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Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



MIKE NORVELL: Obviously disappointing road loss here on Saturday night. You go back, watch the film. What I said after the game really showed up true on the video, some missed opportunities. And I thought our guys played hard.

Just when you come out at a game like that on the road, so much that goes with momentum swings, emotions, highly emotional team we played. Both teams fighting for victory and we had our shots.

We had our opportunities. We weren't able to capitalize on them. Had some inopportune mistakes that showed up, just a couple of penalties that put us in challenging situations.

But for all of it, we've got to show up and we've got to be able to make those plays in those moments and we've got to continue, as a coaching staff, put our players in the best situations possible.

I thought you had some good looks at it. Obviously, there were some things, as a staff, where we've got to continue to grow and gotta be better in those situations.

There's things that, as a football program, we take out of it, and you just get one shot at it. Give credit to the opponent for the plays that they did make, and some of the calls that they had, and different things that they did.

But I believe in this team. I believe in our capability, and belief is great, and we've still got to go out there and we've got to be able to execute in those moments.

There's some uncharacteristic things, the drops, that's not been this team this year. And we've showed up on the road, showed up in the time where we needed plays to be made. But it's one of those things that you've got to be able to work through it.

Obviously, it wasn't good enough for us to get a victory in the way that we played, ultimately the way we coached, because it all comes down together.

And this team, it's a team of great individuals. I do have a lot of confidence in them, and the urgency of preparation from last night, the ownership of last night, of coming back -- we got back in at 3:00 in the morning and came to meetings, practice.

And whether it's the young guys that you've got their lab work or the guys when we got back on the field, there was an absolute sense of urgency for improvement.

To lose a game like that on the road, it's highly disappointing. But where you go from it, this week we're back home, Military Appreciation game, last game for the seniors here in Doak Campbell Stadium.

And I have high expectation for how we're going to play, what it's going to look like, what these guys are going to do and their continued growth.

Like I said, I believe in them. And I think we've shown high level of capabilities on both ends. And we've got to be more consistent. We've got to continue to push. Last time we were in this stadium, we played at a really high level, and this is a team that feeds off of -- they do feed off our fan base. They feed off that energy.

And even on the road, I thought in all things there, Saturday night, the mindset that they had, it was energetic. Pregame, all things. We had some missed tackles there defensively on that first drive. I think we had six or seven missed tackles on the first drive, which allowed them to go down. You had that opening drive touchdown.

I thought our guys settled in and played, big picture, played well defensively against a talented offense but there's still plays left out there, plays we have to make in situations, but we have to have great energy here this week.

I know guys are excited being back at home in our last home contest, and we've got to have our best game show up. At the end of the day, it still goes through how we prep, the things that we're going to pour into this week, from how we started last night, I have high expectations what that will be.



Q. It seemed like in that game, as you mentioned, the dropped passes, also a missed field goal, fumble, those things can be deflating sometimes. How do you get the team to where they don't become deflating and guys rise up?

MIKE NORVELL: That's where we've got it on the 10-yard line. We had the fumble. Opening drive, they take it down, whatever it was, 12-, 13-play drive, they score a touchdown.

We get down, had a dropped pass on the first drive, get down inside the 10, with great field position with the turnover. There were some things that they did stack up, and it's so much -- it's been a point of emphasis of trying to, let the play be the play, good result/bad result, all focus on the next one, go control what you can.

It wasn't just one player. It wasn't just one position. That's where, there's times that a guy can get in his own head. And sometimes you'll see that dip in performance or you'll see it, and sometimes it's just get on the sideline and taking a deep breath and going out there. But we saw that kind of scattered over multiple positions with different opportunities.

And you have to control that. And this is a team, I know how bad they want it. And there's the thing where, do you press, do you try -- ultimately, go out there and have fun playing the game, trusting the training of what you've done and the positions you've put yourself in.

Whether it's a small fundamental of an exchange, whether it's watching the ball all the way to the tuck, whether it's just make sure we're tracking where we need to track in open field, trying to make a tackle, the leverage that you have in coverage, those things, it's just -- that's where the training -- that has to override everything else, more than the crowd, more than the emotion, more than what even the last play just was, you've got to pour yourself into that in the moment.

