

Atlantic Coast Conference Football Kickoff

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Florida State Seminoles

Coach Mike Norvell

Tommy Castellanos

Darrell Jackson Jr.

Earl Little Jr.

Press Conference



probably some of the hardest workouts that we've had, and to see those guys embrace that literally with a smile on their face, knowing there was an opportunity to compete, to go get better, to see the newcomers, the guys that have been a part of the program, to see them all work together, to be able to set the foundation for what this football team is going to be, because all that we have is the season that's ahead.

When you look through the past few years, we've accomplished some great things. We've experienced the highest of highs and we've also found ourselves in a valley. We've faced some disappointments.

But every part of it has come back to our response. This team and this season that's ahead, I've got great expectations. I've got a lot of confidence because I've watched the work, because I've seen the investment. I'm really proud and grateful for the coaches and the new leaders that we have within our coaching staff. Being able to have two of the best coordinators in college football, a couple of the best football minds that this game has.

Coach Malzahn and Coach White have done a wonderful job pouring into our players, being able to establish a foundation throughout the course of the spring and be able to build concepts and a plan in place that are built for the great playmakers that we have.

We're excited for all things that are ahead. It's an exciting time in Tallahassee. We've got a great kickoff here August 30th with Alabama coming into town, and this football team, it is hungry, and it is bringing that daily edge in all things that we're doing.

There's a lot of wonderful things around our program. We have a newly renovated Doak Campbell Stadium, which we're so excited to be able to be at, at full capacity. Our football-only facility that we'll be moving into this fall. I do want to take a moment to thank our administration, starting with President McCullough, his leadership, his vision, his continued push, our AD Michael Alford, our board of trustees. We have an incredible group. Our Chairman of the Board, Peter Collins, and the work that they have pushed to continue to elevate our program in this new day

MIKE NORVELL: Well, it's great to be here today. Obviously with Media Day comes just one day closer to the kickoff to this season and all things that are ahead. So proud of our football team for the work that they've poured in throughout this off-season, from the winter program to spring practice, going through our tour of duty, the summer workouts, and coming up to report next Tuesday and back on the practice field one week from today. They've done a remarkable job, and the investment into each other, into pushing, to hit and to reestablish that championship mentality and expectation that we have here at Florida State and uphold the standard of what it is to be a Seminole.

We've got four remarkable young men that are here with me today that have done a wonderful job throughout this off-season of being great leaders, of being -- the willingness to be the example of what we want it to look like on a daily basis, and excited for the expectation for all things that are ahead this season.

As we're going into this off-season, it has been about bringing that daily edge, that desperation to go win on a daily basis, and in everything that we do, whether it is in the weight room, whether it was on the field, meeting room, in the classroom. We wanted that sense of competition, and we wanted every day to see guys that are willing to rise to the challenge to be their best.

This football team has done it. Whatever we put in front of them, whether it was academically coming off -- our spring semester we had the best team GPA ever in program history. They answered the call when it came to what we wanted them to do academically or in the weight room or tour of duty. We challenged them at new levels that was



of college athletics. I'm just so grateful for the support that we have and the investments that have been made from all of our boosters and everything that we're doing.

There are great days ahead here in Tallahassee and with this Florida State football program, and just excited to get back out on that field here this next week and everything that's in front of us.

Q. Coach, the enthusiasm that you have in your voice, I got excited. I almost laced up my helmet to go play for you. How excited are you, even though you didn't have the season that you projected that you would have liked to have had last year? How excited are you about this team, and what should the fans be excited about from this football team?

MIKE NORVELL: I'm extremely excited. I'm excited because of the characteristics that I've seen from this team. From the newcomers that have joined, from all the players that have returned, because every one of them said yes to the expectation.

You don't come to Florida State unless you're willing to embrace the greatest of expectations, because there is a standard, and every day that standard has to show up. As we've sat there coming off a year that was a disappointing season, we had some real conversations. Ultimately, it wasn't for everybody. The sacrifice, the investment, the work, the challenge, the confidence that had to be developed, because every team and every player that stands in front of you are going to tell you how confident they are. But for that confidence to be real, it has to be earned. There has to be the work. There has to be the truest belief of being able to embrace that in all things that makes up who you are.

That's what gives me excitement for this year, because I've watched a football team of guys that have said yes. They're not just saying it with their voice, they're saying it with their action.

We've got some wonderfully talented players. But even with all of them, none of them have hit their final stage. All of them are continued growth in progress. They're embracing that journey. They're embracing the opportunity.

To see them come together, to see that excitement within the position groups, the side of ball and collectively as a football team and just to see how much they enjoy who they're getting to do it with, that gets me fired up.

All of it sounds good. Now we get to go get it done on the field. But I've got a tremendous amount of confidence

because of that work.

