

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



COACH NORVELL: This is a class we're extremely excited about. This is a class that's been four years in the making. When you look at coming in the door, had to go through quite a bit of challenging moments, experiences, unanticipated circumstances with COVID and not being able to get on the road.

But when you see this class, and the way that it's all come together, we have 17 out of our 21 announced signees here from the state of Florida and Georgia, that's something I'm really proud of.

We wanted to be prominent within these two states and be able to go after the best players in those states, and to get them here to Florida State. It's a great group.

You look at the balance, we had 12 offensive players, eight defensive players and the best kicker in the country coming into the program. We're able to address a lot of needs, not only for this upcoming year, but also as we project out to what the roster's going to look like in these next few years, just within different positions, where we're able to add depth, where we're going to be able to add competition.

And this was a class that we wanted to continue to attract the top playmakers. And I think we absolutely hit a home run when it comes to that.

Offensively you sit there and look, you get one of the top quarterbacks in the country, and one of his first offers. It was before he had all the rankings and all the things -- we saw something special in Luke and he's just continued to do all the things that we believe that he would ultimately become -- and I think that he's just getting started on this journey.

And when you add that at quarterback, these guys are, they're remarkable, young -- he's a remarkable young man. He's done a great job of building the relationships within the class, but just with these guys that we've had these long-standing relationships, guys that have been committed for multiple years.

And you see the growth they've had and see the players that they've become, but also just the relationships that have been forged within this group, it really is special.

And when you look at the offensive side of the ball, you get two running backs that I think are dynamic playmakers in Kam and Micah. Both guys are game changers in what they do. Their versatility, not only with what they do carrying the ball between the tackles but also what they can do catching the ball out in space. Great playmakers in that regards.

We're able to get four receivers that I think are all special talents. And you look at -- we have different variations -- size with Elijah, great size, great skill, tremendous ability. Definitely a dynamic playmaker.

You look at Camdon Frier, tremendous speed. That name is special here at Florida State, with his dad, his uncle, the legacies they left. And now Camdon is going to get an opportunity to come forge his own path. He's got game-changing speed in how he runs, the ability, the potential of what he's going to bring.

Lawayne McCoy, coming from South Florida. I think he's one of the most electric players in the country. Definitely one of the best players in the state. One of the best players down in South Florida, just really a special talent and somebody that I think is going to bring a dynamic ability into what we can do and how we can utilize him.

And then BJ Gibson, coming from mid-Georgia, definitely a special player with how he can change the game. He's so very versatile. A two-sport star that I really believe is going to be able to really add a different dynamic and element to this offense.

You look at tight end with Landen Thomas, I believe he's the best tight end in the United States of America. He was one -- it's been four years. You watch him grow from his freshman year to where he is now. This is a guy we think has big play potential coming in from day one. Definitely going to compete for an opportunity to impact us next season. Glad he's going to be able to get in early and watch him grow. But definitely a special talent there from

South Georgia. And really impressive in all the things he's going to bring into the program. Once again, just a tremendous young man.

Offensive line, you look at the size, the length, the athleticism. We have four offensive linemen coming in. I think when you see the versatility of what those guys can bring, huge upsides, great ceilings, from Manasse coming from California, coming over, he was on his official visit here this last weekend. Just tremendous length, tremendous athleticism. Really excited about what he's going to bring to the program and watching him grow and develop.

Jonathan Daniels from over in Pensacola, was an early target for us, a guy that I think he's got all the upside in the world, and he's a guy we've worked with, we've seen. He was very well-sought after throughout the recruiting process, but really found a special fit here. Excited about what he's bringing to the program.

As you sit there and you look, we have Tye Hylton coming in. I think he's probably one of the most versatile players that we have coming in. I think he's going to have the potential to be able to play across the board on the offensive line. And extremely intelligent, very, very smart. And he's one of those guys, you talk about the right fit, he was a home run for us, a guy, I don't think he's missed a practice in I want to say three years at his high school. Hard nosed, tough, really just a dynamic addition to our offensive line.

