

Florida State University Football Media Conference

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Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Coach Mike Norvell

Press Conference



Florida State - 34, Virginia Tech - 14

MIKE NORVELL: Appreciate everybody being here. To start off, proud of our guys, just the way they went out and competed tonight, the way they prepared this week, just the attitude, the approach, the overall mindset. It was a resilient week for how they poured into each other and just wanting to go out and, one, just get a win and make sure we sent the seniors out the right way this last home game and this season.

Our guys, they care so much, and they really do, they pour their hearts into it. There's been some ups and some downs just throughout the way we've performed. That showed up some tonight where it wasn't a great game in regards to our performance. But those guys, they just continued to battle.

Defensively, we were able to create two takeaways. You had the two fourth-down stops. We did what we needed to do to be able to get off the field and limit them in some of those opportunities.

Offensively, we probably left some points out there on the field. But when we needed a big play, we came in the second half, really the last drive of the first half that we had, and getting into the second half and being able to go put touchdowns on the board was big.

Jake had an early miss and came back was able to make a couple of kicks. And special teams with Jaylin Lucas getting out and sparking a couple drives with big returns.

You felt all parts of the team working together. That's what you want to see. Like I said, I'm proud for our players. It was great having Ethan back yesterday at practice. I mean, it was an emotional time for everybody.

Obviously seeing him lead us in the Legacy Walk today into the stadium, being in the locker room after the game and just the time with this team. He means so much to us.

Yesterday, at the end of practice, I asked if he had

something to say. And it was two words. It was, "go win." And we were able to get that done for him and for this team.

We've got a short week ahead. It's going to be quick back at it. We'll be rolling as coaches in the morning, have the players come in tomorrow night. They needed tonight. I'm definitely grateful for them and for our fans.

It was a great atmosphere tonight. It was a packed stadium and it was a great atmosphere to be able to be a part of this last game at home and the '25 season. All our fans, definitely appreciate them for being here and just for being able to create that home-field advantage.

Q. You touched on what the last couple of days have meant to you guys with Ethan tonight. When he got shown on the Jumbotron one of the loudest cheers on the night. We saw your sideline and the Virginia Tech sideline was giving him applause. The support he's received not only from within the program but externally across the board and seeing that, what has that meant to you guys and for him?

MIKE NORVELL: He's such an incredible young man. Obviously, it was an awful tragedy that happened to him. You never know why. But nothing that he did, it was just really wrong place, wrong time. But he is the one -- he lives the effects of it.

He has fought throughout this process. Not once has he ever said anything negative about the situation, other than he was going to work. I talked to him a lot. I Facetimed him a good amount. Most of the times I'm Facetiming him he's in the middle of a workout or his rehab.

He has sweat going down his forehead -- Coach, they're pushing me. I said, sorry, buddy, you're built for it. He said, yes, I am, yes, I am. He's going to go do all that he desires to do because of what's in his heart and just the passion that he has.

You feel his spirit just around, anybody that's around him. And he's just a great teammate, a great friend and somebody I love deeply, just for all that he stands for.



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Q. Duce is closing in on a 1000-yard receiving season. You've spoken about him as a pro, but how impressive is it what he does on a weekly basis for you?

MIKE NORVELL: He just continues to show up. He's a great young man that loves to work. He came into my office on Monday and he said, Coach, what else do you need from me? What else do you want from me? I want to help this team and I want to be the best I possibly can be.

And I challenged him. I said, every day has to be your championship game. Every day you've got to be willing to be the example. My favorite play of him tonight wasn't any of the catches. He hit a big block on one of the swing passes that we threw. That's something I challenged him with. I want to see you play without the ball in your hands. And he showed up.

He probably had his best celebration after the block. And that's where it's easy to see and celebrate some of the stat line things, which he's on pace and doing wonderful things and answering the call when we need him. But somebody that cares deeply about his teammates and wants to see their success, wants our success, and is ready to do whatever he needs to to make that happen. Looking forward to him continuing to grow in these last couple of games as we continue to build for what's ahead.

Q. You mentioned there were some missed opportunities. But it seemed like for the first time in a while, every phase contributed, as you said, the kickoff returns, turnovers on defense. Does this give you a glimpse of where you think it can give the guys a glimpse of what it can be when it all comes together?

MIKE NORVELL: The capability is there. And we've seen it in a handful of the games we played where you see all three phases that don't have to be perfect. And you're not going to see a perfect game. But when you are complementary, when you're there to support defensively, we didn't get off the field well enough on third downs. But when they would answer the call on a couple of fourth downs or answer the call by creating takeaways, that's huge.

To see the offense be able to respond and go and put us into position, that's what you want. You want to see the team that feeds off of each other. I thought they did that well.

I've got a lot of confidence in what's ahead. And I do believe in the growth that this team is experiencing, but also what they're willing to put themselves through to go

and get better.

As we talked this week in media availability, I talked about what Sunday night looked like. But it was real. It was their choice. They came out after a disappointing game a week ago, and with everything they had, Saturday night was probably one of the better -- or Sunday night was probably one of the better Sunday night practices we've ever had here.

It was a team making a choice just to control what they can control and that was the moment. That's really what we need to see throughout the course of the games that the offense does great, the defense does great, special teams. If one of them have a misstep, and you control what you can control and you go do your job, you focus on your one play. If we do that, I think great things can happen.

And tonight we played really disciplined. I think we only had one penalty tonight. I thought our guys, you could see even in some moments where it could have went a different way. Some of the things I asked them to do, I thought they did, and did it at a high level.

