

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Good morning, guys. Appreciate everybody being here today. Just want to first start off, I know thoughts and prayers are with Ethan Pritchard and his family. It's obviously an extremely just tragic event for the young man. I got a chance to be there last night with him and his dad and family, and grateful for all the support and medical support that he was able to receive.

Our football team, coaches, family, we're all here to support them, and it's absolutely believing and are praying for all parts of him and the journey that's ahead, but definitely appreciate the support from everybody in the community that we feel, and just continue to be with him.

Coming off of Saturday, just a lot of gratitude. A lot of gratitude for this fan base, the university, for each and every one of the players, coaching staff, everybody involved.

As you go into a first game, there's a lot that pours into it, and I know I said afterwards in the press conference, glory to God for the opportunity that I get to be able to lead this program. I mean that with every bit of my heart. It is an absolute joy to represent Florida State, the position I have, and the responsibility that that comes with.

But to see a team prepare the way that they prepared, a lot of new faces, a lot of guys that have been through the journey here, have seen the ups, have seen the downs, some young players that got to get extensive action and make incredible plays and impact throughout that game, and to have a top-10 opponent come in here, and I felt we were a dominant team. It was a dominant team win and one that you saw all different aspects of complementary football. You saw speed and physicality that was played, a team that believed.

That was something that I felt throughout the preparation. It started back in January, and the competitiveness of what our guys showed and the edge that they brought, it was a great win. It was a great win for everybody involved. It was awesome to see the fans.

I know the mentioned the Marching Chiefs there after the game. I've been here this is going into my sixth year, and I cannot remember ever just having the feeling of what that felt like consistently throughout the course of that game. It was electric, and throughout my coaching career, I don't know if I've ever been in an atmosphere like that.

I'm grateful for just everybody involved and really proud of our players, coaches, and like I said, just everybody around the program, our strength staff, athletic training. You saw a team that was well-prepared. It was strong, it was physical, and I thought we were the aggressor throughout it.

We talk about how we wanted to play, and we talk about playing smart, we were disciplined in what we did. I think we had one focus penalty in the course of the game. A solid team that was very aware of what situations were showing up and what we wanted to do schematically and different things.

I thought we played fast, which I talk about that confidence, and that comes from the work. I thought you saw great speed out on the field, and then the physicality that we want to see definitely showed up. I thought we won the game in the trenches. I thought even when you got to the perimeter, you saw big hits from safeties, corners, you saw linebackers, H-backs, receivers, and then obviously the offensive and defensive lines performed like we expected them to perform, and it was a great showing against a very talented group.

Then lastly to finish, you look at those 4th down stops -- I know I mentioned it right after the game, but the ones that came down to just a handful of inches, that's effort, it's physicality, it's determination, desire, and even on those plays, we did not find ourselves in great position in a couple of those moments, but you saw players that brought that edge and were desperate to win that one play.

Then for our offense to go into a four-minute drill and be able to finish with the ball in our hands, it was a great finish to a game where complementary football had to show up. A lot of great individual performances, and obviously we'll celebrate that, but what I loved about it is that we won by



two scores, and I'm kind of pissed off it wasn't more because there's a lot of areas where there were opportunities for us to be so much better.

I know you guys talked to coordinators last night, but you watch the film, and there is an absolute sense of urgency for improvement this week, and that is our focus. It's about what are we willing to do to go take a critical step for improvement for this team and this program and every individual within it.

We're going to go to work, which started last night, and our guys came out relatively healthy. We did have a little bit of injury news. Roydell Williams will miss a period of time. The overall extent of that, we'll see, but I absolutely hate it for the young man. It's not something that we're expecting to stretch into anything for the season, but he will miss a period of time this week, and obviously I just hate for him to miss anything because I thought he was a great factor in the game the other day.

The 4th down run there on our own end of the field, he showed power and he shows toughness, and he was definitely a great contributor in that win. With that, we'll continue to move forward.

Any questions?

Q. I wanted to follow up on Ethan and the players. What kind of support are you guys providing for his teammates today? I know it's normally an off day. Then the second part was turning back to the team, when did you see this physicality coming? Was it something you saw in the spring, or was it just building over time?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, so this morning I was there in the hospital until early hours, and through Ethan's dad, he gave me the opportunity to be able to share a little bit of where things were, and then we had an opportunity to gather with the team this morning just to give them an update and a perspective on where that is.