And then Jayden Todd is one of the biggest human beings we have coming into the program, a guy that has tremendous strength. Still at the front end of where I think his potential is going to go but was a big-time get for us. Somebody that we identified earlier.

And he came over whether it was camps, building relationships, just really excited about what he can bring to this program and obviously the opportunity that's ahead with him.

Flipping over to the defensive side of the ball, really you look at that defensive backfield, and we knew this year we had a couple of seniors and guys that are leaving our program that had tremendous careers.

You'll really like the group we signed this last year. I think we have some wonderful players. And we wanted to be able to continue to add those guys with playmaking ability.

Starting off, you sit there you've got Cai Bates out of Orlando Edgewater, definitely a special talent. Great length, a former receiver. Definitely a guy that as you've

seen his transition to the defensive backfield, what he brings, the mindset of how he competes, but a former receiver with dynamic playmaking ability, a guy we're really excited about.

I think one of the stars of the class, Charles Lester, he does it all. And every time that he steps on the field, he's going to change the game. And Charles is a guy that we've built a tremendous relationship with. He's continued to grow and just really put a showcase on his athleticism and just overall skill set. It was a top target for us from the very beginning of this class. So excited to be able to see him part of this program and a guy that we're expecting really big things from as we continue to progress.

Ricky Knight is another defensive back that I think has a huge upside. He's so very versatile. Can do a lot of different things. Coming out of South Florida, one of the best playmakers there, I think, in the country of what he brings, a guy that can play nickel. He can play corner. He's got length. He's got ability. You'll really like the way he's grown throughout his career.

And Jamari Howard, that was a guy that we identified early and said this guy can be a key to our class and obviously to our program.

I think one of the biggest upsides of anybody we've signed. He's a special player, a remarkable young man. So excited about the element of just play-making ability. You've seen him in his high school film. He'll play corner. He'll play in the slot. He'll be able to play safety. He can do all those things.

We're going to start him off at the corner position, but I definitely think that he is a dynamic player and just brings tremendous skill set into our secondary.

And all those guys, when you look at their ball skills, when you look at the opportunity to make plays in space, the speed that they have, the length that they have, it was something we really wanted to address in our defensive backfield. And I thought we hit a home run there at that position.

Linebacker, I thought we're bringing in two really good playmakers, guys that are tough and physical. Jayden Parrish from down in South Florida, a guy that's really done it all for his program. We've identified him there early in his junior year and watching his potential. Got great size and length. He's a guy that brings a knock back. When he gets there, you feel his presence out there on the field.

Unbelievable young man. Can play sideline to sideline but also has that toughness that's necessary there in the box.

And Timir Collins, coming from South Carolina, definitely excited about what he's bringing. He's smart, tough. Really for not the tallest guy in the world, has great length. Unbelievable arm length.

Came into camp. You see his versatility. Can play inside the box, outside the box. I really like his skill set and all the things he brings. Very mature for his age. He is a complete football player, whether he's blitzing off the edge, whether it's key and diagnose. I just really like the skill set of what he's bringing, and think that he's going to be a great player, being able to have some of that versatility.

Probably a little bit similar to what Kalen DeLoach could do, where he could line up -- if he had to remove out but could live in the box if necessary as he's continuing to grow up.

Moving down to the defensive front, really excited about DD Holmes. I think, he's a guy that we identified early in the process, just an incredible young man coming out of the DMV area. He's going to impact the quarterback. He's one of the best pass rushers. Obviously has great size, great length. Shows toughness and physicality to play against the run.

I think he's a guy has a huge ceiling. Was really a key to us as we were coming into this class and so very excited about being able to have him join and all that he's bringing to our program.

And then going inside, Jamorie Flagg, been committed to us for a good while, out of Booker T. Washington down in Miami. Unbelievable young man, great playmaker, very instinctive, got great quickness. Has a versatility to play the 3 or the nose. Really going to be a match-up problem. He's got good length. But what I love about him is just the explosiveness that he shows.

