

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, September 23, 2024

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: After the game, I was proud of the guys, proud of the way they fought. I think that was the X factor in the game.

And I think it started throughout the week of practice, just the intent, the purpose, the joy that they had in going through the preparation. And I really felt their energy. I felt all the excitement, all the things that showed up throughout the course of the game.

The game did go the way -- I think it was probably very beneficial for us for where we are. You had to see the response to challenging situations. You had to see the response in going and making a play. You had to go see a response to finish. And all those things showed up during the game on Saturday.

Yes, a lot of things we have to continue to improve on, a lot of things we've got to work on and clean up. And really it's in every phase. But I was proud of our guys for what they did to be able to go get the win there Saturday night.

And I thought there was some really good performances. I thought our defensive line showed up and was productive and impactful. I think we had 12 TFLs in the game. That was a huge part of the game. I thought we saw some young players that showed up and really did some nice things. Edwin with his first career interception. I thought Q was remarkable just in his coverage and things that he was able to do.

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Impressive for those young guys in the secondary to be able to take advantage of the opportunity. K.J. Kirkland continues to flash and doing some good things. And then obviously offensively I thought some of the plays that were made on third downs, some of those cash down situations were big, some guys that really stepped up.

I was so proud of Jalen early coming off his first start, which is kind of unexpected, just there in the Memphis game where obviously some challenges showed up. But I

thought he came out and played at a very high level here this last week.

It was unfortunate Rob couldn't go. Obviously J.B. was not ready. I think both those guys have an opportunity to be back here this week. But to see Jalen and taking the week of preparation and the mentality of how he played. I recognized him there in front of the team because just really proud of what he was able to do in that moment.

You saw guys like Ja'Khi Douglas who has been really good for us over the years, but a couple big third-down catches, obviously the touchdown there at the end. It was a great connection there in that moment. And we had to have that play.

I thought the run game really showed some life. That was a good Cal defense. And obviously the front seven, they've been very strong this early part of the year. And I thought our guys were able to create some run seams.

There were some things that we still get to clean up and build upon, but I mean it was good to see the run game getting established.

We did miss some explosive opportunities where we've got to be better. Had a drop -- had a missed opportunity to connect vertically down the field.

But all in all I thought it was a good team win.

And I thought that special teams, there were some good and bad that we get to continue to work through, but overall I thought Alex was remarkable in helping flip the field and just our coverage of Ryan continues to be great in his kickoffs.

And just get to continue to build upon a lot of those areas where our return game, I think we're close. We've got to get a spark there.

But excited about the week that's ahead. We have to go on the road, ACC conference game, the first ACC conference game for SMU. I know it's going to be a great atmosphere there for them. They're kicking off their new

start in the conference. But a lot of respect for their coaching staff, the guys that are there. And they've got a talented team coming off a big win for them this last weekend in a rivalry game.

So we've got to have a great week of preparation. I know our guys are excited to build off of some of the things that we saw and experienced this last week. But there's no question about it, we've got to go get better in every area.

And our guys they got off to a great start with that last night. And I felt that urgency there in practice last night. So we've got to carry that over here tomorrow.

Q. Even though you had only scored seven points at the half, you moved the ball well. You didn't capitalize on some of those opportunities. What's the key to finishing some of those drives?

MIKE NORVELL: We got down into the red zone, had the turnover. It was just a bad play. It was one that we can't have the interception down there. Obviously we had a couple of negatives that forced them into long-yard situations.

But I thought we did move the ball. It's a consistency, making sure we're executing there on the third down. We had a couple of penalties that ended a drive where we were forced to kick.

But those were -- you started to feel a little bit of rhythm there in the first half, but it's still about being able to go down and finish. And can't have the turnover.

But I thought that was something that was productive. Coming out in the third quarter, obviously had an opportunity there early in the third quarter, but I think we had two three-and-outs to start out the second half. And we can't have that.

We're trying to establish things in the run game. We're close on a couple of plays when it comes to that. But obviously we've got to be better when we get started.

I thought there in the drive, the third to the fourth quarter, it was good for us. It was something that we needed. We had to have a couple of third-down conversions that showed up.

But it felt good to see the offense get in rhythm but we've got to finish drives. The name of the game is scoring points and putting our guys in the best position to be successful. Obviously we've got to continue to work and make sure that we're doing that.

Q. You mentioned in your opening statement about a different energy and preparation. And a couple of the guys after the game mentioned the same thing. Was there anything in particular you saw in their prep last week that kind of changed that for you?

