

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Hope everybody's doing well. Happy Signing Day.

Before I get started, I'm going to kind of reserve this time and this press conference just towards the young men that we're signing in this class, the guys that have been processed. There's still a couple of forms that we'll be waiting on and surprise some more guys here in the next few days. I'm going to kind of push back any staff questions, personnel. Obviously that's a part of transition for us.

We'll have announcements, potentially another press conference here at a further date, to really address all issues when it comes to staff. I want people to be focused on the young men who are joining our program.

Very, very excited about the group. We have 15 guys at this time that are official newcomers to Florida State football and definitely excited about this group.

I think, as you go through a season, it's been a season of challenge, a season of change. It's been definitely a remarkable journey with building relationships, pouring into individuals, identifying needs of guys that can come in, I think make a great impact to the program.

I think there's a lot of guys on this list that will be immediate players, have a chance to really let their presence be felt not only with their athletic skill and talent but really just the mindset, the maturity of who they are, the drive that they have. I think they'll be a wonderful complement to a lot of the returning players that we have coming back.

As you look at the list, we hit a variety of different positions, but size jumps off at you. We've got great length in this class. It was something that we knew we needed to address. We wanted to make sure that's something that we continue to push upon. I thought that was something at times this year where we could be better, and that was something that we wanted to basically add into the program along with the playmaking ability.

As you look over the years and make sure that we're continuing to grow and the guys that we're bringing in, I wanted the playmakers. I wanted guys that there's not as many projections in this year's class. These are guys that I think are very well established in what they've done. They are guys that I do think will come in and have opportunities to grow and develop throughout their journey, but these are guys that I think are definitely a special group of proven playmakers.

Definitely excited about what they'll be able to do early in their careers, whether it's a junior college player, whether it's a freshman that's coming in. I think these guys are definitely an exciting group to be able to watch with great size, great ability, and I think they'll be dynamic players within our program.

Got to give thanks to everybody involved in this process from our academic team to our recruiting team to professors that are within campus to all of our coaches that spent countless hours in building relationships, to everybody around this university that helped put on display what it is to be a Florida State Seminole and the countless hours of investment and just taking the time to paint the vision for what the future holds for each and every one of these young men.

I thank the recruits that obviously have signed here today, but I also thank the ones that have given us opportunity. There's some remarkable young men that have made choices to go elsewhere and obviously forge their journey, but they gave us a wonderful chance to build relationships and to identify guys that obviously we're really excited about adding to the program and obviously guys that I think have chosen what they felt was the best fit for them.

It's been a different year just because of how this Signing Day falls, right after the season, especially with having a couple of open positions within our staff. I think there's some challenges that presented itself, but the commitment from these guys that have signed today, some at positions where we don't currently have a position coach, it's the belief in who and what we'll be able to do and really just overall this program and where it's going.

A lot of excitement with a couple of the hires that we've made. I think there's going to be a great deal of momentum as we're pushing forward.

Q. Kevin Wynn is a young man you had committed for some time, but you had to battle to the buzzer to keep him. What is he potentially for you guys, and what kind of class do you like around him?

MIKE NORVELL: He's definitely one of those guys throughout this process that's been pinpointed the last couple of years. To see a guy with his size, he's got tremendous explosive get-off. He's such an impactful player. The way that he moves, he's unlike anybody else in the country in my opinion. He's so explosive.

As we transition into a new year, obviously we're going to attack on defense. That's going to be something that we're going to do, and he is somebody that we've identified that that is the greatest trait in him. I think he's listed at 320, might be a little bit more than that, but definitely excited about the playmaking ability that he brings into this program.

I think that he will have a chance to make an early impact. Obviously when you're playing in the trenches, that's a hard position to transition, but he does -- he's got the skill set and definitely the mentality that it takes to be able to have a chance to do that.

So really excited about being able to hold onto Kevin. It was a battle. I think Odell did a wonderful job throughout it building a relationship with everybody around. I love the young man. I was on the phone with him late last night. That's when he told me he was solidifying that commitment and just so excited about what he's going to bring into this program on and off the field because he is a young man that he is -- he's the total package.

What he does in between the white lines is special. Who he is outside of them is just absolutely remarkable.

Q. You mentioned the length, especially at the skill positions, receiver, tight end. Was that something that you guys were seeking, or just those were guys you liked and it worked out that way?

