

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: (Stream started in progress).

...great, great play for just a who we want to be in an uncomfortable situation. But I thought our guys really, really rallied, did a good job second and third quarter. Obviously left some things out there in the fourth, but I thought our defense was great just being able to hold them to seven points. Nothing in the second half. I just was pleased with our team.

We had some guys that had to step up. Ja'Khi Douglas going over a hundred yards. You look at the production of our tight end room. I thought all three of those guys that were able to have catches, big plays in big moments, whether it was third down conversions, the touchdown with Markeston, the screen game, guys did a wonderful job there. With Johnny and Keon, having four to five guys that were limited or out at receiver, I mean, it was a challenge. But you saw everybody really kind of take hold of that.

I think Pitt did a good job of trying to condense things within the box. Kind of naturally how they play. I think that was one of the things we really tightened down, had some good pressures that they were able to create some negatives on our end. Obviously some things we have to clean up.

I was really pleased to see us break the long run. Threw for 360 yards, which is just a testament to Jordan, our receivers, everybody involved. Running backs had a couple big catches. Just how we were able to distribute the ball to a variety of different people.

As the game went on, to be able to hit the big run with Trey Benson was huge for us. Just proud of our guys. I thought Alex did a great job when we had to punt, had to flip the field, averaged 45 yards per punt. Doing a great job there in special teams. Ryan bounced back, did a nice job.

Really pleased with all the things that showed up throughout of our response as a team. To be able to clinch a spot in the ACC Championship was big. It was something that we knew going into it if we handle our

business that that would be the result. We were able to get that done.

We know we'll get one more game here at the end of the regular season to compete for a championship. That's something that's big for our program, something that we always aspire to do.

Ultimately there's a lot of steps we have to take between now and then to be in the best position for when we get there.

What better week than this week. This is what college football is all about. One of the greatest games this country has. This is a huge contest for our football team. Everything we've done throughout the course of the year is to prepare you for this moment, for this week, for what we're going to do and what we want to accomplish. A lot of excitement around our program.

Guys had a great workday yesterday. You feel the energy, feel the edge. This is one of those that we talk about at the beginning of spring practice or January workouts, at the beginning of fall camp. This is a critical game for our program, for our university, one that our guys will remember for the rest of their lives.

I'm honored for the opportunity to be part of it. Excited about the week that's ahead, all things that come around with this game. It's great to be back at home with it.

I do want to take a quick minute to thank all the fans that showed up in Pittsburgh last week. To go back-to-back weeks on the road and to see just the overwhelming support of our fan base that travels, that shows up. I mean, it was an incredible reception we had there just from all of our Florida State faithful. Definitely appreciate our fans.

Can't wait to kick it off on Saturday, another sold-out game at Doak Campbell Stadium. It's going to be a special atmosphere.

Q. We've all written and talked about how different your roster is compared to a couple years ago in terms

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of the talent. This past Saturday, is that a game from a program standpoint would have been much tougher to win two years ago, the resilience?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, the way our guys responded, you see the confidence they have. Even on the sideline, when things didn't go well early, there wasn't a sense of panic. You give credit to the team. We knew we were going to get Pitt's best shot. A couple weeks prior they had an undefeated team at their place. They pulled a big upset.

That's a tough place to play for top-ranked opponents. Four of the last five top-ranked teams that went in there had disappointing results for the team that went and played there. We knew we were going to get their best shot, coming off a bad game they had. Nothing shocking about that.

What I loved is just the confidence of our guys. Even when it wasn't going well early, just a belief how we would respond, what the outcome would eventually be. It was still about the work, still about the mentality. I think we've grown up a lot as a program in regards to that.

It was a hard week of practice. We had to move certain guys' positions. A lot of personnel groupings and things that we were trying to implement. But seeing the depth that we have, seeing the guys. Ja'Khi, at the end of the Wake Forest game, getting that spark, seeing him take that to a whole new level this week. Darion had a big third down conversion. Missed some opportunities later with some of the vertical passing game.

Still watching those guys go in there and compete, the tight ends continuing to make such a big impact with the adversity of personnel not being available and great players. We're talking about two guys that are elite receivers in the country, huge play-makers for this team. When them not being available, seeing our guys rise up.

For Jordan to go out there and throw for 360 yards. That's pretty dang impressive when you have two of the best receivers in the country not available. That speaks to the quality of our personnel and it speaks to I just think the whole way that game played out, just the mindset, the character, the confidence that this team has.

It's a 60-minute game. You give everything you have. It's not always going to go exactly how you want. Your response will showcase that identity.

Q. Obviously it is very impressive to throw for 360 when you don't have those guys. It's not ideal to go the rest of the season without two good wide receivers. Ja'Khi and Darion were probably the only

fully healthy guys. Looking forward, do you see that position getting healthier and being in better shape come Saturday?