Q. I just want to ask you, you talk often about the climb, and that's been the mantra of Florida State football since you've been the head coach there. It may have seemed like last -- as you were recruiting getting players in, you had a certain kind of mentality that you were looking for in players, and you talked about the desperation that they always had, and you always recruited to that. Did it feel last year that maybe that was the missing element to the team, was that desperation, that sense of we refuse to lose? And what gives you the confidence that you have that mentality this season?

MIKE NORVELL: Well, you know, you talk about the climb, and we all have a desired destination. Everybody wants to get to the top. We've seen that. A couple years ago, we got to lift the trophy. Most people talk about it; we've seen it. We know what that looks like.

But on the flip side of it, when you're climbing a mountain, there might be some times where you slip and where you stumble. But the most important step along the journey is the next one. People that are willing -- regardless of the circumstance, regardless of what you find yourself in, that you're willing to take the step to go be your best, to put everything that you have in -- I don't want a team full of sidekicks. I want guys that are willing to grasp it, to hold it, to push it, to step for it and to go be it, and that's what's needed, and that's what I believe I'm seeing within this football team.

Once again, we start fall camp next Wednesday, and I want them to be pissed off to go be their best every single day. It's not about last year. It's not about anything that they've done up to this point in their career. It's about this season with each day and every step that's in front of us to go put it on display for what you want to be. Don't talk about it; let's go do it. I feel the confidence within the team because once again, I see their work. I believe in who they are. I believe in the journeys that they've had. No player on our team has had a seamless, perfect journey. There's been ups and downs for every one of them.

But when they come, whether it was the recruiting process, whether it was the opportunity to come back and to be a part of what this team is going to be, I wanted guys that were on the edge of their seat ready to go attack that work.

I can't wait for fall camp because I'm going to challenge them every single day in everything they do, physically, mentally, relationally, all parts of it, because that's what the season is going to hold. As we've seen that at an elite level, we also know -- we know how hard it is to win a



game, to win a play, to win a rep; obviously what it takes for a season.

But I believe in the group of guys that we have that have come together. In today's age of college athletics, everybody has a choice because it's easy to leave. It's hard to stay, and it's hard to say yes when you know the expectations that are going to be put in front of you. When you come to Florida State, you'd better embrace the highest of expectations, because it's what I have, it's what our program has. There is a standard of what it needs to look like, and I've got to uphold it and so does everybody else a part of our team; players, coaches, every single one of us.

I believe in what it's going to be, and I'm excited to get back on that practice field as we build as we continue to climb to August 30th for our first opportunity to go put on display what this team has the potential to be.

Q. I want to ask you about Gus Malzahn. You bring him in as offensive coordinator. He's a guy that's got a ton of experience as a play caller. Obviously he's led a team to a National Championship game. Can you talk about what that experience at that high level does for the program, and was that something that you really sought after whenever you shuffled the coaching staff?

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, having the opportunity to have Coach Malzahn come and be a part of our staff, it was special. It's somebody that I've had a 20-year relationship with. All the respect in the world for the man, just the coach. He's somebody that infuses confidence in everybody around him because he knows what he wants to do. He knows what he wants it to look like. It's the belief that he's able to pour into others, for what it takes on that journey.

You talk about the perspective; he does. He's been a very successful head football coach. The last time he was an offensive coordinator he did win a National Championship. To make the choice and decision he made to come to Florida State, I mean, that is the purpose. That is the reason.

We have an opportunity here to really do something special, and I think that his focus is there on the offensive side of the ball, and he's one of the best that have ever done it.

But he also brings perspective as a big picture, to continue to challenge every element within the organization, just to push to be the best, to be able to accomplish and do some of the things that he's been able to do on his journey and

what we all aspire to be.

Q. Just talk about you personally as a coach this year, because you have all these great coaches around you to help you to get better and get back to where Florida State was two years ago. Talk about having them in the room and you have new ears to help you get everything ready to go.

MIKE NORVELL: For us, as we all go through this, this career, as players, coaches, everybody involved, it's who you get to do it with. That's what makes the journey special. I've been blessed throughout my coaching career to be around a lot of wonderful coaches, and I believe this is a special staff. To be able to pour into them, to be able to help support them, to challenge them, for them to do the same for each other and for myself, it does make a great dynamic.

It's one that I don't take for granted, and every day that I come to work, I want to be able to provide that and I want to be able to receive that.

That's where for me, as I reflect and I see, hey, with where things are within college football, within our team, our program, it's one of the elements of the season I'm really excited about because I'm not sitting in just one side of the ball or to have one focus as much as what I have in the past. I get to continue to invest into them. I've had probably more one-on-one conversations with our players than at any point of going into my 10th season of being a head coach, and that's what I do it for. I want to see these guys fulfill all I know they can be, and the challenges out there for a student-athlete right now are greater than it's ever been. There's great rewards when it comes to that, but there's also unbelievable dynamics that they have to work through, and to be able to meet them where they are, to be able to continue to push them, to continue to help them understand all that they can be, more than just a jersey number, more than just the position. The teammate that they can be for this program and for the guys they get to do it with, that's what makes the journey worth it.

