coming off, it wasn't like, oh, this was a terrible decision or this was that.

Their guys did a good job rallying to make a play. We got the ball into a tight space. Obviously didn't work out. We'll be better moving forward.

Q. Three straight home games for you guys and the atmosphere you had on Saturday, what kind of impact does that have on recruits and for them to see it on TV? And how is that platform help?

COACH NORVELL: It means everything for that. We've had three straight weeks, a lot of great -- recruits being here. And being able to see what it is, a game-day environment, to be able to be a part of this program. Had a lot of guys make multiple trips, coming back.

They see the importance of Florida State football. They see you've got three straight sell-outs, whether it's afternoon game -- obviously the night game was remarkable, but they see the passion around this program. They see the platform they get to be on.

It's awesome when it comes to that experience for a young man trying to look at the places that he would want to be at. And it's definitely made a great impact.

Q. On the Lawrance Toafili touchdown, the screen pass. You were super excited like I'm sure everybody was. But was it as much about the play call and how it worked, or was it just the circumstances in getting that score? And also could you just talk about Lawrance and how you kind of define him? He's not like somebody has to have the ball 20 times a game but seems like he makes a big impact --

COACH NORVELL: I'll give you a multi-layer response. Yes -- to all in the first question.

To see the players execute in that moment, you could kind of get a sense that we were pushing to -- you start seeing more pressures, pops.

To be able to have a play call that was good into a situation, but then for the unbelievable execution. What I loved as much as anything on that play, the effort. Because I told our team after the game, I think I may have said something in postgame, go watch Markeston Douglas on that play.

He's away from the play, does a great job, kind of a speed sweep action to Keon. A little bit we handled the speed sweep earlier. You see a little bit of the pull, but Markeston comes all the way back across the field and has the last block to be able to allow Lawrance into the end zone.

You look at the offensive linemen out in the way, that gets me fired up when I see that because I know practice, how much time we put into it.

Jordan does a good job drawing the rush. Lawrance does a great job getting out. A guy comes to grab him. He avoids it. And then you finish in the end zone. That's beautiful. It is a wonderful thing as a coach.

Yes, situation, yes, now you go up -- gonna be up 11 or a

chance to be up 11 with the extra point, but all of that is the emotion.

And for what Lawrance does -- how do you describe him? A playmaker, whatever you ask him to do. He was covering punts as a gunner. He's been on our punt-pressure team, just whatever it takes, running back, what he does at receiver, blocking, protections.

He had a couple of past pros in the games that I thought were awesome. Whatever we ask him to do, he's such a playmaker. And you see the physical development in his body.

He's been great throughout his career in space and this and that. But you see the total package really starting to emerge. And whether it's big runs in the run game, whether it's catches out of the backfield, lining up at receiver, whatever he's asked to do he's been really, really good at kind of embracing his versatility.

But he's still growing in it. He's building more confidence in the things as he's grown physically.

Q. Do you foresee Destyn and Johnny being available this week or anytime soon? If not, maybe talk about the receivers that have to step up in -- why you have depth in wide receivers.

COACH NORVELL: We'll see. I can tell you Johnny was in a really good place yesterday coming out of the game. Destyn got more work yesterday in practice than what he did in the previous week. Excited to see kind of where those guys go as the week progresses.

But it does open up new opportunities. And it's good that we have depth in that position. It's good that we see guys being able to get quality reps throughout the course of the game. Now it's just elevating the production.

We never know what it's going to look like. Coming into the last game, Duke did a really nice job of trying to take multiple guys to focus on the outside guys and I don't even know how many catches, tight ends, running backs, they were awesome in the game. And they took advantage of the opportunities that came their way.

It's the same thing at receiver position or running back, when you get into the game -- Cazia Holmes had a touchdown at running back, Rodney had a touchdown -- when you get in a game you've got to make it count.

And I obviously love our depth at receiver -- Darion, Kentron, Ja'Khi -- getting him continuing to get ramped up -- Hykeem Williams, those guys -- Deuce Spann, that was

big -- I loved watching Deuce last night. He was bouncing with a different step. Sometimes those big plays can do that for you.