MIKE NORVELL: No, I do. What that means, we'll see. As we go through the week, we'll get a great perspective of where guys are. Kentron, he battled last week. Deuce obviously didn't play. Shahriari took over some of the things in the kickoff return game. It was a real challenge last week.

Another guy I want to mention is Vandrevius Jacobs. Hadn't played a whole lot this season. His number got called and he was ready. Just continued growth from another true freshman that's able to make an impact for us.

Yes, I do see us being in a much better spot. Coming out of last night's practice, we had a lot more participation in it, guys being able to get out there and work. We'll see where the week goes.

Q. At the end of the game Jordan was pointing to his knee. Was that just injury related or the plan?

MIKE NORVELL: I think he was showing me a grass stain that he had (smiling).

No, he's fine. He'll be good.

Q. Maybe an obvious question, the specifics of this rivalry, why is it such a big game?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, it's everything from the past, the tradition, the legacy. Just an incredible matchup. You have two in-state schools, there's been a lot of success within these teams and these programs over the years. Just some of the greatest, greatest games.

Ours players know them. They know us. It's a heated one. It's what college football is all about. I think in today's age where you see a lot of rivalries that are now being split, I mean, this is what makes it special.

Like I said, I'm just grateful to be a part of it. I've got a chance to coach in two of these. You feel it from pregame, obviously the week of practice, all those things. The minute you step on that field, there is a different edge. Like, there's nothing I can just say that would really give justice to what that experience is.

I'm excited about it.

Q. On the two trick plays, how come you decided to call it in that moment? What goes into calling a trick play? Something that goes on during the week or



happens in the moment?

MIKE NORVELL: I thought it would work (smiling). One of 'em really pretty good. Actually there's probably I think three that we called. One that really didn't.

Those things, you try to calculate where you think you're going to get a competitive advantage. Obviously some things with missed direction, some things with alignments. Obviously all those things go into planning. When it works, it looks really good. When it doesn't, you get to continue to reflect on why not, what could you have done better, was it the right situation.

Coming out of the game, it wasn't a good time to call, to call the play. That's where for me, I mean, I got to be better. We all take ownership in what we do and how we do it and why we do it. In the moment you have a thought, you have an idea, something that you've seen. You continue to grow through each of those experiences.

It's just like I tell our players. We're all working through to try to be best. There was a few calls I'd like to have back, a few of 'em I really liked how they worked out.

Q. How valuable a weapon is Kalen DeLoach as a blitzzer?

MIKE NORVELL: Kalen is an explosive player. I think he's having an incredible year. His production in all phases of what we do defensively. He's talented in coverage. He does a really good job, whether it's playing the run, playing the pass, just from his core linebacker position. He is a dynamic blitzzer. He's one that his speed allows him to make up a lot of space. He had to work through some different things to get there.

I think it is a tribute to the guys that are also around him, being able to force a contain, allow him to have the time to be able to get home. Obviously he knows what to do when he gets there. I think he's been very productive for us. I'm excited about the growth that he's had. I think he's a special player for us.

Q. Miami has had some strange losses in games where they controlled the game. When you look at them on film, how talented does that team look?

MIKE NORVELL: It's a talented team. I mean, each year we played 'em, they've been a talented team. Probably always will be a talented team.

It's one of the things that makes this rivalry great because you're going to see a lot of talent on the field. It comes down to execution, physicality, response, toughness, all

things. It's going to come down to a couple plays.

Last year's game came down to a handful of plays. I tell our team that all the time. A handful of plays can make it really good or make it really bad or really close. You've got to be prepared on each one, thinking and knowing that's the most important play. It's the consistency in that execution.

But this is a talented team we're playing. You look at the matchup and how it's all going to play. I mean, I'm excited to be a part of it. Going to come down to a lot of one on ones. Defensively they are doing an outstanding job this year, statistically one of the best defenses in the country.

They're going to attack, multitude of fronts, bear, three down, some of their fourth down fronts, the movements and the blitzes. I think they've done a nice job in that regard.

Offensively, very talented group. Their quarterback, I saw him a couple years ago. He's a player, freshman of the year in the conference. You see the talent that he has. He's been projected as top draft pick for the last few years. He has ability. He has talent.

You look at the receiving core, who they have. That's a position that's grown for them over the last few years. They have some guys that have made some big plays. They have a stable of running backs that can do so many things, handing it off to them, catching it in the backfield. You look at their offensive line, they're a big group. Done a good job of adding size, transfers that have come in and helped them. Just the experience.

It's going to be a heck of a matchup. We're looking forward to it. Excited about the week of work building up to it.

