

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Sunday, August 18, 2024

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate everybody being here. It's good to be back in game week. Very excited about being able to kick off the college football season. Really proud of our guys and all the work they've put in throughout the off-season program.

Obviously going into the summer, spring practice, summer, you were here in fall camp, I thought it was very productive. I thought our guys competed at a very high level. We have a lot of guys that we've seen tremendous steps and tremendous growth, guys that I'm excited to watch go take another step in their career and have an opportunity to put on display just who they are and what they're all about and ultimately continue to showcase the identity of what the Florida State football team is all about.

It's been one that's worked really hard. I think we've got great size, speed, explosiveness, and now it's time to go kick it off.

To be able to do so in the first game this season is definitely a tremendous honor. Having Gameday there, we've got a tremendous history and past with Gameday, we'll be the first on-campus show and now being their first international show, it's definitely a wonderful platform, a great stage for our guys that they've worked hard for and have earned throughout what they've been able to do and accomplish.

We're all excited about the week ahead. We still have a very important week of preparation. We're playing a very talented and experienced Georgia Tech team that we've got a lot of respect for. I think Coach Key has done a wonderful job, his coaching staff. They've really done a great job of being able to build the confidence and showcase the skills and abilities of some very talented players throughout this last year, and you see the potential they have as they're continuing on their ascent.

We know it's going to be a great match-up, but for us it's all focus on the Seminoles, and that's what we're going to be tuned into this week, making sure that our discipline, our details, and overall putting ourselves in the best position to

execute come Saturday.

But really, really proud of the work that our guys have put in to this point.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE NORVELL: It has. We try to measure all metrics of -- all the comparables that we can, to see the growth, to see the improvement, the size, the speed, and that's something that's held true. It's been the most explosive fall camp that we've had, the workload, the player load that our guys have poured into it, the number of top speeds that we've hit all have been highs for our time being here.

Like I tell our players, that's a compliment to them. It's a compliment to Coach Storms, our strength and conditioning, athletic training, nutrition. Everybody plays a part in that growth and development, and what I like is I'm seeing guys growing in their confidence of what they're being asked to do, from a schematic aspect, the techniques, the fundamentals, to be able to showcase all of the work that they've poured into physically.

Like I said, I'm excited about this group and really looking forward to seeing them be able to play and apply that there in the moment of truth.

Q. I was wondering if you had an update on Alex Atkins' suspension, and if he won't be on the sideline what your contingency plans are?

MIKE NORVELL: Alex will not be available on game day. We're going to go through a normal week of practice. Obviously everything leading up, but on game day he will not be with us. We've got a plan in place. We've kind of implemented the plan throughout our scrimmage opportunities here in fall camp. Alex has done a wonderful job and continues to do a great job in helping prepare our players in all things.

Coach Fertitta will take over that role there on game day operation. A lot of confidence in him and what he brings and what he has brought to our program over the last few years, and it's going to be as smooth of a transition as we



can have it there on game day. Like I said, we've kind of been preparing for that here these last few scrimmages, but that will be the status.

Q. The Georgia Tech DC was at Duke last year. Do you guys expect to see a similar scheme to what you saw against Duke last year, and what benefit does the team have from already playing against that?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, obviously when you play against really good coaches, and I think definitely that Tyler is a really good coach and does a wonderful job, mix their personnel, they'll be able to mix what they do schematically to the guys that they have. Yes, we've done a lot of studying on what they did at Duke a year ago, but we also know that when you see the amount of versatility that he can deploy that there's a wide variety of options of what we might see.

For us, it's making sure that we play with our eyes, we can adapt, we can adjust. We trust our rules and the things that we do against whatever scheme that might show up.

A lot of respect for him and just the job that he does. But also how he ties that to the personnel and the players that he has there at Georgia Tech. You look, they have a good number of returners, but they also have some guys that have transferred in that I think are really talented players that are joining that defense.

I know he'll have a great plan in place as we kick it off.

Q. The specialists you return, kickoff returners you return, and then just the depth and talent of the roster, what are the expectations for special teams this season?

MIKE NORVELL: It's a very critical factor for us. Offensively, defensively, we've got a lot of confidence with LB, but I think if you look at a group that has a chance to really push us forward, it is our special teams units. With Ryan, with Alex, you talk about the returners, you do span last year, we had a huge kickoff return there against Duke that was one of the spark plays for us in the season. Obviously Jaylin Lucas brings a great dynamic, different guys, Malik Benson, Lawayne McCoy, all guys that can serve as really good dynamics in a return game.

I think our coverage units are something that have to be huge for us. Those are identity-type units for us, and we put a lot of time and investment into our special teams, and we want that to be one of those key focuses of this team as we're able to move forward.

Q. You've talked a good bit this off-season about your

belief that the offensive line can be a strength of this team. We saw the first depth chart, I think there are 12 guys on there, no one repeating at any spots. What's it been like seeing the transformation of that unit from when you got here to what it is now?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's great. It's a big compliment to Alex Atkins and his staff that he has there with the offensive line, just growth, development, great evaluations, guys that have come in and worked their tails off and really bought into what we've done.

