

Florida State University Football Media Conference

Monday, August 25, 2025

Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Grateful for all the work of our coaches, support staff, every department that they've poured into the young men that we get to coach and really grateful for the players and the investment they've made, not just what they're doing on the field but the growth and the continued buy-in to how to do it and the relationships at that are growing throughout this journey.

We've got a great group of young men. I think you see the experience that this team has and guys that have played a lot of football, and some guys in different roles, some guys obviously at a different place, but really looking forward to this 2025 Florida State football team and all that I believe that they can accomplish.

What better way to kick it off than here at Doak Campbell Stadium, sold-out crowd. It's going to be an incredible atmosphere, and to be able to do it here against a quality opponent, top-10 ranked team, a lot of excitement around our program.

Looking forward to a big week of preparation. I like the things that guys have done up to this point. We have got a jump start on Alabama, and now it's just about continuing to grow and improve throughout this week so we can go play at our best level come 3:45 on Saturday.

Q. As you've gone through camp and preseason, all the good stuff, do you have a sense for what this team is? What do you know about this team personality-wise and even schematically?

MIKE NORVELL: I've been really pleased with the competitiveness of this team in all situations that we've tried to throw at them. It's easy to say offense, defense, special teams work, everything that they're doing, growing in our situational awareness, try to see guys that take ownership in what they're being asked to do on a specific play, whether it's coverage, run scheme, obviously technique or fundamentals they have to use.

But really more the mentality about how they go into executing that, and I really have liked the fight I've seen in

this team throughout our preseason workouts and really since they got here in the off-season, stemming all the way back from January, and I think that's going to be a great characteristic that's needed and something that we were looking for.

Obviously come Saturday, we're going to get to see them do that against another opponent. I do think this is a team that has a lot of versatile playmakers. When you look on both sides of the ball, guys that can align in different places with what they're being asked to do. I'm excited to see all of it come together with the different combinations but also the 11 guys that take the field to go get the job done.

Q. Chase Loftin listed as a wide receiver. I know you guys have talked about his ability to flex out. Can you paint the picture of how he can be used?

MIKE NORVELL: Chase is somebody that we're really excited about. Just from coming in in the spring to what he was able to show, seeing how that's been able to transition, he's a very natural route runner. He's got great explosiveness, ball skills. He's a guy that really has earned opportunity.

I love our tight end room with the guys that we have there, and I think that Chase being able to put himself in this position is a testament to his work and ability, and really fired up to see what he's going to be able to do throughout the course of this season and starting here Saturday.

Q. We saw the video you guys put out on Tommy breaking the rock at the end of camp. You knew what a playmaker he was coming in. I know you knew him personally from recruiting as well, but has he exceeded any expectations? Has he been exactly what you guys wanted since he came in?

MIKE NORVELL: We had very high expectations when he joined the program of what he would bring. It's easy to see the athleticism, the skill, the games that he's played, the impact that he can make.

But what I've been just very proud of him for, just the investment. The investment in others, the investment into



the program. He brings a great spirit into this building. Whether it's how he greets people walking in the door, whether it's the Extra Point Club ladies that are sitting at the front to how he interacts with managers, trainers, his teammates, the competitiveness that he brings, the challenge that he presents. Just seeing when he steps on the field, guys striving to be better.

You need that from that position. He's definitely provided a great spark for this team. I think guys have rallied with him in this off-season, and definitely excited to play for him.

I think that Tommy has earned that throughout this time here at Florida State, and I was really pleased to see him break the rock. It was a pretty easy decision just watching the way that he comes to work every day and what this team and his teammates mean to him.

Q. Jayvan Boggs gets the starting receiver role. I know you've talked about him throughout the off-season, but what was it that truly separated him to get that role so quickly

MIKE NORVELL: I think he's been extremely productive. From the spring to fall camp, you saw growth. He has definitely got a wonderful skill set. But when he got his opportunities, he's capitalized on them.

He still has a lot of growth in front of him, but he's put himself in this position, and I think he's earned the opportunity.