So I am grateful for the coaches that I'm getting to be a part of. I'm excited about some of the flexibility that I get to do in my job on a day-to-day basis, and just to be able to pour in and invest in the wonderful players I get to coach.

Q. Tommy, you've had a road, UCF to BC now to Florida State. What is it about the Seminoles that spoke to you in the transfer portal, and specifically to Mike Norvell and what this staff is doing that made this the right fit in your career?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: Being a part of Florida State is



a dream come true. It's been my dream school since I was a kid. When they called and then Coach Gus Malzahn called, I thought it was the right thing to do to be back with him and be a part of Florida State and Coach Norvell.

Q. Tommy, you've said some things this off-season that have obviously ruffled some feathers, got under some skin and all that. As a quarterback, it's a position that people know for having to have some of that confidence and whatnot. How do you balance that line between, or straddle that line between confidence and arrogance, or is there no line for you personally and you speak how you feel and that's just what it is?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: We stand on what I said. But there's no disrespect between that team or anything like that. It's just the confidence that I have in my teammates and the way we've been preparing and putting this preparation together this off-season, I just feel confident in the guys and the work that we've been putting in.

Just feel confident in me and my teammates and Coach Norvell and how he's getting us ready to work and ready to go play.

Q. Tommy, you and your coach both wear your heart on your sleeve, and your entire career you've embraced that underdog mentality. Florida State, great program, always has high expectations, but you guys are, in some capacity, a little bit of an underdog this year. How do you plan to bring your experience overcoming all of that adversity throughout your career to the group you're with this year?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: Just like Coach said, just focusing on this season, put everything that happened in the past behind me and just focus on being the best me I can be for my teammates and leading this group to go out there every Saturday and just go to battle and go to war and just make sure they get the best me that I know I can be.

Q. You've shown great prowess as both a runner and a passer, and now you've reunited with Gus who's going to be your OC. How is he tailoring the offense to your dual threat capabilities?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: Coach Malzahn is going to call plays and he's going to dial things up. He's a great offensive minded guy. He knows ball. So he's going to put me in the best position for the team. Whatever he calls, I'm going to run. It's going to happen.

Q. Heading into the 2025 season, what are your personal goals, whether it's something you want to

achieve in terms of statistics or just from an overall team perspective? And as an overall team, where do you guys want to end up at the end of this season?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: We're just going to take it one day at a time. We're going to earn it every single day, like Coach Norvell said. He's going to push us to be the best we can be every single day and try to have that championship mindset and win every day.

Right now we're just taking it one day at a time and we're just going to earn it every single day and win day by day. We're not going to look in the future and make expectations and stuff like that. We're just going to focus on one day at a time and we're going to earn it and we're going to work.

Q. You've described yourself before as a Jameis Winston type of quarterback before. What does that mean to you as a player and as a person?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: When I say that, I mean characteristics wise. He's a bit goofy, outgoing person and I'm the same way. I'm very energetic, outgoing, very goofy, like to laugh, like to have fun. I think it means a lot to be loose and just rub off on my teammates.

Q. You talked about kind of butting heads a little bit with Bill O'Brien. I'm wondering if you feel like you wish you did anything differently in your time at BC and how it's prepared you for this next chapter of your life?

TOMMY CASTELLANOS: You know, I'm very thankful for Boston College and all the people there that supported me when I was there. I had a great time there.

But we're past that. I'm focused on this season and focused on everything going forward with my new teammates and my new team.

Q. Darrell, you kind of got a slow start to last season but then started really coming on strong there in your play. How do you walk into the season with the mentality of you've got to start strong and you've got to start fast in order for that defensive line to be successful against an offensive line like Alabama?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: Just the confidence I've been putting in this off-season, just coming into the season confident, and just be willing to be desperate and take that next step.

Q. At the end of last season, you declared for the NFL Draft. You decided to come back and use that final



year of eligibility. What went into that decision?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: I felt like I left a lot on the table. I had room to grow, so I just wanted to come back and be developed and leave this program in the best position that I know it's capable of.

That was all that went into it, to be honest.

Q. Your highlights, your best plays, when you're rolling at your best, you've been described as unblockable and a force in terms of your size and movement ability. But as of now, it's just been flashes. How do you make your talents more consistent in more of a well-rounded game that shows up more play in, play out as opposed to spikes and lows?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: That just comes with being consistent, just working this off-season, just being the guy I can be. Like I said, just being desperate, just taking that next step.