When you look at guys that have been here, Maurice, Darius, Rob Scott -- it was great getting Rob back in the mix, and with all the experience that he has, those guys, they were really young there four years ago, and when they had to go through some very challenging experiences, tough times. But they've grown through it, and they've stayed the course and I think have really done a remarkable job. Guys that we've been able to bring in that have been wonderful complementary pieces. Having J.B. here last year, started every game there at the right tackle spot, K.J. who got a lot of work, and then bringing in guys like Richie and T.J., Andre' Otto, I've been so very pleased with, our young tackles like Lucas and Jalen. They're all pushing. It's exciting to see that group.

Bryson Estes, another guy that's been here for a long time, was limited in the beginning of fall camp but is really coming on strong here this last week and a half since he's been back.

I think we have as good a depth as we've had, and I think that front line group has really got a chance to be one of the strengths of this team.

Q. You mentioned about your depth and you were saying in the beginning that this might be the deepest team you've been around. How much is that important for you to display this coming season?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's huge. There's a lot of competition. Obviously everybody is working to define their role. What you do in practice, what you do in your scrimmage opportunities is going to put you in the best position on a day in, day out basis, and the thing I'm excited to see as we build up to kickoff there on Saturday, it's about being able to apply it in the moment. It's the greatest thing about the game of football is there's so few game opportunities that you get a chance to play, so you've got to show up with your best in that moment.

I think we're going to have very quality depth. I think we have guys that are going to be able to go out there and make an impact, but it's going to come down to the

discipline, it's going to come down to the details, and with that depth, we should be able to play with a relentless style approach play in and play out because if you do need to get a break for a couple plays, then we're going to have somebody that can bring that same type of mentality and effort there at your spot.

Guys are still pushing to continue to define what that is, but obviously there are going to be some things that are going to wait until Saturday, see how guys perform there in the moment.

Q. In your opening you talked about guys who made big strides. Who are some of the guys that made the biggest strides for you?

MIKE NORVELL: I think there's a wide variety of them. I know you look at defensively, Azareye'h Thomas is a guy that I know has been talked a lot about, but he was one -- last year he was our third corner and now has kind of jumped into that role of being one of the starting corners. I think him and Fentrell have both done an outstanding job throughout the off-season, really done some remarkable things.

I think Shyheim Brown is almost night and day compared to where he was a year ago in just his overall understanding and the coverage ability, the physicality, the things that he's wanted to grow in. You're seeing that ownership, has really been remarkable.

I think when you look at the defensive front, we've got great confidence in that forcing unit, but a guy like Daniel Lyons I think has really come along. I really like the depth at that defensive tackle position, but Daniel has been a guy that's played these last few years sparingly, but I think he's really pushing himself to take another step.

Linebacker position you've got guys like Blake Nichelson, DJ Lundy, who's kind of been that third linebacker that is now probably the leader of that group, and I think he's going to be just a really dynamic player for us and what he can do. But Juice Cryer, guys like -- have taken some really nice strides for us.

Offensively I think Kyle Morlock, he's a guy that has really got a chance to be a great weapon for us. You look at him, where he was a year ago, he came and he played coming from a smaller school, was very productive in what he was asked to do, but now you see the confidence, really taking it to another level as he understands and then has seen the improvements, whether it's in the route game or in the blocking game of how he's grown. I think that he's really got a chance to be a great player for us.

I think the receiver position just as we've gone through fall camp, this last week was probably the best week we've had just in seeing that group consistently showing up and being able to make plays and doing the little things, and you can see their confidence that's growing, and I do think we're going to have a great group that we're going to be able to run out there and be able to attack in a variety of different ways.

Then you've already mentioned up front, but the running back position. Guys like Sam Singleton I think has really done a wonderful job. Cam Davis is somebody that I expect to play for us and to be able to be a part of that running back rotation, and obviously with L.T. and Roydell and just that group, I think they're going to be a really special unit for us.

I've been excited about a lot of guys that have emerged, but it's been fun to see some of these younger guys that have been in the program taking those real positive steps.

You see that in the defensive backfield, too, with some of those younger corners like Quinn, Conrad Hussey I think has taken some great strides, Ja'Bril Rawls is somebody that's going to be able to help us, and I'm just excited about that group.

Q. I think DJ has played in close to 50 games in his career. You've had him for nearly 35 practices now. How familiar are you guys with each other, and as a coach, is there ever a surprise the first time you go into a game with a new starting quarterback for the first time?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, yes, there are, but most times it's usually early in somebody's career. DJ has played in, like you said, a lot of football -- he's played a lot of football games. He's seen it all. He's been through highs, he's been through lows. I could not be any more pleased with what I've seen since he got here in January, even just his growth. You go through spring practice, we tried to put him in some really challenging situations. Some of the things we wanted to see, we wanted to see him respond to a disappointment. We wanted to put him in the hardest looks to see what was his decision making, how would he go and then how would he grow from that.

I think he's just done an outstanding job. He's playing with a lot of confidence. I'm excited to go see him play like he's prepared. If he does that, I think he could have a very special season. He's a great young man. He's a great leader. The work that he's put in, and he's got all the talent.