Q. Mandress Desir has a sack in each of his last four games. How impactful is it to see him grow and perform like this as a freshman?

MIKE NORVELL: He's definitely a young man that just the sky's the limit for. He's performing, continuing to grow in his confidence and the things that he's even showing himself that he can do. There's still some other opportunities out there that he's going to grow from. But he's got a chance to be a really special player if he'll continue to progress and to learn the lessons of the good and the bad. But I'm really proud of him for the productivity that he has and what we're seeing in his impact within this team.

Q. With Ethan being here, the way you guys played especially in the second half, the crowd being into it and basically being a sold-out game, do you allow yourself to soak that up, like, how cool -- because winning in college football as we all know is hard. Do you allow yourself to enjoy these moments and soak it up?

MIKE NORVELL: Absolutely. I found myself there in the second half, during one of the breaks, I might have stopped and looked around. Ethan's up in the -- and I did. When the next play starts, it's back to it.

But that's what I love. I love that about this place. I love that about college football in general and just the -- it mimics life. You could sit there, you go through life, and

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you could find every problem or every issue and everything that could go wrong, and you pour your focus on that. Or you can pour everything you have into growing and being better and making a positive impact on others that you're around and being grateful for all the blessings.

Being here, representing this program, it is special. And you see the fan base, like you mentioned, it was awesome atmosphere. That second half, I thought our guys definitely fed off that. We had a big third quarter to carry it over into the fourth.

But I don't ever want to take it for granted, and I don't want ever to not understand how big this experience is for all those players that stand on that sideline and how big it is for all those fans that are sitting in the stands, because we do have a great responsibility to represent this place. And it was a great night to be able to do that.

Q. With Ethan, just not only him recovering so quickly but the determination of not only wanting to walk again but also wanting to play football again, does that really kind of describe how he is as an individual, thinking about how when you recruited him that he has that kind of determination?

MIKE NORVELL: I have absolute no doubt that he will accomplish all that he puts his mind to. He's led with the heart. I remember going to watch him play in high school. And it was after -- I got to watch him live a few years back.

He was one of those guys you just felt on the football field. Size, measurable speed, he's got some great qualities. But just the mentality of what he brought, he was not going to be denied.

And from the day that he's been here, he brings that passion. And even the night that he got shot, I mean, we were sitting there. We just came off a big win. After each win we celebrate our scout team players of the week.

And I swear to you, he came into that practice that Sunday night and, man, he was so determined because the first week he didn't get the scout team player of the week, and he goes, "What do I gotta do? What do I gotta do?"

It's funny because the week prior, he had a couple of bad plays, and I said, you just keep it -- I know, I got it. And Sunday it was everything he was determined, this was going to be his week to get it done.

When you can bring all the passion, all the energy to be the best that you can be, then the circumstances you find yourself in is not going to define you; it's what you do through those circumstances that's going to show the world

what you're all about.

I hate -- hate -- what happened to Ethan Pritchard. It should never happen to any person. You watch him. If you need inspiration, you need motivation, you want to understand how to go about doing things in life, watch him, because I know where he's going, I know what he's going to be able to accomplish. He's an inspiration to me. And I just love the young man.

Q. What is it about this group where they've just, even if things haven't gone well, they've been resilient and they keep fighting, why do you think that is, I guess?

MIKE NORVELL: Because they care. I think we have a really good group. They are talented. They have great ability. But the thing that leads them is their heart. And I've said it throughout this season, like I said, we've had disappointing results, but this is not a defeated football team. This is one that really cares about what they do, who they get to do it with, and they're willing to continue to fight and try to take the positive steps to showcase the best of them.

And when you have those types of characteristics, you can accomplish great things, but even like through the course of life, there's going to be ups and downs, and I'm excited to see their drive through the end of this regular season to watch them continue to ascend.

We've got to go on the road this week, and that's something -- obviously, we've not played well on the road -- it's time for us to go get that done. I do believe that they'll answer the call and excited for them, but also an honor to be able to coach this group.

Q. The offensive line obviously had some things to deal with tonight. Jacob comes in, plays two different positions, I think Andre came in, just how they battled through that. And also could you give us an idea what this week looks like with the short week?

MIKE NORVELL: I was really pleased and proud of Rizy came in, was able to continue to showcase his versatility. He's been great for us this year, been able to come in and answer the call when his number was called. And Otto getting in there, he's the guy I'm really excited about, and to be able to go in there and to do a good job on the plays that he had -- where he had to answer the call.

And I think we've got some young guys in that O line group who are really, they're practicing hard. They're working, they're developing, but we've got some great examples from older guys that have been playing. You go through 10 games of a regular season, your body is going to be



bumps, bruises; you'll feel all of it.

But these guys, they're great competitors, and I thought they did some good things. There's some talented guys on that defensive front that have given everybody problems, and to see that our guys were ready for the challenge and did some good things tonight.

So this week will be -- it's going to be a little bit different. We'll be back tomorrow as a coaching staff first thing in the morning, kind of put this to bed quickly, and all our focus is on NC State.

We will meet tomorrow night. We'll have treatments in the morning for the players, but then we'll meet tomorrow night, kind of wrap up this game, and then jump right into the primary focus for NC State this week and a kind of abbreviated practice on Monday, and then we'll get after it pretty good there on Tuesday. And then just kind of -- essentially, we lose what Sunday is in a normal week, but we will modify it a little bit just being this late in the season for our Tuesday practice, which will be on Monday.

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