Like I said, we're grateful for all of the resources around our players. I'm grateful for their hearts. They love this family that we get to be a part of. There was a lot of emotions, and I've got a lot of emotions through it.

Being able to know that there's great outlets here to support them through this, we'll continue with that.

Q. The physicality, did you see it coming all year --

MIKE NORVELL: It's been hard earned. You've got to develop physicality through the work, and we believe in the

mindset that this team has. But when you're sitting there and what you do in the weight room, what you do in practice, when you get the opportunity to go against the guys on the other side of the ball, there's nothing soft about this football team. When you're competitive and you're willing to go in every day -- we talk about iron sharpening iron. That doesn't happen because it's nice and easy. You need friction. You need somebody that's going to be willing to pour their best into you, and if that shows up, then that just becomes a part of your DNA.

Every team talks about wanting to be physical, but we want to go earn the physicality, and I think they've done a good job with that and just the way they've competed in practice.

It's going to be something we have to continue to do. You've got to be smart and obviously try to maintain health in all things when it comes to it, and I think that's where the coordinators -- we've had a great balance in that, and we've tried to -- we're going to continue to push.

Obviously you've got to get them to a point where when they step on that field on game day, it is their best showing up, and I think we saw that with the physical nature.

Q. I'm not going to ask you to rank your portal guys unless you want to, but how valuable is Luke Petitbon? What does he mean to that offense? It seems like the way you and Gus talk about him, it's almost like he's a coach out there.

MIKE NORVELL: Oh, he's different. I'll say this: You kind of group them, and that offensive line group is really impressive. You see and feel the leadership, the want-to. I thought Luke -- he's come in and really -- he embraces it all. I love the young man. I believe that he's got a chance to be one of the best centers in college football. I really see him at that level.

It's the guys that are around him that pour into him. I thought Richie played at a very high level coming off of an injury from last year. I thought all those guys showed up and by no means played a perfect game, a lot of technique, fundamentals, but you feel Gunnar Hansen's passion and energy, you saw Adrian Medley was really, really good, had a couple huge blocks. Micah Pettus, the sky's the limit for what he's going to be able to do.

None of those guys played perfect, but they were dominant. It was good to see. Jacob Rizy is a guy that he didn't get to play in the game the other day, and he's a guy that I view as a starter in my mind of all things. He is ready for opportunity.

Andre' Otto, another young guy that's coming along, and to see the push from that group -- I think Herb has done a



great job with them.

But to speak on the value of Luke, he's everything. He really is. You get the total package when you get him. I'm really proud of his investment in this program.

Q. You guys stayed in front of the chains consistently in that game. How much is that a credit to the entire group of the offense but also Tommy and his ability to erase when things go sideways on a play?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, I mean, one, I think there was a great plan with Gus and the staff, being able to be aggressive but also to be able to put ourselves in a great position. That's one of the things we had a big point of emphasis here in the off-season of understanding that the early down success rates, the things that we talked about on both sides of the ball have been a big focus, and I thought that was a key factor in the victory.

Yes, we've always put a lot of emphasis on the cash downs, 3rd and 4th downs, and we definitely won those as well. But that early down success offensively really allowed us to be multiple, aggressive.

Tommy made some things happen, which when you have playmakers, they're going to do that. It's not always going to look or go exactly how you draw it up, and I thought he was great in his reactionary movements and decisions that he made. Obviously he was a great spark.

Q. When the physicality -- you expect it in the trenches, but when it transcends into the secondary and some of the things Earl or Ashlynd were doing or Randy and Duce and some of the others, when it's not the biggest guys who are enforcing things specifically, what does that do for a football team's mentality?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, like I said, it does a lot because you see every -- you see it transcending, but that's what you desire. Every team is going to talk about wanting to be physical, but is it just a singular focus, or is it a program mentality?

We put that on display in week 1. My expectation it for it to be better in week 2 and then week 3 and week 4. That's a baseline. This team has embraced the challenge of what it is to be physical. They've got the right thing in their chest, with that edge and desperation. It comes from the heart, and they put display their heart and willingness to go put it out.