I do believe in this team. You saw guys that, even in the course of the game, where there was something bad that happened, they did come back and have a positive play or a good follow-up.

I've seen guys even throughout the course of the season where there's been some games, it wasn't their best to see the follow-up in that. That's our growth as individuals and a team and something we have to be better at. Especially on the road.

That's something that we've seen in the last two -- I mean,

the last two road trips, specifically, we have not answered the call as well as we need to in those moments.

We've just had a critical mistake or a critical moment where things didn't go the way we needed it to go. We've got to be better with that.

Q. I guess on the high kickoff, after you scored, what was the desired execution?

MIKE NORVELL: We were just a little off on placement from what we had worked for, from what we had seen, from what we were trying to potentially get the ball to the ground to see if we could -- to have a scramble or a dash to it.

Yeah, it was a little bit of a miss-hit, and as you go through it, Jake has been really good, obviously, on kickoffs, being able to put the ball through the end zone. It's something we worked through the week. Was really good, felt very confident in that, even in that situation. Probably got the best look because of the potential of an onside, a good window to it. A little miss-hit, their guy did a good job of fair catching it. Just trying to get the ball to the ground, have an opportunity.

Q. On the running back rotation, use of depth and also just the way guys seem to get in rhythm, is it a matter of finetuning that, maybe narrowing it down?

MIKE NORVELL: Yeah, it's something that we're talking about as a staff. We've got a quality room of guys with diverse skills and talents. And I think we've got to continue to push that. But also I think there's guys that have shown throughout the course of the season just the explosiveness, the capability of creating the big play.

And still some guys that are growing. As you have good experience, as you have guys that have versatility, but then you also have youth. And when you look at this team, I mean, we've got some really talented, young guys, that are coming along, that are growing in who they are and what they're going to be.

Just as each of those days go by, each game goes by, they're growing in their confidence and the consistency of their execution, and that's something that, as that happens, the best player's going to play. I think right now all those guys in that running back room can help this football team.

It might be in different areas, different spots, different things we can do. And there's a great deal of competition that's happening in that room.

But, yeah, I think we're going to continue to push that. And

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as the productivity is shown, we're going to continue to push in that area.

Q. The situation when you have a player that gets an emotional penalty, what goes into factoring whether or not you pull them out of the game for a little bit or keep them out? Like (inaudible) got the personal foul and he stays in the game, and people wonder --

MIKE NORVELL: I happened to be watching that one. We had two guys that were punching, hand fighting, two guys throw a punch, swing, whatever you want to call that, one guy gets called for it.

You can go back and watch as many plays as you want to play. And that's where: Control your emotions. You have to be in control of you. If we don't swing, maybe we get the penalty moving forward. You do. You put yourself in jeopardy. Obviously that was a call that the official made.

We've got to be in control of us. That's a young player, second-year, highly emotional game, plays his butt off. When he does have the ball, doesn't have the ball, he's really putting everything he has out there.

And there's a couple of plays in that sequence, really, in that sequence that were negative for us. And it's just one of those -- great teaching opportunity for him, even with all the emotion, take a deep breath, control you.

But there's times, there's some foolish penalties that have been made in past years that have -- guys that I've coached, and sometimes this year, years before, you're going to get pulled.

If you are doing something that is just blatantly negative to this team because of where you are in the state, you're going to get your butt out. There's times when guys work through it. Those are all decisions that are made in the moment and based off of what I see and what I feel.

Q. Question on Ricky Knight, will he have the chance to return to the team this season? What plays into --

MIKE NORVELL: At this time Ricky is suspended from all football-related activities.

Q. You mentioned, like, the struggles on the road. What goes into that? It's been -- I think the last one was Florida in 2023 when you guys won on the road. Is it a focus thing?

MIKE NORVELL: You can't -- each team is its own team. The team we were in '24, it's a different team than '25. You could try to tie all similarities to it.

We weren't a very good team in '24. There was no point we really showed we were a very good team. There's a lot of things that contributed to that, a lot of things that were done as a result of that.