Dre Jacobs, another true freshman that hasn't really been forced into the action -- has played a little early. But he's a guy that continues to get better. Gotta grow and emerge.

I'm excited about what that group is and hopefully we have Destyn and Johnny rolling here this week because it keeps us at full strength. But if not, it's new opportunities for other guys. And we've got a talented group.

Q. On Jordan's touchdown run I know Jaheim was the lead block for him, he was waving him in before he laid a big block that paved the path totally for Jordan. That's not why you brought Jaheim here, to be the blocker, but how have you seen him grow in that role?

COACH NORVELL: That's actually one of the reasons why he's here. We saw a guy that was very talented with the ball in his hand. Very explosive player. I wanted him to be a complete player.

The fact that he's embracing that role, like that is about growth. Yes, Jaheim does wonderful things with the ball -- you see his play-making ability; you see all that. But why a guy comes here is to get better.

And we saw a young man that had tremendous athletic ability, tremendous explosiveness. He didn't know how powerful he could be. And I thought that showed up in the game a few times where it's just like, man, I was very, very proud of him in that.

There's so many guys that are out there. Johnny Wilson coming in a few years ago, it wasn't just because of all the catches that he had had at previous institutions -- oh, this is going to be the next great receiver.

I want to make sure when somebody comes here that, yes, does Florida State get better? Absolutely, but do they get better? Do they improve? Do they have an opportunity to grow and be all that their potential is?

And I think you see that with Jaheim. And that's what excites me about seeing a guy that comes in and buys into something that might not be a whole lot of fun. Sometimes the things that you get asked to do -- but he's now embracing it where it is something that he's seeing it as his strength.

Yes, I think it adds to a level of versatility of what he brings. Just definitely makes him a more dynamic weapon with or without the ball.

Q. After the game, Braden talked about the good chemistry in that locker room and the pieces you were able to bring in. Obviously the transfer portal, you've been very sort of meticulous about bringing in guys that have multiple years. But a guy like Braden only has one year left. What kind of value is it that a guy played so much football and has kind of sold out and buying into your guys' vision?

COACH NORVELL: Braden's been remarkable. Very similar mindset to what Jermaine had when he came here -- the program is a different place than -- we had more like-minded individuals, that Braden's come into that group. But it's still the same impact. Like he wants to be great for his teammates.

I mean, he's in this building as much as probably any human being. He utilizes every resource. He's there to build relationships with his teammates because it was a very similar story.

Yes, this is a one-year deal, but if it's just about the on-the-field, if it's just about what that's going to look like, then it's probably not the best place for you.

He's like, Coach, I want to come in and make a positive impact on all things -- the culture, the teammates, the experience, what it means to be a Florida State Seminole.

If you watch him play and you watch the relentless effort and pursuit and physicality, the celebrations with teammates, all that, we're getting all of Braden Fiske. And we're trying to help give all that we have to help him to continue to grow.

But that's what you want. You want guys that buy into the total experience of what it is to play football here. And I think he's done a great job with that. He's continuing to get better.

But we've got a great team. I say we've got a great team because of the character of the guys we have. And he's definitely added to that.

Q. You alluded earlier to how much attention they were placing on stopping Keon, slowing down Keon and Johnny. With that in mind, how impressed were you with just the desire from Johnny on some of those catches? He made a few catches where it was like he just decided nobody else was going to get it.

COACH NORVELL: I've seen Johnny miss a game, but he's played at a very, very high level. Had a couple of opportunities earlier in the year that maybe he caught but

just didn't finish on there when the ball got to the ground and all those things.

You see him playing, I think, at an elite level. He's really done some great things in practice and the way that he's pushing. I'm so proud of him for the positive strides that he's taken. That's what you want.

When you have go-to guys, they get opportunities. You want to see them capitalize on those. He's definitely trying to leave his mark every time the ball comes his way.

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