

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, October 30, 2023

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate you being here. Obviously just wrapping up Saturday's game, going back and watching the film of the game and the way that we performed, I was really proud of the team. I know I said I was proud of them after the game. That was really mindset, approach, but being able to go back and watch the way we played, I thought it was fast, it was physical.

You know, we had our mistakes that showed up and obviously things to improve upon, but I was proud of the way that our guys played. Told them that yesterday. You saw a passion and intensity throughout the course of the game. Defensively we had about three plays that every one of them count, but really three plays that kind of stood out where we have to be better. We had one bust in coverage that allowed a seven cut. They did a nice job on another route concept that allowed an explosive play. And then obviously we had the misfit in a run game that we just have to be better at, and gave up a big run.

But I was really pleased with the way our guys battled. We had too many penalties in the course of the game. Some things are technique that we can be better at; other things are -- we just continue to push to control all the things that we can control, but when you have nine penalties, it's obviously too many. In close games, it definitely can cost us. It hurt us in a few drives defensively and offensively with what we were trying to do.

I thought our third down defense and third down offense was extraordinary. Our defense was aggressive throughout. Impacted the quarterback. Officially how many, six sacks? Okay, we're at six sacks, which was great.

Great to see that type of impact that we were able to make. I think it was ten TFLs, which was an outstanding performance and plenty of explosive plays that were made.

I thought our defensive back field did a great job in coverage. Like I mentioned we had the one bust, but they were in position, really forced the quarterback to have to hold the ball a few times, which allowed the rush to get

home.

I mean, it was just a really, really impressive effort. Offensively a lot of explosives. It was great to see. They pressured as much as they had pressured throughout the course of the year. I thought we handled that. They did some good things in their run game. I mean, still coming out of that game, I know I complimented their safeties at the beginning of the week, but the other two outstanding safeties, they did a wonderful job making open field tackles. They were involved in the run game. Really added an extra hat into the box.

You know, opened up opportunities in the passing game, and I thought Jordan did a really good job of taking what they were giving us. We got a few one-on-one opportunities that I know Keon was able to take advantage of. Jaheim had a big play. Kyle Morelock with the big play. Saw some the other receivers that were able to be impactful.

I thought Jordan distributed the ball really well, had multiple receivers that made an impact, and then we were -- the running game found its time and its moments, and I thought we did a good job with it.

Obviously each game plan is gonna be different, and we knew we wanted to try to attack and spread the field as much as possible. You know, we anticipated that we would see some pressure, and just to try to just disrupt the run game. I thought we did a good job keeping a fair balance with that, but it did create the opportunity for the explosives.

I was proud of our guys for that. We did have the one ball that got to the ground, and then there was -- we had a couple guys slip in situations on a couple of Jordan's passes that, one, Keon slipped down and was a near interception, and then there was one thing technique-wise on our route we got to be better at.

We did not turn the ball over in that game. We were 50% on third downs. You know, unfortunately we did go into the red zone once and not come away with points. You know, was Ryan's first miss of the season. Even on that, we had

a touchdown opportunity that we got to finish on in that drive.

But I thought our guys responded well. Special teams once again was a big benefit for us. I thought Deuce Spann, once again showing the confidence that he's growing in the return game. I thought our kickoff coverage was fantastic, just they way that the guys were working down the field.

Our punt coverage, you know, I thought our guys covered really well. We got some things we can be better at when it comes to our punt, and then obviously another impactful punt return. Proud of guys special teams-wise for how they're competing. It allowed us to go and have a dominant performance on the road. This week, another road trip at a place that is a challenge to play.

As you sit there and you just look historically, even this year, you got to go and you got to play at a very high level. This is a football team that is -- it's going to be tough. It's going to be physical. They're going to be aggressive. I think each week I get up and say the same things about defenses that like to blitz and attack. We found another one.

Coach Narduzzi does a wonderful job defensively and being able to create challenges for opposing offenses and what they do; historically has been such an impactful defense.

I mean, this last game was really an anomaly for them with the lack of TFLs or sacks in the game, but you still were able to create a couple takeaways. They're one of the top defenses in the country in those statistical categories.

You know, we've seen them play at a very high level. Offensively they went through a quarterback change midway through the season, so you're working to feel that out. You seen them play at a high level. I know when they played Louisville I think they scored 38 points against a really good team.

As they've continued kind of growing and forming that identity of who they are, we know they want to run the football. That's something in their DNA. That's what they want to be. They got some guys that can really run on the outside and obviously the quarterback that's shown potential.