He is a playmaker. We've had him at camp his junior year. You fell in love with him and just the way he worked and all those things and watching him to continue to progress, it's been a lot of fun to see.

Excited about this group, excited about what the guys are bringing into the program. I think it really is a special group.

We'll touch on Jake, Jake Weinberg, our kicker. He's the best kicker in the country coming out of high school this year. We identified him early. We knew that Ryan, he still has another year of eligibility. We're expecting Ryan to come back. But this is somebody that can come in and be able to compete from the jump.

He's got unbelievable leg strength, but he's just a really special athlete that I believe is going to have a wonderful career here, is going to bring a great dynamic to our special teams and what we're doing within that group.

Like I said, there's potential for some additions to the class, I would say, as we continue to progress. But really excited about this group and just, like I said, the guys we have.

I touched on the running backs, but that's a group, with Kam Davis and Micahi Danzy, I love what they're bringing. When you see guys like Trey Benson, what he's been able to do over the last few years, and to see a guy like Kam and Micahi with their home-run-hitting ability, it's going to be a special group.

There's so many people that go into this process, whether it's our recruiting staff and personnel, the countless hours of investment and time -- and just whether it's the preparation for on campus visits, whether it's making sure that we're doing all things to showcase all that Florida State has to offer, it's a special group that we have here.

Tremendous relationship builders. Our coaches, the time that's spent away from home and as we're out on the road building those relationships, but it was just great to see all of it coming together.

The professors here at Florida State sacrificing their time to come and share and paint the picture for these young men, what their future can be here as a Seminole. It's really a collective effort. And to see it all come together with a great group of young men, this class, it's highly rated and sought-after guys, but I'm going to tell you some of the best group of young men and the character that they have, the hearts and relationships they have built in a short period of time, excited about what they'll bring to our program and definitely believe we got the right fit coming in. Looking forward to see it all gel together.

A lot of these guys, I think, we'll have 10 or 11 of them that will be here in January. So it will be a good group that's going to be starting early. We're going to be able to see them start their path and get them into the competition. A lot of these guys have the opportunity to impact here as freshmen and then definitely early in their careers.

Q. Luke and Kam not only have been committed for a long time, but they also went to commitment ceremonies. They took a real active role. Just how important were they throughout this whole process?

COACH NORVELL: It's about the relationships. Today is a celebration. It's a celebration for those kids, for their

families, for all the work they put in.

For us, it really marks the official beginning, but there's been so much time that's gone into it, it's just another step along the way.

To see the investment in people that these guys have shown -- whether it's to each other, to this class, to the group that's coming in -- I have a lot of confidence in what this group is going to be able to accomplish because I already see the way that they interact with each other. You see the like-minded approach of which they bring.

Yes, they are very, very talented, but when you take great talent with tremendous hearts and work ethic, the sky is the limit to what you can accomplish. Kam, Luke, Charles, a lot of those guys just spent so much energy investing in a relationship.

That's going to pay off when they're here and when they're not starting at ground zero. They've already been pouring into each other. Obviously that's going to pay such great dividends once they start this process together.

Q. What position group or groups does this class most positively impact? And what groups do you still need to go get more guys and feel there's a pressing need?

COACH NORVELL: I think each position group has really been positively impacted with the guys we've been able to bring in. I think each position group has an opportunity for guys to come in and play early to add to the competition that we have.

I think when you look at a roster in today's age, it can change quickly. And there are a few positions we're going to continue to evaluate where we are as we continue to move forward. But I think we were able to hit across the board.

Like I said, there will probably be a few more additions here in the near future that we'll see and we'll get, and we're definitely excited about where it's heading. But those are all things that we'll continue to focus on as we move forward.

Q. You mentioned that you got a lot of these kids early that you signed. How important to build those relationships when they're underclassmen, and to see the growth and see how they grow as humans in the class?

COACH NORVELL: I think it's big. They get a sense of who we are. I've said it all the time, Florida State is not for

everybody. It's for guys that truly embrace the work. They embrace not only what they're going to do on the field but the expectations there off the field.