I'll tell him the same thing I've been telling him, just go out

there and be himself. We've got a lot of excitement and confidence in what that's going to be.

Q. After the second scrimmage you talked about the health of the team being in a good spot. Some guys might be questionable going into game week. What are you able to share about the state of the team?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I think for the most part, we're probably as good as you could hope for going into our first game. We've got a couple guys that will be kind of game-time decisions. Got a few guys that missed out, but I think it's going to be as good as what we could probably hope for. We might have a couple guys that are limited, but right now we'll kind of see how it goes more towards the end of the week before we make any, I guess, definite decisions on whether guys are available or not.

But I feel really confident about where we are going into this.

Q. I was wondering if there was a plan in place to deal with jet lag and the time change and kind of the long flight overseas?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, this has been probably the most preparation going into a travel plan or game that I've ever -- it's been a year and a half process. I'll tell you, for our operations staff, they've been remarkable, whether it's Jason and our staff there in equipment, just top-notch in the preparation. Scott Trulock, Josh Chapman, our athletic training team, just the preparation, the planning, the research. Obviously Bruce Warwick and the overall operation group, Jeff Kupper and player personnel, it's been just a full team effort, whether from the little things of getting everybody passports to making sure they're all ready to go to the planning of nutrition to our sleep habits to what we're going to do when we get there, how we kind of broke out our schedule. There is a very specific plan in place, and I think our guys have a lot of confidence.

Just in the operational aspect of it, we've got guys with over 20 games of international game experience at the NFL level, of what that looks like, what that needs to be. We feel very confident in the plan, and now we've got to go out there and execute it.

Q. Pretty sure this is a Tyler Santucci's first time as a defensive coordinator, so I know you were asked about it previously, but how similar maybe was an offense when you were an assistant coach versus when you had the full reins as an offensive coordinator?

MIKE NORVELL: No, he was a defensive coordinator at

Duke last year. He did an outstanding job in his first season of being a defensive coordinator, when you look at that defense and what they were able to do. Obviously Coach Elko was one of his mentors, and they've had a great tradition. But Tyler was a defensive coordinator last year.

But we understand that, like I said, with great coaches, they're going to be able to adapt to the personnel that they have, and I think that's one thing that showed even a year ago, just the versatility and all that they could do. It really kind of leaves an open platter for the things that we get to prepare for.

Q. After eight months with this bunch and 20 preseason practices, what do you think the identity is when you walk through the door and the first game?

MIKE NORVELL: This team has been about the work. That's what I always desire, is that you have a team that you don't have to push. These guys, you put the work in front of them and they go running after it.

I really have been proud of them for their approach to it. This is not a team that sits around and complains about what's in front of them. They go and work and attack it.

I cannot wait to watch this team play, and I really am -- with everything that I have, just excited about the moment and the opportunity. I like this team. I like how this team has come together. I really do respect these young men for who they are and what they're all about. It's just like I told them, you do all the work and you build it up for -- it's so few games, but now you get to go put it on display. There's going to be great moments. There's going to be challenging times in of course every contest, but it's that response. You can build confidence through the work that they've done and their preparation, but you get to go out there and execute it, and that's what we get to see come Saturday, and what a stage to be able to do it on.

Q. Obviously the game is sold out. Just scrolling through social media, there's already a ton of Seminole fans across the pond, the Marching Chiefs are going. How wonderful is that to know that even though you guys are going to be playing halfway across the world, you're going to have a very, very friendly crowd?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, that's what makes Florida State special is our fan base is remarkable. It's amazing, no matter if it was in the summer or out on the booster tours or any time, the number of people that said, Coach, we'll see you in Dublin, was just mindblowing. I know just even in our conversations with the game managers of what it is and just the number of Florida State fans that are going to



be there, that are traveling, obviously the Marching Chiefs, that's so big for us. They are such a key component to what we're all about. To be able to hear the war chant playing there at Aviva Stadium is going to be really something special.

It's a great venue. I do need to take a moment and say that I'm just grateful for everybody with the Aer Lingus game and the opportunity that we have. They've done a wonderful job in their preparation, and we're looking forward to the experience. All things that are leading up to go play our best.

I'm glad we're going to have a lot of Florida State fans there to cheer us on.

Q. I think they ranked 128th out of 130 teams last year in rushing defense, but obviously with the new coordinator, new pieces, is that something that's worth considering? Is that something that kind of flushes from year to year?

MIKE NORVELL: It's a good question. I think when you look -- college football now is so different than it's really been in years past. You have Duke, new coordinator, new scheme, new philosophical approach in how to improve in certain areas, but then the amount of personnel change that you can see. You look at their defensive front, their linebacker -- there's a lot of new bodies and new personnel that's joining the fold, and with the scheme that has been pretty good at working to stop the run. It's going to be a great challenge for our guys, and that's what I love is you get in the first game and you might have an assumption of what somebody will do, but you've got to be able to respond and react to what you see.

It's going to be a lot of moving pieces, but like I tell our guys, you've got to trust your rules and trust your eyes as we go through it, and we'll see how we adapt throughout the course of the game.

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