That's something that we have got to, just like each week, focus on us, making sure we're doing our job, being disciplined, and growing in the areas that we need to continue to grow. Special teams will be a big part of this game as we go up.

You know, it's truly another week and another opportunity where we have to grind away at it and go get better as a football team in all the things we're doing.

Excited about the opportunity that is ahead. Looking forward to the week of preparation.

Q. If you take away scrambles and sacks, you guys were throwing the ball much more than running it compared to maybe last year. Is that something coming into the year seeing your quarterback, skill players, that was an idea it might be or is that just...

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, a little bit of both. I mean, I like our offense. I like what we were able to do. I think we got playmakers on the perimeter. Sometimes when you sit there and you look at it, there were a couple of run plays where there were throws because of what we got.

I mean, you know, we're pretty close in a sense of if you call a screen pass, what is that? What is that necessarily going to be? Sometimes that's an opportunity to get a five-yard outside zone that might pop and turn into something more, or you sit there and it's just a balance of where you're trying to attack on the field.

Ultimately we're going to do everything we can to score as many points as we can to put ourselves in a position to win a game, but I do like the personnel we have. I like the potential we have in the run game.

Now, if people are going to stack the box, bring safeties in, you have to be able to take advantage of one-on-one opportunities only the perimeter.

Try to keep them off balance. Whenever you can soften them up, it does open up things in the run game and allow our backs to be able to have space. Whether it's Jordan being a part of that, whether in the read game, or whatever that might be.

So it's kind of both. Yes, we like the receivers that we have. We've liked some of the matchups we've got. Then on the flip side of it, some of it is what we're almost being forced a little bit in situations to do because of looks that we're getting.

Q. Some of the numbers for the pass game on defense are really top notch nationally. It's been a thing all season, specifically last month. Seems like it keeps getting better and better. What's working so well about your pass defense right now?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I think it's a combination of all

three levels. You know, early in the year we had some communication things. We had some technique things that we had to clean up. I think our guys have really spent a lot of time, Coach Fuller, Coach, Surtain, Coach Shannon, because it really good work at all levels of how you're trying to defend and cover different concepts or routes, whether it's man or zone.

I think those guys have done a really good job building their confidence of what we want to do, and then whether it's man or zone, our guys are competing at a high level. I think we had six pass breakups the other day. Our corners are playing physical. Safeties doing a good job in coverage.

You know, obviously when you have a pass rush and can put pressure on a quarterback, that's going to definitely help, and I think our guys are, in all three phases, embracing what that needs to be and what that looks like.

So I'm really pleased with the growth we've seen, but I think there is still more steps that we can take as we continue to get better.

Q. Coach, you had another opening drive score. Can you take me through the preparation of writing the script through the week and why the opening drives have been so successful throughout the year?

MIKE NORVELL: We actually don't start our script until really Thursday. We'll do a Thursday, Friday look at it; sometimes it'll change. It's something I've done throughout my career of being an offensive coach. Just I like to have a sequence. I like to have a thought.

Sometimes, like I said, it could change and there, are plenty of times we'll go on it and, hey, you might have however many plays in your thought process, but if you see something early you go to it early.

Other things, you might tell a story. Might be setting up things for later on down in the game. That's one of the fun parts. As an offensive staff everybody plays a part in that.

So we have our routine of how that comes about, and just fortunate to have good players that can execute at a high level. As we go in we try to put them in the best position to have an early productive start. They've done a really nice job of executing that.

Q. On the wide receiver depth chart, guys expected back this week, how do you feel about that room coming about and getting a few of those guys back?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, we'll see where it goes throughout

the week. Obviously last week being down three really good players, you know, Johnny and Destyn have both been starters throughout the course of the year. Hykeem has probably ascended as much as any player, but having those three guys out gave new opportunities.

One of my favorite plays in the game was Kentron's early first drive, one-on-one coverage. Great throw by Jordan, great route. Having an explosive play there on the first drive was big.

Unfortunately the other one was called back due to a penalty. I thought that was big for him. To be able to see Ja'Khi, we talked about him. Ja'Khi has made so many great plays here throughout his first few years coming off the injury, just working to get back. Hit a big post route in the middle of the field that got tripped up, or I think he would've scored on that. But it was good to see him get into that rhythm and obviously have some production there.

But we're excited about the guys that have stepped up. Darion had a catch later in the game. The tight ends, the mix of our personnel of what we're able to do has really been good.

But ultimately if you get those guys back, just helps with depth, being able to keep guys fresh, being able to utilize all the skills. I think as we're looking into this week, as it gets a little bit further down we'll have a better clue of the availability. I know Johnny was out yesterday and got a chance to get some practice in. We'll see what that looks like as his week progresses.