MIKE NORVELL: I thought they had fun competing. I mean, to be honest with you. I can't say that this team has not worked. I believe they've worked in practice. I believe they've been trained to get better. But it's still a different mentality.

When you feel that edge and that urgency, that was the thing that stood out. There was good plays and bad plays in practice last week, mistakes that were made. But there was an urgency and enjoyment for that work. And seeing guys going at each other and competing with each other, but all with the positive mindset of what we get to do.

When you face disappointing results, at times you want it so bad you go out there and you work. And you just grind through the work, but I thought just that mentality was really special.

It was something that I told our team before the game, it was motivating to me to watch them come out and prepare the way that they did just with the mindset that they had. It's something you want and you desire, you ask for. But they made the choice to.

I was very confident in what it would look like, and that's where I felt us play like we're accustomed to playing at Florida State. It was hard. There's energy and excitement. Obviously incredible atmosphere with our crowd. It was a fun game to be a part of.

And just with all the different elements that showed up, those guys responded. But I thought it was the response in the week of practice that prepared them for that.

Q. As a play caller how do you balance tempo versus pulling out a little bit of a slower pace? First half looked like you established things with tempo, but I know you can't do that constantly.

MIKE NORVELL: Obviously you have to be able to sustain and extend drives. The explosive plays helps that. In some aspects, we had a couple early, we were able to pop a couple of early runs that you get into that rhythm.

It's one of those things that I think is important for us to be able to establish. It's something that we're working hard at because I think that you see the success that we can have when we get into that rhythm and to be able to play with tempo.

But it's still a consistency of execution, making sure we're taking what the defense is giving us. And then when we get our opportunities to have an explosive play, when we get an opportunity to push the ball down the field, whether it's in the run game or the passing game, we've got to take advantage of that.

There were probably 10 plays in that game offensively where you could take all different -- whether it was a read at quarterback, a track by a running back, a leverage from blocking.

They did a good job of mixing their fronts and things like that, but just trusting what you see and the quick reactions of what has to show up, all those things were different elements -- and I mean I see progress. It's about the final execution of it.

And we had a dropped ball on a potential explosive that was big. Those are the things that have to be cleaned up so we can jump into the rhythm and make sure we're pushing the tempo and playing and attacking the way we want to.

Q. Is the plan to keep utilizing DJ at quarterback moving forward? And if so, what are the things you see from him that you can build on productively?

MIKE NORVELL: Definitely not changing his position. Yes. I mean, obviously we all get to have the opportunity to go out and get better. That's going to be the push throughout the course of this week.

There were some good things that DJ did in some very critical moments and there's things where he has to be better.

It's the same for guys across the board. We're going to continue to push, continue to evaluate what we have to do in every area, not just at quarterback, across the board.

We've got to ask score points we have to be better offensively than what we've been. It's a challenge for every person, coaches, players, all of us. And so we're going to continue to push to do everything in our power to make sure that becomes the reality of how we operate.

Q. I want to ask about two decisions during the game -- first, going for it on fourth-and-seven how come you didn't kick the field goal or punt? Second half, (indiscernible) about fake punt return, can you talk about that as well?

MIKE NORVELL: The fourth-and-seven it was going to be

a 56-yard field goal. It's kind of the max range just with elements of what it was there for Ryan.

And then I thought our defense was playing really well. Felt very confident in -- I was under the belief we would go and get the first down. Obviously that did not happen.

But we've been really good on fourth downs this year and ultimately it didn't work out on that situation. They did get a field goal there before the half.

But I've got confidence in our team. I've got confidence in the guys to try -- I don't go into it thinking, oh my God, I hope this doesn't happen or hope that doesn't happen. It's the belief in what you do and how you train and all elements of it. I believe even if we didn't get it that we would get a stop defensively.

And obviously I want to put our guys in the best position to be successful. And I think we've shown a lot of confidence in Ryan in that moment. But I felt that I liked where we were. I thought if we get the first down, got an opportunity to go down there and potentially score a touchdown -- like I said, that didn't work out -- but we held them to a field goal and still winning with the lead there at halftime. And unfortunately it didn't work out the way we wanted it to in that situation.

Q. You spoke on a couple of banged-up guys earlier in your opening at running back. Obviously Roydell was unavailable on Saturday. What's his progress moving forward?