Most freshmen that come in, they all want to play, and they'll say it. They'll sound good. Some of them have the ability and talent, but it just also carries over into the mindset, carries over into making sure that you know what to do, how to do it, and then the consistency of being where you need to be and being able to execute when your number is called.

I think Jayvan has done a really nice job of putting himself in that position, and I'm excited to see him go compete on game day.

Q. Two players who weren't listed on the depth chart, Lawayne McCoy, Kevin Wynn, are those injury related? And health-wise going into Alabama, how are you guys doing?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, those are two guys that will be out this week. They're expecting a relatively quick return, but those are two guys that will not be available.

Q. One guy who did come back from injury later in the fall was Jason Jenkins, and he gets a start. In that

short amount of time that you were able to see him out there, what was it that stuck out so he could get that starting job?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, he's a violent player. You feel his presence. We knew that whenever he was coming in.

Unfortunately it was delayed in person just with the injury there in the spring, and having to kind of work through his rehab process, but he attacked every day. I've used him as an example. I think I've mentioned him and Jacob Rizzi, both guys that had spring injuries that really had to bust their tails to get back to have an opportunity in this game.

Both of them came back before what was initially thought would be their return date, and for them to get live work in that second scrimmage and for them to go out there and function and really even in these last couple weeks just be able to grow throughout -- knocking some of the rust off and just the technique, the fundamentals, the communication, playing faster, I think both of those guys have done a really impressive job in the controlling the things that they can control and putting themselves in position.

But I think Jason is a guy that I'm really looking forward to seeing out there on the field. He brings a physicality and an explosiveness that's absolutely needed, and he plays with an incredible motor.

Q. When we spoke to you in the final week of camp, you mentioned the safety position. One of the safety spots being what you were looking for. It looks like Ashlynd Barker was listed. What did he do to establish himself?

MIKE NORVELL: Ashlynd, I think he's taken some tremendous strides. He was a guy that when he came here he was kind of limited just on overall experience. He dealt with injury in high school, went to junior college, was able to come in and really was learning on the run.

You've seen his growth. You saw some plays last year that showed up in special teams, a little bit defensively, but I think he's playing with a lot of confidence. He's got great size, can run, definitely a physical presence. You see him, I think K.J. Kirkland has continued to emerge. You'll see him a good amount here this weekend as well, a guy that can play and play multiple positions. But it's a competitive group, and I think it's a testament to the consistency of what Ashlynd has done, but it's also -- we've got guys that we're very confident can play at a high level.

Q. With Randy Pittman, how good is he? How good can he be? And is he better than maybe you thought



he was when he got here?

MIKE NORVELL: I think Randy, he's an absolute playmaker. He can do so many different things, whether it's alignment, whether it's out wide, in the core. He's got a tremendous versatility of skills. I think that he has absolutely grown even in his time here. You've seen his playing techniques, fundamentals, allowing him to maximize his size, his strength. A very powerful human being.

Reminds me a lot just from the strength and power, really kind of what we saw with Jaheim Bell, where he's not the biggest guy in the world, but he definitely plays with the right mentality, can create space. When you look at him on the perimeter, he's got great ball skills, a guy that -- he knows his game. He knows his game really well. I think he puts himself in a great position to be able to impact the game because of that versatility.

I think when you look at that tight end room, it's probably one of the best positions that we have just with the versatility of skills. Randy, Amaree, Landon, who it was great to get him back these last couple weeks. He was out for the first part of fall camp. Seeing Markeston and just what he can do, which allowed us the flexibility with Chase, who we talked about earlier, just to be able to kind of transition him out to kind of solely focusing on receiver because of that room.

I think those guys have done a great job, and Randy is definitely a leader within it.

Q. When we talked to Coach Hand last week, he mentioned some possible starters at some positions but there will be also top backups at each position, so you're always trying to get your best five available on the field. Is that something where you guys actually map out all the contingencies, or is it just case by case?

MIKE NORVELL: No, we've got a really good plan of if this happens, this would have the mob. If that happens, this would be the adjustment that kind of coincides with it.