Q. Last year you ran wild on Miami. What have they done to improve in that department?

MIKE NORVELL: They're going to put numbers in the box. The variation of things they do with a multitude of fronts, blitzes, the way they're going to be aggressive, they're going to attack. They've done a good job of tackling in space. They're one of the fewest missed tackles teams in the country. One thing last year that team struggled with that. You see the improvement there.

Like I said, they're going to get guys to the box. They're always going to be right in their number count in what they're trying to do. I think they've done a good job in that regard.

Q. Secondary, young players, but still stepping up.

What kind of growth have you seen in the season?

MIKE NORVELL: Conrad is a guy that really proud of the strides he's taken. He's still young, a true freshman. Still learning a lot of things. There were some mistakes that were made in the game that are critical in the moment, but you see the play making ability. Big interception. Being a part of helping force the fumble. You just feel his explosiveness.

He's got a great future in front of him. As he continues to grow in that consistency, I think there's still a lot of season left to play and you're going to see more and more of him. He's a very impactful player.

As he's growing, you can see just him mature with each game, with each practice, with each meeting, everything that he's doing. I'm really proud of the strides that we're seeing there.

We've got a lot of freshmen. Blake Nichelson, Justin Cryer, Donny. You watch our kickoff coverage team, three true freshmen there last week. I pointed it out to our team yesterday. Those guys are all going to be real players. It was exciting to see their speed, the physicality, the way they're playing. It's a really good group.

Seeing those guys come along and continue to build and impact this team is something definitely to be excited about for years to come, too.

Q. Have you ever clinched a berth in a championship game this early? How much advanced scouting can you do when you don't know who you're going to play?

MIKE NORVELL: I don't recall. I mean, we had three of 'em. I know the last two were not. They went down to the very end. I can't remember our second year, how early it was.

For us, all of our focus is right now. I talked about it after the game, congratulated the team once again last night. We'll see that game in three weeks, all right? Taking nothing away, but it's huge for our program, huge.

This is about right now. If we don't do the steps necessary this week, this game, go get better as a football team, continue to grow. I'll say the same thing next week, the same thing the following week. If we don't do that, we will not be in position to go be what we're capable of when we get to play for that championship.

It is the process of today, going to get better, continuing to push, continuing to learn from the mistakes we make,

continuing to learn from success we've had, remain humble in your work and go get better.

That's what I'm excited about. Obviously when there's an opponent, we will have enough time and opportunity to be well-prepared. All things for this week.

Q. I know Pitt plays an aggressive defense. Did they play differently? Would they have played the same way if 4 and 14 are out there? I mean, I guess you don't know. Did they look the same definitely as the game wore on as the team you saw on film.

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, like you mentioned, that is their style. I would say they were maximum aggression, right? That's not saying they haven't done that in other games. They've done that. That's a team that they want to be able to stop the run. I think they led our conference the last four years in rush defense. There's a way they play and they do a good job with that.

I think there was part of it to test our receivers, test the matchups, what that would look like. I also think there was a reason why Trey Benson had a long touchdown at the end of the game. It was something we had to stick through and be strategic.

We had more negative plays, might have been the most we had all years. Credit to them for most of 'em. Things we have to be better at in some of 'em.

But, yeah, it was definitely all a part of the matchup. Pleased with our guys how we showed up and able to respond to that. It was a part of the challenge.

Q. Seemed like the last few weeks Jordan has made a lot of checks at the line of scrimmage. How much autonomy does he have at the line and how often does he check?

MIKE NORVELL: Each week, I mean, we'll have a game plan for certain things that we see. Last week probably wasn't as much as some weeks, but there were a few.

It's good having an experienced quarterback that sees things really well. Jordan has been great for us throughout this year, really throughout his career, in what he sees, helping get us into the best position.

That's all kind of part of it. Really depends on the week.

Q. On Jordan, these last couple weeks, how he's had to use so many different weapons, attack defenses in different ways. How have you seen him embrace these opportunities?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, I think he showed himself as one of the best players in all of football. He's a great football player. I believe that we have really, really good personnel in our depth, really good personnel in different positions, the variety and versatility within an offense to help those guys get put in position to go showcase all they can do.

There were some things early that you could get a sense of maybe wasn't as clean for whatever reason, whether it's a person, a place, just a little difference in timing. It's hard to get to that point. But I think he does a remarkable job. He really helped take over in that game. I mean, there was four or five throws in that game that are as good as you'll ever see. You couldn't go out there and place the ball any better than what it needed to be in the moment. There's a few plays that you'd like to have just a little bit better with a variety of different personnel.

I mean, that's what makes him... He's so good at making the 10 other guys out there on the field around him better. We've got really good players around him, so it's a good combination.

If anybody comes into wanting to know more about our quarterback, you go and watch these last two weeks, and you see what he is. That's why he's being mentioned for the greatest award that you can have in college football. Deservingly so.

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