For them to be able to see that play out is something -- that's why you see, I think, some of the relationships that are forged early and are built. And when you see talent, that's one thing. When you get to know the heart, when they get a chance to see all of this play out, there's guys in this class -- we've been on for three and four years -- and you talk about a vision of what's ahead, but they got to see it, experience it. They got the behind-the-curtain look in what all goes into it.

It's exciting because we all have to say yes. We say yes to them with the opportunity. They say yes that this is where they ultimately want to be and to be able to help push this program to another level.

I think you look over the last three, four years, we've done a good job in our evaluations. We just finished this last season 13-0, and offensively and defensively, special teams, we've got some dynamic players and guys that are going to be taken very high in NFL draft this year.

When you find that combination of great talent, great young men, you invest and build that trust over the course of time, great things can happen. And I definitely believe this is a special group.

Q. Landen signs from Colquitt, just up the road. Micahi obviously here in town. Camdon, just about an hour away. When you have elite talent in South Georgia, how important is for you, not to just recruit those Florida and Georgia guys, but those guys right in your back yard and how do you pitch to them that everything you need is already here?

COACH NORVELL: It's obviously huge. And to be able to have those guys that are so close in proximity to come in and be a part of this program, I mean, it's special for them. It's special for their families. It's special for Florida State.

You look through the history of our program, and all the great players that are local, that are in that Big Bend area in South Georgia, that's why four years ago coming in it's been such a big emphasis.

And it's one thing to sign a player from an area. It's another thing to go get the best players from those areas. And to be able to do that here locally, to be able to do that within the states of Florida and Georgia, I mean, it's big for our program.

So I'm really proud of our staff. I'm proud of all the work



that's gone into it. Our players, our current players do such a great job of really selling the opportunity that's here.

And as recruits come in, as they go through their own experience, I always tell our players this, be truthful, tell them exactly what they can expect when they get here because I owe it to our current players, every person I bring in the locker room, they've got to fit.

They've got to be about the same things that we push towards each and every day -- that standard, the expectations -- and they embrace some of those challenges. So when our players get to share that story, the experiences, the relationships we have within our team, the culture that has been built, I mean, that does wonders.

For the guys that are close and local in proximity, they've been here so many times that they have really got to live it with us. It's definitely exciting and big for the program to get those guys to jump on board.

Q. You're in line to have your highest rated recruiting class since you've been here. You said it was four years in the making. I'm wondering how much the success of this class can be attributed to the turnaround that you guys started last year and the success from this year?

COACH NORVELL: I think you look at when a lot of these relationships started being built. At the beginning I was talking about the vision. I try not to say anything outlandish at the beginning other than the fact just watch us. This is what I believe will happen. This is what I believe will occur. And these are the reasons why.

And it wasn't saying, hey, we're just going to win some games. No, I want you to watch all aspects of the program. I want you to watch our team's GPA. I want you to watch what the players do within the community. I want you to see how they carry themselves and how they respond to adversity. And I want you to see the playmaking abilities and how we utilize them offensively, defensively and special teams.

That's what I wanted them to be able to experience over the last few years. And then you build trust when you can paint the picture and then obviously they see how it plays out and they can start picturing themselves doing those same things and continuing to elevate the program.

So that's what's been a lot of fun for us is that -- I remember Luke, the first time he came out to camp. We were getting to know him. He's getting to know us. And I think about the growth he's had from that camp experience.

I think Micahi might have been at the same one as it rolled through. But I watched those guys. To see them grow and become what I believed they would, and still stay true to who they are, stay true to the work, to the relationships, just trying to be the best in all that they do.

It's a two-way street. And I'm just grateful for the guys that are coming to be a part of the program and I'm grateful for everybody that's been a part of the program. I'm just painting the picture to what we're all about.

Q. When you do start getting this proof of concept, when all the hard work starts manifesting itself into wins, how quickly can that impact recruiting success? Instantly, could it be years down the road? How as a coach do you evaluate what we're doing now, how can that impact the future?