This team, this '25 team, we've shown capabilities on both ends. We've shown to be as good and to be able to play with and beat as good as there is out there and we've also shown the capability to play really bad.

When you look at our performance on the road, we were in a couple of really close contests that, like I said, the Virginia game -- Virginia is a good team. They're one that's played at a high level throughout the course of the year.

We had our issues in turning the ball over. We had our issues in some things that kept us from winning what was a very close game that went to overtime.

Stanford, I think, and Clemson, were our two worst games offensively that we've played. And there were some mistakes that showed up. When you look at it, we're able to move the ball but we're not scoring points with opportunities to be able to do that.

And those are things that you've got to set yourself in the moment, whether it's times that you get down in the red zone, you've got to put touchdowns on the board. We had some missed opportunities, field goals in both games, in both those road games where we did miss a field goal coming out of the half after we just scored a touchdown to end the first half. Missed opportunity for that little bump there.

And as you sit there and watch it, whether it's a negative play, a missed opportunity with the catch or a throw, whatever that might be, you've got to settle into yourself. That's where you sit there and look at it, we have our process of what we do on road games.

I do think our guys are prepared for the moment. We've got to do a better job executing in the moment. And you can go through a long stretch of times with certain teams where you see great road victories and great times of being able to go out. But each one still has to be the one.

Obviously we have not been good enough in our playing on the road this year, and we'll have a couple more road games that we're going to have to go here in front of us, we're going to have to address that, and if there's modifications, adjustments, continued things, as part of my conversation with one of my staff members here today, is we're going to continue to evaluate to connect the dots so that our best performance is showing up.



Last time we played in Doak Campbell Stadium, we had one of our best performances of the year where we played as a complete team and played complementary football.

We did not carry that over into Clemson. And it cost us a game. There's still some good dynamics and good plays and good elements of the game that you can take out of it, but at the end of the day, we didn't do what was necessary to win.

So our next road contest, we're going to have to be better in that, but we've got to learn the lessons from what we did and take that into having our best week this week as we play Virginia Tech.

Q. I know you take it day to day, week to week, game to game; fans don't. What do you think the trajectory of this program is heading into '26?

MIKE NORVELL: I've got an elite level of confidence for what's ahead for this program. I believe in it. I believe in the guys. When I look at our roster, I see the guys. As I mentioned earlier, we've won championships here. We've done that.

To be a part of a staff that fixed it from when we first got in here to achieve that at an elite level as one of the best times that this program has seen through a stretch of 19 straight games, I mean -- you can find all the reasons, well, this was close or that.

That's good, but we did it. We lifted a trophy. We were able to have success. '24 was an absolute -- it was a complete failure. And like I said, there was reasons of things of why we got to that point. We lived it. We did it. We made changes.

As this year, I think we are improved. I mean, when you look on both sides of the ball, I think we have taken positive steps, but there's been some transitional elements of it that we needed to be better.

I say that we've shown the capabilities on both sides. We played as good as anybody in the United States of America at points in this year, and we've played as bad as probably anybody at times this year.

But this team is full of what I believe is very talented playmakers. I think it's full of very capable and talented coaches, and it's about our growth.

The results, they matter. They absolutely matter. Every play, every game, all that we do, but for us it's about progression. It's about going out there and getting better,

going out there and continuing to grow as a program.

I mean, you look at our roster. We've got double-digit guys that are high school signees within their second year that are significant contributors for us.

Like, those guys are going to continue to grow and ascend, and I see that. We've got some guys that are upperclassmen that I think have a chance to be some of the better players in all of college football.

And next year will be a new team. And I think you look at these last couple of signing classes, the guys we're bringing in, I think we've hit -- I think we've really put ourselves in a great position for what the future holds in it. I think we're going to be able to bring some guys in this year's class that are going to be able to make a great impact.

So I really have -- I've got elite expectations, and we're going to win a championship here in the very near future. That's not going to be this year.

As I told the team in fall camp, I believed it in fall camp, I said, we're capable to do everything that you desire throughout this year, but we're also capable of giving other people opportunity.