MIKE NORVELL: No, we wanted to go big, to say it that way. Adding Jordan, being able to go through and see what he does, Teriq, who joined the class here I think it was last night verbally, obviously signing here today. That's 6'5" and 6'7". We've had a lot of success with guys of that size, and just the matchup problems that that can create and the play makers that they are.

You see on film what we've asked guys to do here. Yes, do they have a high ceiling? Do they have high potential? But I think they can come in and really be able to address a need for what Coach Malzahn is looking for, for what we've been accustomed to seeing and excited about just the total package of what those guys can be.

I think one of the stars of the class is Chase Loftin. He has been our top target. He's been the guy that we've wanted as this thing has gone through. Building a relationship with him, getting him on campus, it was no doubt that -- the playmaker in space. He is a hybrid and can really do it all. He's one of the toughest matchup problem, I think, players in the country. He's got great speed, great playmaking, great hands. Then he's also got a great deal of toughness that, when he has to come inside the box, you can feel him there as well.

Then he's just a remarkable person. He has been through the process. I think Chris Thomsen did an outstanding job building that relationship, being able to paint the picture. He's going to be a guy that we're very, very excited about coming in.

Also in the defensive backfield, being able to -- we've got three defensive backs that have joined the program, all with great length. I mean, Zae Thomas, just a corner from American Heritage, I think is going to be an outstanding player, very versatile in coverage and what he can do, playing up, playing off, get his eyes to the quarterback, and he'll put his pads on you.

It is special too with him, a member of the Seminole tribe of Florida, being part of this class, what a remarkable story. As I've told him throughout this journey, he earned it, the position, and really was somebody that we wanted to have a part and being a leader of it.

You sit there and you look at Max, I think he is -- the versatility that he brings, Max Redman. I think he is just a guy that can really play all five positions. He's got length. He's got versatility. He's a guy that a few years back I saw in a camp, and I think he's pushing 6'1", 6'2". He's just such a diverse skill set. I think he has the ability to play some corner. I think he has the ability to play safety, play deep, or being able to force himself into the box.

Today being able to get Shamar, that was a top target for us. He's gone through this process. He is a guy that, of all the guys we had that came to camp this summer, he was the one that stood out to me as much as anybody. He's been a great player on the field.

When I got to see him in person, I mean, it was no doubt. He's been a top target, somebody that we absolutely

wanted and needed in this class, and I think he's going to be a special player for years to come and has a chance to definitely make an early impact with what we're doing here.

When you see another 6'2" corner, that's something that we've really tried to address over these last few years. Coach Surtain is doing a great job of developing those guys, and it's kind of speaking for itself.

Q. We've talked a little to Kevin Sperry, I guess, to hear his side of the story about how that kind of came together late. What can you speak to about your relationship with him and what stands out about his skill set, a guy who played at a high level of high school football in Texas?

MIKE NORVELL: I love Kevin. I want to say it was two years ago, two or three years ago. I'll never forget the first time I saw him out here on the practice field, going through our quarterback camp. I mean, you heard about a young man from Dallas that was going to be here, and he just exploded throughout the course of that day. It was impressive.

Watching the ball jump off his hands, the accuracy, the kind of precision in the passing game that he showed there that young in his career, it really just -- the ball jumped out of his hand. That's when we offered him. I was very confident in what his career would be, and he's definitely not proved me wrong.

You look at what he did last year in the state of Oklahoma, leading his football team. This year he's in the semifinals there, in the highest classification there in Dallas in the state of Texas. What he does with his arm is special. What he does with his legs, it really is, it makes him very dynamic.

When the opportunity presented itself for us, it was obviously an opportunity to reach out. Kevin is an absolute home run for us. So excited about bringing him in for the player but also the young man. His family, even early in the process before he committed to another school, came out multiple times. We got a chance to really build a relationship there.

The good Lord got us back to being together, and he's going to be one heck of a quarterback here at Florida State.

Q. You talked about Chase Loftin. I think he's actually the first player to ever come here from Nebraska. What does that just say about Florida State, the brand, all that kind of stuff, that you can go to a state like that where it's hard to take kids out of state and get him to

come here?

MIKE NORVELL: Chase is a special player. Being one of the top players in that state and choosing to come here, it's exciting. There was a lot of pressure and a lot of schools pursuing him, but he knew what he wanted and was very specific in looking at offenses, coaches, position coaches, opportunity.

I just think it really all came together. It was a position of need. It was one that we needed. Obviously we've got Landen and obviously even Amaree, who when Amaree came here, signed as a defensive end but knew he would be an athlete. As he came in as a true freshman, wanted to get him on the field, he earned that and his role at tight end. We're going to really look at him a lot this spring at defensive end as well because I still think he can do both.