COACH NORVELL: I think it definitely has an impact. You go after the best, you've got to be part of the best. There were guys that, couple of years ago, some of them took a little bit of a leap of faith.

And really it was both on our end. There were some guys that came in that are some of our top players right now that might not have been the most sought-after or that had all the recognition or accolades. We jumped in that journey together. And as we've grown and as they've grown, you see the proof of development. You see the proof of relationship, of building trust.

So I think that's a big part of it. But now as we've had the success we've had, there's a lot of people that want to be here at Florida State.

And you can't just post a record and say, now we have this record; come play for us. It's so much more than that. It's going and finding the right guys, the guys that fit this program, the guys that understand what it takes to not only achieve success but sustain the success. That's kind of what we've kind of sought after.

It's been a lot of fun for us as a staff these last few years just seeing not only the great talent but also the character that's behind the talent.

I'm not recruiting just talent. There's plenty of guys out there that are really tall, really fast, but if they don't have the desire, the want-to, the heart, the character to maximize that talent, then that's where you see some of the disappointing stories and some of the disappointing experiences.

And it's really just about finding every guy that we're bringing in here, we have a plan for development. And

they're going to help our program continue to develop to where ultimately I believe that we're on track to getting to.

So that's where that relationship merges together, but when you have that success and that talent, it comes together, it's definitely exciting.

Q. Obviously you had a really good defensive back group. I think a lot of great kids in there. Charles Lester, in particular, could you talk about him as a leader? You recruited him for a long time. But just what he brings even personality standpoint or leadership standpoint that you noticed early in the process with him?

COACH NORVELL: Charles definitely has personality. But he's got a pure soul. You think about him and he cares about people as much as anybody -- as you recruit somebody you get to know him for three or four years, he's as pure hearted as anybody I've ever been around.

He wants to be around great people, whether it's coaches, whether it's mentors, his teammates. And what people don't understand about Charles, he's one of the smartest football IQ players that I've probably been around in the high school process of recruiting. He is extremely smart. And he understands what it takes.

He had to transition in high school, going from high school to finishing up in Venice. And I think it's one of the great storied programs in the state of Florida. And watching his transition, and just hearing the things from the coaching staff, his teammates, watching how they all rally around him. He has that infectious personality. He's going to put in the work. You see the impact he can make.

So we have the highest of expectations for him, and I'm excited to help him continue to grow and develop to all that I believe he can become.

Q. You mentioned the versatility on the football field, but you also have a couple of signees that could do track, do baseball. How important is it to sign players with different skill sets that can also translate in other aspects?

COACH NORVELL: It's always unique to itself. It takes a special human being to be able to do that at this level, when you look at the talent ability of our other programs of what it takes.

These guys, they have to not only have the skill set but also have the maturity and the work ethic to be able to achieve at that level. And I think we've definitely hit a home run when it comes to that. And I try to paint the full

picture and whether it's talking to the coaches in the other sports and how this is going to happen, laying out the plan, being able to set the expectation. And these guys embrace it.

And when you have that mindset and work ethic, coupled with some incredible God-given talent and the opportunity we present here at Florida State, it's one of the unique dynamics that makes Florida State special.

You look back in our program's past, and all of the incredible two-sport stars we've had, it's definitely a unique opportunity for these guys that are coming in and excited to watch them on their own path and journey.

Q. When it comes to roster construction -- obviously you have 21 guys here now -- do you foresee getting a few more high school kids, overall with the portal and everything else, do you have a number you'd like to get to? I know it's fluid.

COACH NORVELL: It's always a work in progress, to be honest with you. And I like where we are sitting here on signing day. Obviously there's a few guys here and there that still have to focus on when it comes to the high school ranks. We'll see the different dynamics of guys or positions that we might pursue in the portal. But I really like where we are when it comes to the overall roster construction.

You see some of the balance within the signing class, couple spots with three, four guys there. Being able to address some needs at a variety position. I know I touched on running back was one. We wanted this to be a two-back group. And you look at how Kam and Micahi marry up with each other, I think that can be one of the most dynamic backfields in the country, with those two guys coming in.