And we've had five games that -- a lot of close games that we have not done -- it's not one specific position. We're not a -- we haven't been good enough across the board. And it's coaches, players, everybody involved, we haven't been good enough where we are to get the job done to the level we wanted this season.

We still have three regular-season games left. I'm fully expecting to see our team go ascend and be better and to go get the job done in these opportunities we have, but I've got a lot of confidence in where the program is heading and what's going to be the result of these games, of these experiences for what the future holds.

And everywhere I've been, I've won a championship. Except the one year at Pitt, we did not. But everywhere else I've been, as a player and as a coach. I know what it looks like, and I have actually done it. I can sit here and say it with confidence. We're going to get this back.

Fixed it once. We're going to fix it again. We're in the process of that fix now. What we've done is not to the standard of Florida State this year. I understand that. I fully am aware that we've got to win the close games. We've got to be able to play our best every opportunity that we step on that field.



And the work, that's happening. All right. The belief is there. I'm not saying that just from a coach that's standing in front of you, I'm saying it -- I see these players. I see their heart, their investment.

Last night, I mean, it was -- that's where I can sit here and stand confidently in front of you. You're not at practice, that's fine, that's my decision to make too. Ultimately, it's for those guys that are on this football team that every day they just need to focus on them. They need to focus on what they're doing. They don't need the outside perspective of who is doing this or who is doing that.

That's why I chose to do that. They need today to where they can get to centralize all their focus on what is necessary for them to get better.

You look across college football, really talented teams where everybody's got an opinion on what they're going to do, where they're going to go and what they're going to be. Week in, week out, you see disappointing outcomes.

I'm fully aware of the outside narrative around our team is not good. Around me is probably not good. That's fine. That will not affect, right, the job that I'm going to show up and do.

The job I'm going to show up and do is I'm going to pour everything I have in this team with a championship expectation for us to grow and be better.

Why I can say that? I've actually won a championship. I've done that. We're going to do it again. We're going to do it here.

That might piss people off. So be it. They'll be celebrating when we are hoisting a trophy. It will be the belief I see from our players, the belief I see from our coaches, the talent that I know our players have and the guys that are coming to be a part of this. I've got elite level confidence for what's ahead of us.

I know not everybody wants to hear that. I don't care. I know what it's going to be. And I'm grateful for the opportunity that I have. I also understand that it has not been good enough. And the results, they matter. But we're going to take that step and we're going to get the job done.

Q. Ja'Bril, we saw get banged up in the game, how is he doing? And how did Shamar do as his role increased?

MIKE NORVELL: Ja'Bril, this will be a big week to see how that goes about. I'm very hopeful. I think he's played at a

high level. He's one tough son of a gun. He's a great Florida State Seminole, a guy that's emerged to be a top player, not just on this football team, but a guy that has played at a high level.

Shamar, I mean, he's one of those guys I was just referencing. True freshman. Put himself in a position to be our third corner when Q went down, really kind of forced him into a little bit more action.

He was playing free safety there even before that because he was the guy that we saw that, man, want to give an opportunity to get on the field.

He's growing day by day. He's still a freshman. He reminds us of that daily through plenty of different areas. But, I mean, he's somebody I love coaching because he loves football. He loves the guys he gets to do it with.

I thought he played well. I mean, still some detail things he's got to clean up. But I'm excited about that.

Regarding Ja'Bril of where that goes, it's still an open door of opportunity. We need Charles Lester, I thought he did a good job, eight, ten plays in the game. He's starting to grow and grow in his confidence.

Cai Bates is a guy that we need to see another step. You've got to remember, Cai transitioned from being a receiver most of his life to DB last year of high school.

There's a little bit of that transitional element to where he's still growing in his confidence and trusting some of the things he's doing in coverage, and just the big picture, but I do think he has talent and ability and so to see those guys emerge, but hopeful that things will trend well for Ja'Bril. But that's a young group that we have that, I think, that is talented that has to answer the call.

Q. In a couple of your responses you talked about young players. Two-part question. Do you feel like you have enough building blocks for 2026 and beyond with some of the young players? If so, who are the guys who give you confidence this is continuing to move in a championship-quality direction?