With that opens even a greater door of opportunity for Chase to come in and have a chance to make an immediate impact because I think he absolutely has the skill set to do so.

There will be a transition, but he identified what he wanted and so did we. For that to be able to stay true throughout this process, I'm definitely excited to coach him.

Q. You mentioned a little bit earlier, but how tough was it recruiting down the stretch without a full coaching staff? And then along those lines, how important has Coach Malzahn been just in the last 48 hours just to finish out this class?

MIKE NORVELL: There are definitely real challenges, and especially when you were -- the high profile players that we're on, it's every day for the last three years that it's been building and working. Then when there's change, I mean, it's hard.

I'd like to tell you that we were able to overcome it in every situation. We weren't. I respect those young men for the time they gave us, for the opportunity to build relationships, and some of them chose to go in different places where maybe they had a little bit more familiarity with what that looks like, and you know, that's fine. It's part of the challenge when there is change.

I'm definitely excited for the guys that we have and what that's meant. For the ones that believe in not only the place, the people that are in those rooms that are current players, and then obviously what I'm going to be able to do in bringing the right assistant.

There's some positions that it would have been great to have somebody in position, but it's all about being right,

and that's our number one focus of what is the right fit for us when it comes to the leader of each position. Then I think we've hit a grand slam with our coordinators. I think it's definitely exciting for the choices that we've been able to make and what's ahead.

Q. I'm not sure if you've ever had Twins on the roster, but Mandrell and Darryll, what do they bring, and how excited are you to have them come into the class?

MIKE NORVELL: Those are two guys that you talk about potential growth, I mean, they've done that throughout the high school process. To see what -- they're two guys I was really high on their potential. They'd come to camps. You saw the movements. You saw the ability.

But what was the size going to look like? How are we going to project that moving forward? And just the way that they have progressed through their high school career, I mean, it was -- we got a few games into their senior season, and those two guys became priorities for us.

I was excited to be able to get them here, and they were committed to another university. It's good to have Coach Malzahn here with some familiarity of that, but those guys did make the decision to come be at Florida State, and it's because of the opportunity.

But I am really, really excited about what their future is going to be, the opportunity to come, and they bring a physicality as well as an athleticism with great size, and they're going to be impactful for us on our defensive line.

Q. Brunno has mentioned that he may kick and punt for you. Is that the expectation? Also just talk about him as a kid?

MIKE NORVELL: He is, he's special. Obviously in today's age with the new 105 roster count, that's going to be in times where you could potentially carry more kickers as walk-ons over that.

I wanted -- I think JP has done a great job in that room, Coach Barfield, in identifying the right guys. I think we've got the next two stars are guys that have been here in the program, but I wanted to bring somebody that is absolutely going to challenge and be able to challenge early to compete for all things.

Brunno is one of those special players that is a combination. I don't know rankings, but I think he's 2 and 3, whether kicker and punter, or somewhere close to that. But he was the No. 1 guy for us because of that versatility. And to be able to know that he'll come in and have a chance to compete and push in both positions, we'll be

able to surround that specialist group with really a talented group and have great depth and great competition.

There is a standard of excellence when it comes to that here, those positions here at Florida State. Definitely fired up for Brunno being a part of it.

Q. When you're talking about the quarterback and how you like how he looked those couple of days at camp two years ago, how much do you put into what you see in those first two or three days and then like, okay, he did great out here, this isn't a real game. Let me go see what he looks like on film. Let me go see his stats. How much does that play when you're looking at all these guys at camp, the production they actually have in a football game?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, you have to produce, and they're still going to play the position. There's plenty of guys that can go out there and look great in a camp, but it doesn't transition like you'd want it to.

Now, there's been some players that I watched in camp and there was no doubt in my mind what it was going to be. The talent, the ability to -- Luke. We offered Luke, and he had played some at quarterback, but he was a starting receiver and safety his sophomore year. We offered him before his junior season. Just his mentality, the ability, I had no doubt what it would look like.

We accepted his commitment, and he goes on and wins the state championship his junior year and becomes one of the best quarterbacks in the country his senior year.

I know what it looks like, and I've got a lot of confidence in evaluating that position, especially when you get to see those guys early and then the progression of how they ascend. I think Kevin was one of those guys. You watched him. You were excited. That's obviously why we offered him. We did get a commitment pretty early in the process in that year's class, but he did everything I expected him to do.