But we'll look at where our roster is, especially coming into the spring semester. And just like last year, we had some guys that chose to explore other opportunities and it opened up a spot for guys like Keon Coleman. Worked out pretty good for us.

We'll see where that goes. But it's always kind of a fluid situation, I guess, in today's world of college athletics.

Q. You mentioned Cam Frier, the fact that his family, the ties here. You have several players on the team, similar situations. Sounds like you may have another one coming soon that's got a similar situation. How do you handle those recruitments in terms of separating their family name from recruiting them as individuals? And second question was, you guys do pour so much time into these relationships and you've gotten players

who are committed to other schools to flip to Florida State, how do you handle it when it goes the other way after you've invested a lot of time in the relationship?

COACH NORVELL: The first question is, each of these guys that come in -- I mean, it is their experience. What I appreciate -- Cam is a great example. His dad, Matt, remarkable family. The heart, the character, who they are, they're special people. I told him at the front end -- I remember when I sat down with Camdon, I said it's not about your dad or your last name, it's about you. And it's our belief in who they are.

It almost makes it even more, I would say, challenging because this is unique. Most of the kids that have family ties, they watched the program through the course of the year, through their lifetime, really, it's about painting a picture specifically for them.

I try to separate that as much as possible. And I think it's something that has been a positive for us because whether it's Matt being a past player, there's an excitement that he has for what his school is doing and his program is doing. And now for the opportunity for his son to come be a part of it, it is special.

But I don't ever want a player to come here because just a family member attended. It's got to be the right fit for them. And we've got some great ones that have a family legacy here at Florida State. But it's still about them coming to create their own.

That's where I appreciate all of the past players that we've had that we've recruited their children and their sons and just to be able to allow us to have that experience with them. And it's really a neat experience but it's one that it does present its own dynamics.

And the second question, it's hard. Recruiting, like I said, I don't just turn on film and say, oh, he's talented, let's go get him. We want it all. We're not half in on building relationship. We try to pour everything we have into it to present the opportunity.

But I always tell guys, this is your one shot at it; go to where you feel is the best fit for you. There's a lot of different dynamics. Things that are important to people.

You see the swings in recruiting. It happens. And these are still young kids. They are. And whether it's families, families around them, it's the kids opportunity, it's the kids choice. And I wish them all the best.

We've had guys that have been committed for a good while. And you have great relationships and everything

feels good and for whatever reason they don't feel that this is the best fit for them, then so be it. And you wish them all the best in where they're going and what they do. We've had that experience with other guys that we stayed the course in recruitment.

It happened last year with Brock. It was one of those things that -- it hurt when he didn't commit to us at the beginning, but we stayed the course and continued to build the relationship and got the opportunity there at the end.

So it works both ways. And I try not to take it personally, but it hurts. It does. Because I care about these kids. And just because they don't choose Florida State doesn't mean I won't care about them. You just don't get to be a part of the journey with them. But you look at the 21 guys that we're announcing today, and, man, you talk about there's such an excitement and joy because I know we got the right ones.

It's something I hold true to. I pray every day that the good Lord brings the right young men that we're supposed to coach and I'm supposed to have a chance to lead and impact here at Florida State. And I don't know, over the last few years -- this is a dynamic class. I'm sorry, but I don't know what the rankings of it are or will be. I know it's really, really good. I felt really good about the last three classes, about how these kids fit into what we're doing.

We might have had some really highly rated players; we might have had some guys that weren't. All I know is it came together as a team that was able to do some special things in the last few years.

We'll continue to build those relationships to help these guys go do all that they can and achieve all that they can. And there's some that obviously might choose not to come. And I wish them all the best moving forward.

But just like I tell everyone throughout it, whether you come to Florida State or not, I know where we're going. And I told guys that two, three years ago. And they're sitting maybe at a different school and they're watching Florida State do something really special. So I wish them all the best. But I have an unbelievable amount of confidence in where we're going.

And today, with the 21 that have been announced, we have a special class coming in that can do incredible things.

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