MIKE NORVELL: I have a lot of confidence in that. I mean, you look at our football team. Our O line is senior-driven. That was something we knew coming in. I'm really excited about some of the young guys in that room that will be able to emerge.

But really at every other position, I mean, it's underclassmen that's a huge driving force to those rooms. And we've got some great seniors in different places, but



this is a relatively young team. When you look at the production that is being had, it's across the board. And I'm excited about really every position of what it's going to be.

I think the last two recruiting classes that we've been able to bring in, I think we've really done a nice job of the high school ranks of guys that have come in that are growing, developing.

Sam Singleton is a great picture of somebody that, it's just taking him a little bit of time. He was three years ago. But it's taken him a little bit of time coming in, but he is ascending rapidly.

Couple, with Ooz, who is a freshman -- Kam Davis has been banged up, talked to Kam last night, hopefully we can get him back a couple games, played special teams, excited about his growth. He's looked like the guy that I've expected to have coming in. He played as a freshman, but he's really -- I've loved his attitude, his approach. Across the board, receivers, young receivers.

I think we have elite level talent in that room. Micahi Danzy will be as good as he wants to be, Lawayne McCoy is continuing to get better. Boggs has been injured, hopefully get him back here. I thought he was close last week. Chase Loftin, Gelsey, Mallory, Magic, those guys are all -- they're a push and a step for us. And for what they're going to be, I'm excited about that.

You sit there -- there's some areas we've got to be better. You look at our entire defensive line, those freshmen that we have are different. Desir, Darryll, playing more confident. And Juju has an incredible future in front of him, and we have a couple of guys that will have a great chance as they continue to grow up. That's part of this game and process. There's definitely some positions that we have big needs for, but I'm excited about what the future is going to be, and the guys that we have within this roster.

Q. To keep going on with the young guys. In an age where it seems bowl games don't matter as much, how important is it for you guys to win two of these last three to get to a bowl game, keep developing with those extra practices?

MIKE NORVELL: I think they absolutely matter. We faced some cases where guys opted out. We've also had a case where guys all opted in. But the games are the games. And the opportunity to compete, the opportunity to grow, especially for the young guys, I think the practices, the game, those are such valuable experiences for where they're going to continue to ascend to.

So our sole focus is on this week to make sure our best

game shows up. But definitely we know the expectations for what's ahead this year and what we need to do.

Q. One last future question. An eye to the future. Obviously you guys have to win games. That's the number one objective. Is there any thought to trying to look at the younger quarterbacks to see what they do in game situations?

MIKE NORVELL: We thought about it, good and bad, we've had those opportunities. Like, we've done that.

They got to play, I think, Brock, Kevin, those guys got to play in some early games. Kevin got thrown in at the Stanford game, as critical a situation as you can have. Brock has played a lot of football.

Unfortunately, both those guys have kind of dealt with some injury issues that have not been devastating but kind of been, restricted them a little bit.

I love our starting quarterback. I think Tommy, just what he brings to our football team as a player, I think he's played at an elite level at times and there's times where he's got plays that he's got to be better at.

And what I love about him is he's the first to take ownership. He's the first to call himself to a higher level of what his expectation is, but he's going to continue to push those around him.

I think that when you see what he's done, I wouldn't steal one rep for what he means to this program and this team right now because of his work, because of his heart and care and all of it.

I mean, now, if there's a play that he can't go and he's not in position, we're going to have guys that are ready. They're going to be ready to answer the call and their opportunities. But we have a really good group in that room that I'm excited about.

But for him, for Tommy, what he's done, I'm definitely looking forward for his best games here in front of us and just watching him to grow and be better.

Q. Is Tommy at all in the plans for 2026, is that a possibility?

MIKE NORVELL: That's things that are all being worked through. Obviously, he played the one game his freshman year, which was in a championship game. I know that's all being evaluated.

The next year they changed the rule to where that's

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available. He did that in the case of Cai got hurt. As much as he is right now, where he's willing to be what a team needs, trying to fit that, he answered the call in a tough situation that, ultimately, at that time, made it challenging for the conversation that has to be had now, but the very next year the NCAA changed the rule. So, we'll see where all that goes. But it's kind of his situation.

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