MIKE NORVELL: He'll be out probably for an extended period. We have to continue to evaluate what that looks like. It's unfortunate for him, but it does open up a great opportunity for some of the younger guys.

I thought L.T. did an outstanding job there in the game. You saw Kam Davis, he got banged up a little bit in the game, was able to come back.

Sam Singleton was able to get some work. Micahi Danzy is really pushing out. And obviously Kaziah Holmes. That running back group is a very talented group. It's unfortunate we're going to be without Roydell for a little while. And obviously Jaylin Lucas being out for the year, those are two really good players.

But I think I'm very confident in the group we have and what they'll be able to do. But you'll see more of those younger guys as we push forward.

Like I mentioned with Rob and J.B., I do think those guys should be in pretty good shape to be available this week.



And there was a good push towards the end of last week. But you'll feel good about where that's trending.

Q. You mentioned Jalen early at the top of this. What did you like about his performance? And how can he build on that moving forward?

MIKE NORVELL: It's funny because I think he had a little bit of nerves going into the game because the week prior, you want to come out of the pregame tunnel or you're coming out of the tunnel going to the game and that's, you're starting.

We had to move things around. It wasn't really much time to think and prep. That's where we always tell guys -- you have to be ready for your moment; you never know when it's going to show up.

I think that was kind of a wake-up call. I think he would be the first to tell you he didn't play his best game against Memphis. But going into this week he knew the opportunity. He knew what he had to do.

And what I loved is even with the nerves that he probably had before the game, once the game started, you felt him playing fast. He trusted what he saw. There was a mistake here or there, but his job and responsibility, he did it to the best of his ability.

He was able to create some space. I thought he did play fast. I thought he was confident in the things he was being asked to do.

So like I said, I was proud of him. I think it's a confidence builder because now he can go see in real, tangible, starting opportunity, he can go be a very high level player. But now it's bringing that mindset to everything you do, whether you're starting, whether you're not starting, you've got to be prepared and you've got to build upon that. And I think that's going to bring a great deal of confidence to him for what the future holds, and obviously opportunities that will continue to present themselves here this year.

Q. With an RPO play with DJ, there's so much going on obviously, but is he being instructed properly on the keys that he needs to be looking at in reading to make the proper decision? Or is he just not making the right decision based on what you guys are instructing him to do?

MIKE NORVELL: Give me that question again.

Q. On the RPO play, there's a lot going on. But there's keys given on it. Like you've got to look at who's crashing down, the numbers outside if he's going to

throw the ball. Are those things being instructed to him clearly that he's accepting them and processing them well in practice --

MIKE NORVELL: It's everything that happens on the field, I'm responsible for the execution of what it is. So we've got to do a better job in some of those areas to make sure that when we have opportunities -- whether it's handing the ball, whether it's reading, whether it's pulling and running -- that we're taking advantage of what we're getting and we all are responsible for that.

Q. On the last Cal drive of the first half, how do you talk to Edwin about the penalty? It seemed like a pretty weird play, weird penalty. With Edwin, too, on a more positive note, the spark he's brought, are you surprised? It seems like he's brought a spark on special teams and now on defense?

MIKE NORVELL: Over the last three weeks, I think he's probably grown as much as probably any individual on this team. He's making some real -- even though it might be small in some areas -- but real tangible efforts of improvement, growth.

He loves playing this game. He's a fun player to watch and definitely somebody that I think has a great future in front of him.

The penalty, he's trying to punch the ball. And ultimately -- he doesn't hit a quarterback when he's sliding. There's a lot of judgment calls that come out of it.

We had two personal foul penalties that I just you've got to -- they're playing the game. If you're trying to punch the ball out -- if the ball gets knocked out there, it's a fumble. That would have been the case in that play.

And then Maurice got an unnecessary roughness and that's a hard play -- when you're blocking somebody and they're going against you and the ball's behind you and there's no whistle, to know when that play is stopped, those are challenging things that we're going to work on the best ways to coach that and the best ways to eliminate -- because those are big place in games. We were able to overcome it with a third-and-18, but it's a hard thing to have to overcome.

Edwin, obviously that sparked them better field position there on that drive. It's a difficult thing with the kid because he's not going into the quarterback, but, yes, we're trying to knock the ball out with every opportunity.

But I love what I'm seeing from them and excited about what his future's going to continue to grow and be.