As you know what you saw early and then the opportunity rises to say, all right, well these -- who is it that you're going to target? Who is it that's going to be the right fit? You go and you watch his film, and for what he did on the practice field with his arm to what you watched, the combination of what he can do with his arms and his legs, this guy's got a chance to be the real deal.

I'm grateful to have him in our class, and like I said, he has a chance to be special.

Q. How many of these -- or which of these players will

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be able to enter in January?

MIKE NORVELL: That's a good question. I would say it's a -- I don't have that in front of me. There's a couple of them that we'll announce as well, but it's going to be a good number of them. I would say 10-plus of these guys will be here. I don't have it on the top of my head right now.

Q. Ethan Pritchard is a kid that's been committed to this program for a long time, and he's never really wavered in that commitment. If you could speak a little bit on him as a person, and also just how versatile he is on the field, having played a little bit of safety, played a little bit of linebacker. What are you looking for him to do?

MIKE NORVELL: I've watched Ethan since his freshman year, and I'll never forget the first time I walked into the weight room his freshman year and just talking to his coaches. It was in January, and just I remember his coaches at the time pointed out, he goes, that one right there is going to be one to watch. He's playing safety.

Came over to 7-on-7 that summer. We got a chance to see him. We covered him. His body has continued to grow. He is a fast and athletic linebacker that plays with a pissed off mentality, and I love it. He's about all the right things.

He's had a lot of people that have come in and tried to sway him one way or the other, but he has been committed to Florida State. It's a great and special relationship with him and just so very excited about what he's going to bring.

Even as we look at different elements of what we can do defensively, he could be one that has a chance to do some great things early just because of his speed and power. But excited about Ethan.

Q. I feel like the more I read up on this, the more confused I get. If you could help out. What's changed with the National Letter of Intent and just, I guess, whether that's a binding thing. Has anything changed with the way guys sign or commit to this program?

MIKE NORVELL: They don't sign a National Letter of Intent anymore.

Q. Does that change anything at all?

MIKE NORVELL: They sign a grant-in-aid, so they're tied to that. That's really where the NLI -- which one is it? NLI, very good. They both mean money now, right? It doesn't really matter. So that one's been removed. Obviously the

grant-in-aid has basically replaced that. It's going to be a lot of different dynamics.

As it moves forward, there will be obviously agreements, there will be all things between schools and players. It's a new age, but you just eliminate one of those sheets of paper. You don't have to circle "AM" on it and send it back and all the different dynamics of what it would take getting things clarified.

Q. Tyeland Coleman, a JuCo prospect, is he a guy that you think could make an impact early on in his career?

MIKE NORVELL: I do. He's one we saw early this fall. Looking at the defensive tackle position, really was looking for length and athleticism, and he's not the tallest guy in the world. He's got 34-inch arms. He is active, plays extremely hard.

One of my favorite things of watching him on film is just the redirection. To be 300 pounds, to move the way he moves and just the effort that he plays with, he absolutely loves it. To be able to get him out of the state with in-state pursuit was big.

He was here this last weekend. He made a great impact on me just having the conversations of what it is he's looking for, what it is he wants to do, his drive and passion, great questions. He really sees this as a big picture experience for him. Yes, as a player, but also his growth as an individual. I think he's got a chance to really be a good player here.

Q. You mentioned earlier the challenges with the coaching situations. How are you able to keep Mario without him knowing who his position coach was going to be? Then also flip another player.

MIKE NORVELL: Mario is remarkable. I think Gabe and Tina did a wonderful job with both those guys, really worked his tail off throughout the year and just building a relationship.

Obviously change is hard, but those guys believe in the program. They believe in the leadership of what we're doing, and they believe in the opportunity that's here for them.

Mario is a remarkable young man with such, such great position flexibility. I mean, he plays the game with the right mentality. Watching his body grow, he came over to multiple camps. He came and made a great investment to learn more about the university, learn more about the opportunity.

Then it's been a great benefit for me to watch him grow. I've got no doubt in what his future will be. I think he's extremely athletic, a powerful young man.

Then being able to add Sean is just another guy that came to camp this summer, and when he left camp, he became an absolute target for us and what we wanted to try to get. He was committed to another school. Obviously multiple schools have been recruiting him throughout this process, and it came down to a tough decision, but he believes in who we're going to be able to attract here, the opportunity that's in store, and just fell in love with Florida State and the guys that are here.

Q. You've got 15 on this sheet of paper. Do you think it will be in the neighborhood of 20 by the time the week is over?

MIKE NORVELL: I think it's got to -- we've got opportunities there. I would definitely say 19, 20 should be a good look.