Now I think we will be better physically as we continue to clean up some of the fundamentals, the techniques, the leverages. There's some negatives that did show up, and

in times throughout the course of the game that we have to get better at or they will cost us. But when you look at those areas of the want-to and the determination and the training, it goes across the board, and I think that every position has embraced that, and they have to continue to embrace that for us to be what I know we can.

Q. With the loss of Roydell, how much are you wanting to do with the shape of the running back room, especially with Caziah and Kam Davis in the mix?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it was great to see Caziah score a touchdown there in the game the other day. You had a couple good runs in it. I think Ous showed that he belonged and we had a lot of confidence coming in, but he had some great runs there in the game. One of my favorite plays, Gavin Sawchuk was outstanding in that game. His touchdown run was a thing of beauty. You saw balance, you saw strength. There was a lot of white jerseys that were getting pushed into the end zone with his feet and then he had a couple of the garnet guys come help at the end. I was really pleased to see him come in.

Kam Davis has taken some positive steps. Specifically he had a little nagging injury there in fall camp and missed a little bit of time, but I thought this last week you saw him back into having the burst that we knew was there, being able to see a little bit of that confidence showing up. He's a great teammate, a guy that's going to look to make an impact in any way.

Obviously anytime you go without a great player, and I think Roydell is that for us, it does hurt, and these guys are going to have to all pour in to kind of fill the gap and go perform.

Q. Coming back to the physicality and the heart, the willingness of the receivers to be blockers, we saw Duce down the field on Micahi's touchdown, there was multiple instances where they were just doing the dirty work. What does it say about those guys especially because they want to be the ones catching the ball and making the plays --

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, they want to win. Once again, one of the biggest plays of the game was Squirrel White 3rd and 11. That was the -- if you want to say where is the spark play, that was the play we needed. First drive, and I think that was Squirrel's only catch in the game, and you felt Squirrel White in the game, though. Coming off being injured and really getting this week, I think he's about to see a continued burst into what he's going to be able to do impacting this offense.

But in the moment of truth, the ball came to him, one-on-one situation, and he went and he did his job. We saw that across the board. You mentioned Micahi in a couple situations, Duce had a couple catches, obviously Randy had a 3rd down catch. Those things -- but when it's an opportunity for you to go impact the game and to do it in the run game with your physicality or whether it's a complementary route where the ball doesn't come to you and still to give everything that you have, that's what it takes to win.

This is a team that we've got a strong desire, and we've got to continue to build upon it.

Q. The Desir brothers, their physicality, I know we had heard good things about them, but to see the way they held up against guys bigger than them, how impressive was that?

MIKE NORVELL: It's already a two for one. It's two brothers.

Q. I did love that they substituted in at the same time together. That felt poetic. Then on Daniel Lyons, I know he had been developing through camp --

MIKE NORVELL: Good question. Yeah, Daniel Lyons is a guy that I thought -- we've kind of been on Daniel this off-season. He was coming off injury. I mentioned him last week coming in, I was excited because I saw the last two weeks you started to see, hey, this is the guy that I know he can be. I thought he played a really good game. He made some impactful game. Not perfect; there's going to be some areas for growth. But he was impactful in the game, played with great motor. Excited for the step that he can take.

The Desir brothers, they're built different. I say that in the best positive way. They've got great desire, want-to. They bring physicality and edge to each play. Still got a lot of areas of growth there in front of them. That was their first college game, and going into it, we heard plenty about the offensive line we're going to face and what that was going to look like, and those guys didn't play like freshmen. They played like guys that wanted to go out there and show what they are and what this team can be, and the depth of our defensive line. I thought Deante McCray showed up, did some good things. I thought Darryl was extremely disruptive. Jayson Jenkins had his moments of -- you see there's been some depth that has absolutely been established, and where that can go, I'm excited for.

We'll continue to push those guys. It was good to have Jaden Jones back out there, just to give him a shout-out, after a couple of years of real adversity, of dealing with

injuries and just staying the course. I know he got a big hit on the quarterback there in the course of the game, and I'm excited about that group.

Q. You spoke on wanting to see improvement this week. What specific areas are sort of a major focus for you over the next five days?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, there's still a lot of elements of just -- I'd say the consistency of our execution, where it's 11, understanding leverages, making sure we're putting ourselves in the best position within the details of the work. There were times where I thought we were not as powerful as we could be because of just technical issues, and it's both sides of the ball where that showed up.