Q. With the way the offense is struggling at times and since you do have such a good kicker, in hindsight do you look back at a couple of those drives late in the first half and think maybe looking more to kick a field goal instead of trying to score? Does that ever enter your mind or can you not look at it --

MIKE NORVELL: It's all part of -- I mean, the interception was a bad play. It was a bad -- it was a bad play. We didn't do a good job. I mean, that was one that, at the end of the day, we come back later, running the same play in running the game and put ourselves in a position to have an opportunity to go for it on fourth down. Those are things that we just gotta be better in the moment.

Yes, I mean, but with outlets and different options, you can look at all things when it comes to play calling or what are you doing in this situation, that situation.

But also I do have faith in the guys of what we can do. And we proved it within that game of what we could do in a long-yard situation to be able to put ourselves in a position to go and score. We scored a touchdown in a later drive because of those same type of decisions.

Those are all things that we look at, all things you trust your gut. You've got to trust what you see what you believe you're going to get. Yes, we do have to go out there and be able to properly execute.

We were able to do that at times, but on the flipside of it, obviously that was a bad situation where we missed out on opportunities for an opportunity for points.

Q. This is the first time FSU will be playing SMU, but you having familiarity with the team from back at the time when you coached at Memphis, what usually would be your preparation when going against this SMU team, and thoughts going back to your common grounds in the Dallas area where you grew up?

MIKE NORVELL: I've got a lot of respect for the coaching staff, the team. It's a lot of new faces from when I coached against them at previous places, but it's a good football team. It's one they've got explosive playmakers. They've got a dynamic quarterback. I think one of the best tight ends we've played against.

They've got guys, you get them the ball in space, they can make things happen. Defensively, they're going to be very aggressive in what they do. This is a team that can present a lot of challenges.

We're going to have to go and have to play better than

what we've played, and we've got to go on the road and it's going to be a great atmosphere for them.

I just want to see our team continue to go get better. Obviously I'm from the Metroplex, and I've been playing enough games going back there, previous places. It's nothing new. We've got a couple guys from the Dallas area that I know they're excited about getting a chance to go play in front of their family and friends. Look forward to seeing them play well.

Q. On the Edwin Joseph play, the referee said after the play, personal foul after the play. But wasn't it happening --

MIKE NORVELL: There was nothing after the play.

Q. Correct. It was during the play. Anyway, that wasn't my question --

MIKE NORVELL: I got pretty far on the field. I got pretty close on that one.

Q. When you're through four games and you've only scored 60 points as a team, clearly not anywhere close to what you're expecting or wanting, is there a temptation to make drastic changes to your offense, maybe to the personnel, to the way you're calling things? Where is that temptation? Are there drastic changes that can be even made at this point?

MIKE NORVELL: It's all things -- every part of it is evaluated. And you look at, hey, who, what can we do to be better because we have to be better. And there's no question about it.

If it takes drastic changes, we're going to figure it out because we are going to continue to work, continue to get better. But there's been, through those first four games, there's not just one thing. That's where ultimately it's a bunch of small things that show up where we have to grow and we have to be better. And coming into the year, there's areas of strengths, areas of wanting to see it in action, to how it's going to play, what it's going to be.

There's a lot of work that goes into it, a lot of work that's out there on the practice field, a lot of work in studying and game planning, prepping for trying to put our guys in the best position. Sometimes you have to evaluate it all. Sometimes it's personnel.

If we need to do this or we need to do that or put this guy in this position or that guy in another position, those are all things that you've got to evaluate and it still comes down to making sure that it's what's best.

Four games in, we've not done a good enough job offensively. That's very clear. And so we have to get better. So we're going to continue to evaluate all parts of what we do, what we're asking them to do, who is doing what, and it has to show up in the game to be better. Because it's a necessity for this football team and ultimately that's my job in making sure that I'm helping put the right guys in the right place to go out there and be successful on game day.

Q. You talked about all the players from the DFW area, having family to come see them play. You talked about how important that direct flight from Tallahassee to Dallas is for recruiting. How cool is it now that the kids in the Dallas area have an opportunity to actually see Florida State play 30 minutes to an hour away from home?

MIKE NORVELL: I think that's great. When SMU came into the league, that is one of those underlying benefits of knowing that, with the direct flight, with the guys that we have and have recruited here to Florida State, it's a great tie for us, and those guys know they also get a chance to play in the Metroplex at least every few years, I think is a great benefit.

Like I said, they're excited. I think it's wonderful for our brand to be there and get a chance for all the Florida State fans in the Metroplex to be able to come out and come see the Noles.

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