Q. And because the calendar is so goofy, immediately you go into essentially portal season. How much do you try -- I know we're talking about the high school kids, but how much do you try to, when you're recruiting high school kids, you're also thinking about portal additions. Do you even have a number of how many portal guys, what this roster overhaul could look like?

MIKE NORVELL: You try to always have projections. While we're doing this, I met with like 30 players of our current players. I met with another even probably 15 today. There's some real conversations happening.

Some guys are going to be going to explore other options and going into the portal themselves. This is a -- it's one of those things that's kind of a fluid situation on what your roster is going to look like, what it's going to be. There's some extreme challenge that's being issued in our meetings.

Like I said after our last game, it's getting right. This is going to be like you're either in or you're not. This is -- there's going to be a sense of desperation when it comes to our daily focus of what it take to go win and to get this program back.

That's what these guys that signed today are signing up for. That's what the guys that, as we go into pursuit for any other additions into our program, man, it's going to be a heck of a ride. I'm very, very excited about how my meetings are going, just the edge, the mindset, kind of the thrust of energy that has come into the program. I mean,

this is going to be -- it's big. The real ones will be here, and that's what it's going to take.

Q. As I look at this list, about half of these guys, almost half of them, that were somewhat of a surprise or a pleasant surprise that they committed today. How long ago did you know this was coming together?

MIKE NORVELL: Some of these it was -- there were some pleasant surprises on our end. There were some guys that we've had a pretty good sense of, and it's kind of a good mix of all of it. I mean, we've worked really hard. We've tried to -- we're not looking to add bodies, and as you sit there and you go through it, there's no position that we just need to sign a guy.

We are trying to identify, all right, what is it that this young man brings to our program that can help contribute as fast as possible but also fill the needs that we have to get our program and to push our program forward?

I think that some of these guys have had different dynamics in their own recruitment of what they're looking for, what they want it to be, and they see the opportunity that's in store here. They see what we're doing, where we're going, and they have a lot of excitement, as we do, of how this can all come together and obviously what the future holds for them.

Q. You just mentioned it and you said it after the Florida game as well how this is going to get fixed. How much does some of these pleasant surprises and that kind of stuff show fans and show people outside of the program that this is the start of that getting fixed?

MIKE NORVELL: You can take it how you want to take it. My focus is going to get this team better. I hope the fans are excited. I am. I'm excited about the guys that we're bringing in, players, coaches. It's got a chance to be a really, really good group through a challenging circumstance.

It's one of those things that we talked about it throughout the season. I'm asked about it all the time of what's the message? What's it going to be? It really is the same. You've got to choose to want to be a difference. You've got to choose to want to be a spark, whether you win a crap ton of games or whether you don't. That's what you have to come into it with.

I don't want anybody coming in here just to be a part of this program. I want them to come in here and fight to make this program better. As a fan, when you see those type of decisions, when you see that type of belief in what and

who is there, I mean, you should get excited.

I think when you look and you see the coaches that are joining our program, which I already said I'm not getting into them in the conversation, but when you see the choice and say that's where I want to be, that's exciting. When players see that, they feel off of it.

There's a buzz within the program, and there needs to be because it's going to take every bit of that passion, that energy, that mindset to go and attack what's ahead. There's going to be -- there will be more that are joining the program, and there will be some that are leaving the program. I respect them all, but the ones that are here, it's definitely time to go get it.

Q. To follow up on that topic, when you're having those conversations and if guys tell you with their words that they're ready for what you want to do, but if you haven't always seen it in their actions, how do you make those decisions?

MIKE NORVELL: Some of them, they don't have the choice. They don't have the choice. If I haven't seen it in any action or I don't believe it, then they're not going to be here. That's that.

If I know they have it in them and I've seen the flashes of it and now it's time to take that step and it's time to prove it with the words, you'll know through spring. Thank God there's another opportunity at the end of it for those that change their mind or maybe can't live up to it. They'll have a path to do something else. But I believe in the players I have. I really do.

We've got a lot of great, great young men, and they're pissed off with what we've done. We all have ownership in it, and it's time to go get it right. We can sit there and talk about it. We can sit there and try to say all the right things, but it's going to come down to the actions.

For the class that we put together, for the work that we put into recruiting, for the work that we're putting into our evaluation, the work that those players are putting into the off-season program that is ahead, it won't be hard to spot because, if it doesn't show up, then they'll choose to go do something else.

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