Q. Sitting out in 2023 after your waiver was denied could not have been easy. How did you stay mentally focused and motivated to come back so strong in 2024?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: 2023 is long gone, but those guys that I had around me, it was special. So it motivated me to come to work every day to be the guy. With Coach Norvell, just motivating, being that guy that he be every day. I was really motivated to come to FSU and work. It was my dream school. 2024, I sat out so it took some time to get my game going. I just have to be consistent.

Q. New defense this year; can you give me some thoughts on the 3-3-5 and your place in it and what excites you about that defense? And then for the first time in 31 years, shout-out to Odell, you will be playing for the first new defensive line coach at Florida State. Can you share some thoughts on what you've seen from T. Knight so far?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: First of all, I'll start with the 3-3-5 scheme. I play in the scheme. It don't cause us to be disruptive. Make plays, show our versatility and just be us. Just playing for Coach T. Knight, he's a great dude, just bringing the energy. Coach Odell, he's still around. He's a great guy. So them being in the room together, it's unmatched.

Q. What's your overall thoughts on being named the Bobby Bowden Leadership Award recipient, and what's your thoughts overall on just leadership in general?

DARRELL JACKSON JR.: I mean, just taking that next step. I want to be a vocal leader, and I wasn't that last year. So just coming into this season I want to be, like, more vocal and just become that leader that I need to be for this team.

Q. You've been described as the rover; how has that been different in terms of positional-wise versus what you've played before as a nickel and as a safety?

EARL LITTLE JR.: Just being at that rover position, I'm always in the intermediate level, so just being that guy coming off the edge, blitz, being a post. I love the position and I'm ready for the opportunity and I'm excited to take the field with my guys.

Q. Obviously having a new DC in Tony White, talk about Pat's role still with the defense. Obviously you're one of the more versatile pieces in that secondary yourself, Edwin, Shyheim, those guys. Talk about how that's changed a little bit with Pat being there?

EARL LITTLE JR.: You're saying Pat Surtain? A lot of things change with different coaches, a different scheme, but we're all just fitting in right before -- just finding ways to be versatile, cause, wreak havoc for opposing offenses. We're all excited for the new opportunity.

Q. Earl, we've seen success with Tony White's 3-3-5 in the ACC, had success when he came to Syracuse with it. What do you like the most about the scheme? And then about the man Tony White, what is it about him that speaks to you as a leader?

EARL LITTLE JR.: What I like most about the scheme, schematically, it allows us to, like DJ said, show our versatility, just play with that edge. We can hit you from different points on the field. Like I said, we're going to wreak havoc for opposing offenses and we're just going to fly around. That's something that coach Tony White emphasizes, being physical and playing with dominant contact, playing with relentless effort. That's something we harp on and that's definitely one of our focal points going into the season. We're going to put emphasis on that.

As far as Tony White, man, he's definitely a great leader. I'm glad that Coach bought him on the team. We're excited to play for him. He brings that fire, that edge and that juice every day, and I can't wait to put that on display.

Q. Over the spring, what was your mentality and what were you focusing on, and then as you head into fall camp and towards the regular season, what are you



hoping to showcase and what are you hoping to build upon as you head into the regular season?

EARL LITTLE JR.: I had a few focal points going into the spring. I was asked to be a leader, just be more vocal on the team because that's what the team needs.

As far as my game, just bringing everybody up around me as far as everybody on the defensive side of the ball, specifically the secondary. Just being that leader, speaking up, just like I said, bringing those guys up around me because I treat everybody the same because everybody can be on -- you never know who can be on the field, whether it's some freshmen, last year's dudes, everybody has to get treated the same. So we attack the day with a great mindset, and I harp on those guys every day, just lock in, do what you've got to do. You don't got to do nothing special to be special. Just continue to be yourself, put your head down and keep working, and that's what we've been doing.

Q. How important during this climb that Coach Norvell talked about, how important is it to recruit the state of Florida in your opinion, because I just noticed that this is one of probably the few schools, if not the only school, here today that has guys all from the state of Florida.

EARL LITTLE JR.: You know, it's a great thing being able to come in and put on for this logo. Y'all know how big this logo is, the standard that it upholds. So just standing in the state and coming and playing for the state, that's a blessing, and I encourage all recruits to come play for the state and come and put on this logo.

Q. In terms of the standard, it's been talked about a lot by Norvell, been emphasized by your teammates that have got up here, as well. You talked about what it means to wear the logo and play for the spear and the state. What does that standard look like at Florida State? What is that standard, if you had to describe it in a couple sentences?

EARL LITTLE JR.: Just playing with tremendous effort, and like Coach said, just being relentless and being desperate. Desperate to win, desperate to eat, just desperate to succeed, that's all he harps on. That's -- we hit on that every day. You come here to be desperate and to succeed, and just like I said, put that logo on your chest and play for your last name and the school.

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