I've been pleased with that offensive line group, and I've been pleased with the competition. There's still competition. We have a week of preparation here in front of us, and it still comes down to production. I've said that to every position, every -- what guys have done up to this point, it's wonderful. We can sit here and talk and feel good about any statements that are made, but when you step on the field, what's getting done.

That's a program-wide -- that's the expectation, that you've

got to go perform and you've got to continue to grow. When you're on the field, is everybody else around you better because of you. That is the challenge that's issued to all positions, and I think our O-line has really embraced that.

You see guys that have versatility and positions that can be played, guys that have grown and developed through that process, and I think it's a very competitive group.

Q. After watching Tony's group throughout the spring and now in preseason, how intrigued are you to see him against a different opponent, especially somebody as talented and physical as Alabama?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it's going to be a great challenge. You look at Alabama and what they do offensively, they've got a very experienced offensive line, big, strong, powerful. You look at how they utilize the tight end position and creating different surfaces, movements, all the window dressing to really be able to play downhill.

They're going to push the ball vertically down the field. I think it's probably one of the best receiving corps in the country, some very talented players that will align all over the place so you've got to be locked in on match-ups, you've got to be locked in on leverages, understanding what's your job, what's your task and what you're trying to take away, and you've got to be aggressive.

This is a team that if you don't bring it every snap, they absolutely will expose you. I'm really looking forward to our defense. You've seen them be able to transition from all the things we've worked in practice, and for that to carry over to the game -- it's both sides. You've got two new coordinators on the offensive and defensive side of the ball, and I think they've done a great job of working together as they've competed against each other in fall camp.

Now as we transition into game week, the preparation that's been invested and to be able to challenge each other to try to expose areas against each other that I think has made us better through the process and through that competition.

I'm really looking forward to both sides of the ball getting a go and showing it on game day.

Q. How is Squirrel White doing physically?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, full expectation for Squirrel to play. He was able to practice the last couple days. Really pleased with him and just his process. He came off the second scrimmage, had a great outing, scored a long

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

touchdown. You feel his confidence, and he took that over into -- when he wasn't able to be on the field last week, he was kind of recovering from a minor injury. Still, his attack was there.

I think he's done a great job. He's a veteran receiver. He's a guy that's performed at a very high level. So we're glad to have him back in the fold, and looking forward to this week.

Q. With Tommy, how good has he been as a football player for you this last month, because what Florida State fans remember is obviously 2023 and then last year he played here. Has he looked like that guy to you for the most part? How good can he be?

MIKE NORVELL: I think Tommy is playing as good as he's been. That is the expectation. As he's come in, there's the ownership of all actions, of what he's doing with his arm, what he does with his legs. I think even the continued growth in protections and being able to help position and get us in the best plays.

I think he's done a wonderful job with that, working with Coach Malzahn, Coach Tokarz. I think those guys have been great for him. I'm looking forward to seeing him be able to transition all of that work to the field on Saturday against one of the top defenses probably in the country.

But he's prepared for his moment. He's better than what I've seen him.

Q. Looking at the depth chart, you've got some -- AJ and Donny, former walk-ons on the two deep, you've got freshmen on the two deep, and you've got some younger guys that have jumped over, former starters or older guys. What does that say about the competition of the camp, and also, have you seen positive results of that, of the competition being so wide open?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, you're not given anything. You've got to go earn it. You've got to go put yourself in that position. Every player on the team desires to be a starter. Everybody desires to get a chance to go play.

You've got to bring that mentality to all things that you're doing, and then when the moment is there for you, whether it's in practice, scrimmages, all the things, and now as we carry into games, you've got to produce.

I think when you see some of those guys that have come in and had their own unique path, I think Donny and AJ both have been extremely productive, and for them, their first path to production was in special teams here, and then

you've seen them grow within their positions and being able to put themselves in a place to where they get to go out there and help us win football games.

As you look at freshmen that have come in, I think we really did a great job with the evaluation of guys that will have a chance to come in and impact early. I think by probably the midpoint of the season, you'll probably see pushing to double-digit guys that are in that freshman class that will have a chance to help this football team. Excited for that group as well.

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