I know Destyn and Hykeem are both going through their process, and you'll see what that looks like as we get to Tuesday.

Q. During your time as a head coach, typically your teams have gotten better as the season's gone on. Is there any methodology or reason for this specifically?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, yes. You know, it's about the work. It's about the -- we go Coach Storms and myself, Jackson Schafer, sports science, we sit down in the off-season and try to go through every element of how we practice, how we structure things, what is that going to look like as the season goes on.

But it truly is about mindset, improvement, technique, fundamentals, continuing to build upon the things that allow you to get better as the season progresses. Still comes down reps, and we want to be as confident in what we're doing and what we're facing and seeing.

That's one of the things that is good, is that early in the



season there was some ugly looking plays, whether it's coverage or whether it's an offense-defensive play that -- you get to learn through those experiences. If you miss out on those opportunities, then you get stuck kind of where you were.

But our guys, they do a great job in taking ownership to the mistakes that are made, but then working to the correction and the application of how to improve that as we continued to move down the season.

That's something that we've held true to over the years, and when you get to November, that's where you want to be playing your best ball. As it continues to go on, you want to continue to grow from there.

Our guys, they put in an awful a lot of work. They're trained extremely well. We lift hard throughout the course of the season so we're stronger at the end than we were at the beginning. I think that's something that I know I mentioned these last few weeks of practice, you see it in explosive efforts. Speed, the physicality.

I mean, Trey Benson gets in the open field and he's really fast here. Deuce Spann, you've seen some of these guys. Keon. When you get out there and you run, I thought Kalen DeLoach on the one play, you look at Kalen DeLoach and Conrad Hussey on the run that broke, these guys were flying to just give us another snap. That that's something that's encouraging to see, that guys are getting better as the year is going on because of the way they train.

Yeah, it's always about the work.

Q. You put a big emphasis on special teams and in the return game since you've been here and throughout your career. Now seems like, I don't know, can it become contagious when the team sees what good returns can do and how important they are for just the course of the game?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. It all comes down to buy-in and ownership. That's where even in the game Saturday there was a punt return where, I mean, we were ten guys on point and just a little technique or fundamental that could have been better, I think we would've had a chance to score another one.

You know, but you sit there, and what I love -- we had a special teams meeting yesterday coming out of the game, and you sit there and when we're in our special teams meeting, the intent of our players, I mean, some of our best players, it's awesome.

We had I think 41 to 16 in the game and we are out there, we run out and we were forced to punt. Renardo Green is out there as one of our gunners. I mean, Renardo Green, Jarrian Jones, Ja'Khi Douglas, Lawrance Toafili, those are our gunners on punt. To see them -- Azareye'h Thomas has done a really nice job. I mean, 41 to 16, Renardo is jumping out there to go cover a punt. That gets me excited as a head coach, because you see buy-in and ownership of guys wanting to be better.

Jarrian Jones has been awesome in special teams this week. Ja'Khi Douglas, remarkable. You see those guys, and then in the return game, I mean, it's been each week you see the growth, the development, guys that are buying in on it. Our coverage units on kickoff, that's where like you see the fundamentals and the things that you work and invest so much time on. When that shows up on film you know they're listening and applying and it matters to them.

So we're not a finished product when it comes to that, but you see buy-in and so, yes, the confidence does show up, but it's not just in the run game. It's in all units that we know -- as we saw in the Virginia Tech game. We were able to respond from it, but, man, that was a big hit.

But what do we do to improve from there? I think the last couple weeks, our guys have done a remarkable job. Yeah, we learn from all those experiences but definitely builds confidence.

Q. Earlier you addressed the improvements in the secondary. Statistically it's obvious. At the same time, your defensive front, they're statistically not so good as you would think they might be. Is that because you're playing with a lighter box, or --

MIKE NORVELL: In what regards? Are you saying like pure...

Q. Statistically.

MIKE NORVELL: So sacks?

Q. No, rush defense. Defense against the run.

MIKE NORVELL: When you look at it, we gave up a 51-yard run, which was not something that you want to have. But I think our guys have played well up front, and for us, you look at -- there were some times early in the season, like we know we played Boston College and they had over 200 yards on third and long situations.

That was not good.

Some of those were quarterbacks draws, counter -- things



that were huge and impactful in that game, and there has been times where we played I guess four of the Top 5 rushing quarterbacks early in the season that really gave some challenges, and we faced some good running teams and all those things show up.

When you look at yards per play, per rush, we're getting better as the season is going on. Yes, we don't want to give up any explosive plays in the run game. We want people to earn everything they get. I think we're growing in that, and our guys are continuing to work hard to improve in all those areas.