We had too many missed tackles there defensively that I think we can definitely clean up. I love the physicality that we showed, but we've got to make sure that we get an opportunity to get the guy down, whether it's the quarterback, whether it's plays on the perimeter. We have to get those eliminated. Then I thought we did a nice job of limiting the explosive play from a very explosive offense, but just continuing to finish when we get to be around the quarterback.

I thought we had a couple opportunities to be able to create takeaways that we want to be able to finish on, and then special teams-wise there were some very uncharacteristic issues and mistakes that showed up for the amount of time that we spend and invest there that we've got to improve upon. I didn't feel that that was -- in that phase of the game, we weren't dominant in special teams. We were obviously really pleased and proud of Jake and going out there, but even in that situation, we roll the team on with close to 30 seconds and just our operation wasn't as good, new holder, new kicker, just all things and dynamics.

So we basically had to call a time-out not for the penalty, but he goes through, he kicks it, and he comes back on the very next play and -- that is huge to me. Nobody really talks about it, but that is a -- you've got a true freshman kicker against a top-10 team and we need him in that moment, and it didn't go exactly how you would probably envision it, but he just washed it, next play, he went out there and was able to execute in that moment. So I thought that was huge.

Mac was very solid in what he did. Still can be better. But I was pleased with a lot of it, but a lot of areas of improvement have to show up.

Q. With the passing game, I assume you're always going to want some balance. It's awesome that you



ran for 230 yards, but I think you ran 80 percent of the time. Would you like it to be closer to 50/50, 60/40, or is it just what you can do against a defense?

MIKE NORVELL: It's go win. I mean, that's what -- we felt that the opportunities that were presenting themselves, we were very productive in that.

There was a couple of opportunities. I thought Tommy was really good, very efficient in it. There's all different dynamics at play. But we controlled the game, and I thought we did a really good job of being able to do that. I'm very sure there will probably be games throughout the course of the season we're going to have to throw it 30 times plus in the game, and to be able to go and work and execute in that, but it's still are you ready in your moment. We did have a couple missed opportunities that we've got to improve upon. But whatever it's got to look like, offense, defense, special teams, that's what -- if you want to compete to the level that I expect this team to compete to, you've got to do whatever it takes.

I saw that in how guys played. I saw that in how guys responded. You've just got to be ready when your number is called.

Q. You guys brought in a couple linebackers, but for the most part a lot of these guys have played really well, guys that were here last year. Is it just another year of college and development, or what have you seen from Blake and Justin and those guys?

MIKE NORVELL: I thought -- I'll give a shout-out to Blake. In his plays that he had, I thought -- I felt him more in this game than I have in his time. I thought he was productive. I thought he was explosive. Justin has been great throughout camp. He's growing. You feel his leadership, ownership, all parts of what we're doing there defensively.

Some of the guys that -- Omar had his plays there in the game and a guy that we're really excited about. All three of those guys have grown through this program and are great leaders for us. Then you show what Elijah -- and Stefon had a big sack, was productive for us. I like that group. We've got a couple guys, AJ Cottrill, we've got Caleb expecting to be back here in the very near future, so I'm looking forward to where that unit can continue to grow to just through that competition.

Q. You talked a little bit about it after the game with the depth that you guys were able to use on defense. Going back, watching film, seeing the way Tony was able to use guys in different spots and the way the rotations would change during the course of the game based on performance, how did you view that all?

MIKE NORVELL: For a first game, and there's all things, like coaches -- we all talk about, we've got to own every action that we have, and there's some really good things that we did, I think, and I was pleased with how the coaches worked as a first -- because the other part of it is just -- that was only our second time due to whatever circumstances of lightning, rain, whatever it was, it was only our second time in Doak Campbell as a team, or technically third, but we were very limited on our operational opportunities, and so it was something that for coaches -- there's a lot of things that we're going to continue to improve upon, but I thought they did a nice job in remembering to execute the plans that we talked about, being able to have the adjustments and still some areas that we get to clean up as a staff.

But I'm proud of the group, proud of the coaches, all the different departments that pour into our players, and I'm happy for our fan base to be able to get that experience in a grand opening or a grand reopening of Doak Campbell Stadium at full capacity. It was really special.

We're excited for this week ahead, excited for the next opportunity, and going to go fight with everything we have to go take that next step.

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