Q. On the plays for -- I guess there were two of them -- one with Byron Turner and DJ Lundy that were penalized. Both had positive stops for you guys. What can you teach them to make sure those positives don't become negatives?

MIKE NORVELL: You know, we addressed it as a team. We can play with lower hands. That's a focus. I mean, Byron, he gets the shoulder first, but the hand does get high. So you give an official to make a judgment call.

I mean...

What I feel about the call is what I feel about the call.

Now, with DJ's, we want to see knock-back. We want to see guys -- because if you don't, that's going to work the other way. Early in the game, we hit a running back, we stop, and momentum stopped. If you don't take him to the ground and they keep moving forward, they're going to continue to allow the play to play. Which is fine. It's great.

Now, in DJ's you see a push to the ground. They called that excessive, so learn from it. Let's not be excessive. We got to finish plays. When the whistle blows, stop.

But we got to stop plays. That's the hardest balance of what you do being a defender, is sideline tackles. I think we've done a much better job when people get to the sideline of not having that extra step, but you see a lot of athletic players that push to the sideline, cut vertical.

If you assume it, well, it can hurt you. So make sure we're doing everything to play the game within the rules and to be smart, to be safe with it.

But it's just a lot of balance. I mean, it was a conversation I had with the sliding quarterback. You know, how many times this year have we seen Jordan run and slide down giving himself up, losing yards, and then somebody hits him. Well, what are we sliding for?

It's like that's where we've got to be wise in those decisions we have to continue to teach tight hands, low hands, all those things, control what we can control.

But it's tough when a lot of these judgment calls -- you know, I don't envy the officials for having to make them, but we can control and be better in different ways. That's what we're trying to teach.

Q. Coach, you were able to pull the starters midway fourth quarter. I know it wasn't a lot of time but how important is it to get guys rest at this point in the year?

MIKE NORVELL: You said rest?

Q. Yeah, just off the field so you can start preparing.

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, the rest part I'm not so much -- I love the fact we are able to get more guys in the game. Our guys are prepared to play however many snaps they need to play.

I think they're going to get better from all of them, but when you get a chance to go and see younger guys get more reps, get extended opportunities, to see them in the moment, it's just all -- it's so valuable for their growth and development, because that's what is really and what you see.

I love seeing Tate be able to go out there, and I mean, he fired an unbelievable pass to Darion right on rhythm, right on time, in the moment. You work it in practice, but now he's out in on the stage.

I think that's one of the things I've been really pleased with. We've had opportunities to get Tate in the game, and, I mean, I don't even know what his quarterback rating is but it's got to be pretty high. He's performing.

And you can say, all right he had a good practice today, but when you put him in the game you got to go execute it. He had some things he has to be better at in that game. Those are all teachable moments. Whether it's Jalen early, young man I think has an incredible future. At the end of one the plays, guys are laying on top of our running back and he goes and pulls one of the guys off. That's a penalty.

So, I mean, have we talked about it? Yes. But in the moment, right, was that something that he registered in his mind? It wasn't malicious, but it is something that showed up that if he doesn't get that rep. What if that is a year from now, two years from now in a critical moment? He's going to remember. We made sure he remembered that experience.

And so those are the great things about getting younger guys opportunities to play.

Q. Not accusing any other teams of doing this intentionally, but seems like some other defensive players, sometimes they really jog slowly out onto the field for substitutions. Does that affect you guys? And then also, have you guys decided intentionally to not do that?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, I mean, so -- this is where can -- what can we control? We control when we sub players. If we sub somebody late, we put ourselves in position for an posing team to sub.

But, now, Wake Forest in the game, on the last -- on the field goal, you know, we had a player that got injured and we ended up getting an additional drive, utilizing timeouts, and one of our guys on field goal went in to the locker room early, so we were late to get somebody on the field.

That's where we can be better. We can't do that. And so and then obviously on offense, we have a late sub, you know, but it does need to be done in a timely fashion.

And so if teams are really slow to sub and it's intentional that they're delaying the game they'll get a delay of game penalty. It's things we bring up with officials. They have every right to substitute. If somebody does it against us we have every right.

If you remember a year ago, we got penalized for a delay of game, and once that ball is snapped you either have 12 guys on the field, it all counts. So if one guy is running off and somebody gets a touchdown, that's a free play for them.

That's the one thing I asked the officials, is consistency of understanding whether it's -- they're trying to delay the game or are they substituting to play. But we have got to be smart in making sure we're not subbing too late in the play clock because you put yourself in jeopardy.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports