

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 21, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Jimbo Fisher

Press Conference



COMMISSIONER SANKEY: He enjoys spending time with his three sons, Trey, Ethan, and stepson Keller. Trey has been a topic of conversation during his recruitment. He's now a quarterback at the University of Tennessee Martin; played his spring season.

Ethan we talk about every year. Jimbo works with the Fanconi Anemia Foundation, a foundation linked with Fanconi anemia and finding a cure. Kids first fund. The foundation has raised nearly \$11 million in the past ten years, and the average life expectancy of Fanconi anemia patients has risen 11 years, to the mid-30s, since that foundation began.

Texas A&M head football coach Jimbo Fisher.

JIMBO FISHER: Howdy, everyone. It's great to see y'all again. It really is. It seems like we pull back in, I was trying to remember it seems like the last time I was here, I guess it was '18 I think we come up, and we're back up here. It's great to see you all.

No matter how grumpy I am sometimes when you interview us after a game or a practice every night, it's still great to see y'all, I promise.

Everything is exciting again. When these meetings start, we know that football is right around the corner. Our meetings, our summer workouts, all the things that are going on, excitement. There's nothing like college football. To be able to bring the fans back this year, the media back this year, get back to some normality, that's something that I know -- you don't realize what you have until it's gone.

I think, when that went away and not being able to walk in Kyle Field and feel 100,000 people screaming for you and even going on the road and having 100,000 people yelling against you, you really miss that.

As much as we love playing ball, it's about the players and the fans and the whole experience. Nothing like playing in

the SEC. It just means more. It definitely does. The life, the excitement, and football is part of life in the south. We're blessed to be a part of something that is really so special.

Very excited about our football team coming up. I feel like we have a very good team. We're making a lot of good progress with the culture of our organization. We're getting to where we need to be and starting to be able to compete for championships and compete at the highest levels, which is why we're there and what we're there for.

We have a tremendous university, tremendous facilities, tremendous backing by our administration to allow us to do the things we need to do to be successful and be the best state in all the union as far as being able to have football players from the state of Texas. High school football is second to none. Very blessed to be there.

We're excited to see where we're going to go, what we're going to do, and the challenges that lay forth, because, like I said, you've got to keep taking those steps to be who you want to be and how you want to be it, and how we handle those situations, how we handle the pressures.

I tell the players each and every day pressure is a privilege. It means that what you do matters and that you're playing at the highest levels, and you learn to embrace those things. The way you deal with pressure is create day-to-day habits that allow you to deal with that.

You don't worry about the outcomes. You develop a process of how you want to practice, create the culture of your organization within the team and environment, and play each and every day. Every day is for a championship. Each and every play is for a championship. Each and every day is for a championship. Every individual thing you do in detail, every meeting, is for a championship, and you create those habits.

So we're looking forward to taking those next steps. Excited about our football team. Like I say, offense, defense, special teams, we're returning a lot of guys. We talk about the offense and defense, but also very excited about our? Special teams. All of our specialists returned.



Our returners returned. Got a great job of snapping, kicking punting, returning. We've got a great group of great guys that can affect the football game in a lot of ways over there. Defensive there is a lot of guys coming back, a lot of experience.

Offensively very excited. We lost some linemen. We had one come back, one of the best ones in the country, if not the best, in Kenyon Green on that side. Got to replace a great quarterback, but we have great outstanding guys with Calzada and Haynes King right there that are going to be two outstanding guys to compete for the job.

We feel confident about the offensive linemen. We lost a lot of the experience, but the guys coming back with very talented. Very athletic, very talented, and very knowledgeable. Very pleased with the spring they had.

More importantly, the skill guys on offense. Top three receivers, All-American tight end. A guy I call your Swiss Army knife in Ainius Smith, one of the best football players I've ever been around. Isaiah Spiller who is a tremendous back, along with the chains. So got those guys around, so that's what you want around when you're replacing a new quarterback. Very excited about that.

Looking forward to the future, what goes on, and what we do here in practice. Quit worrying about results and what we need to do. Got to get to practice, finish up the summer, and get to doing the things we need to do. Had an outstanding summer.

Q. Jimbo, Bobby Bowden's been -- has a terminal medical condition. Can you please talk about what he's meant to you as a coach and a person.

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, I just spoke with somebody in relation to that. I want to say two things. I want to make a couple of comments.

First is keep Coach Bowden in your prayers. I think he's one of the greatest -- not only greatest football coach that ever lived, he's one of the greatest human beings that's ever lived. The ministry he preaches to his players and what he's meant to not only his players, but to me as a mentor -- like I said, I just talked to him approximately just under a month ago.

We had a long conversation on the phone. I call periodically and we stay very close. People don't realize he and I are very close. I've been a part of their family, I guess, as I say, since 1984 when I started playing with Terry, and I used to go to Tallahassee and stay at his house.

I used to stay at his house and go watch practices. Sit in meetings, sit in the back and watch him organize meetings. I'd sit in the press box and put a headset on when he used to call games, when I became the first offensive coordinator at Samford listened to him call games and how he did things.

The things he did for me in my career and how much we intertwined with the Birmingham connection. Him being at Birmingham, him playing for Howard College, me coming back here and playing for Terry at Samford. As I'll say this, there has been two All-American quarterbacks to my knowledge, unless there's a third one, in Samford history. Samford, Howard, myself and Bobby Bowden.

How crazy that is that my first college game as a coach at Florida State, when I was a head coach, I coached against Samford. So our lives and the Bowden family have intertwined so much. What they've meant to me, what he, Terry, Tommy, Jeff, all of them, the whole Bowden family.

But how importantly Bobby was and what he treated me like when I was coaching under him and what I learned.

It's sad. It really is. But if there's anybody ready to be with the good Lord and if things come in time, it's him, because there's no one who preaches about the Lord and did more for people in that regard. He's one of the great human beings that's ever coached and one of the great coaches that's ever coached. So saying that.

Also, I'd like to say something about R. C. Slocum. Keep him in your thoughts and prayers. He's doing very well as he's fighting some disease right now that R.C. is one of the great A&M people, and he's doing a great job, and I think fighting through it very well. Everything, from what we're understanding, is going very well, so keep him in your prayers.

I also want to say congratulations to Khris Middleton from last night. NBA champion from A&M. Huge role in what they did, and the 26 Olympians that Texas A&M has. We have 26 members of Texas A&M University in the Olympics, which is an amazing sight. I didn't want to get away from it.

I was going to mention Coach Bowden in a second, but I'm glad you brought him up. He has meant everything to me, him and his family and what they've meant everything. Getting me started and the philosophies I have in coaching.

People know I was with Coach Saban a lot of years and developed a lot, but my whole background and everything I ever started with and did with and the philosophies I have

offensively and a lot of different things still reside with Coach Bowden and Florida State and the things he meant to us.

It's very sad, but at the same time, he's lived a tremendous, tremendous life and affected a lot of great people.

Q. Coach, we know your four seasons at Florida State was pretty special, and as you enter your fourth season at Texas A&M, do you notice any similarities in your program now and your program then?

JIMBO FISHER: I'm all for it if that's what happens, I promise you that. You know, I think, because I think from the cultural change of you putting how you believe, what you want, how you want to play, the things you want to do into place, I think from that standpoint and the success standpoint we've had, I think there are a lot of similarities.

This is our first -- we've had three great classes. This is our fourth class. That group is juniors now, the first class we recruited fully. Just a tremendous group of people who understand the culture of how you want to play. To me, the culture of an organization is the most important thing, the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you think, the way you believe, and the way you go about your day-to-day habits and what you truly create in those habits that allow you to be successful in those big situations.

Our staff has done a tremendous job recruiting. Our talent level went up, up, up. That's not to say anything bad about the guys that are there, but we've got a really talented group of guys right now, and we're still recruiting that way. Hopefully that part of it is there.

It takes time to develop that culture and get everybody else in there. Where you can say something and walk away and know the players are going to reinforce. Like I said, we just manage a team. We've got to let the players run it. It's getting to that point now where they can finish my sentences. They know what I want to say. We're in a meeting, and I'll bring it up, and say, Coach, we got this, this, yes, sir, I don't even have to finish it. Those parts of the program are very similar.

Now, the results will come when we don't worry about the results. The results will come when we really buy into the day-to-day process of how we have to do things to create those habits and allow us to really execute under pressure and take those next steps.

Very pleased with the progress we've made, and I'm all for the results. I promise you that.

Q. A lot of coaches have been asked, what are your thoughts about the proposed 12-team playoff expansion? Especially since you all came so close last year.

JIMBO FISHER: I'm all for it. I think it's necessary. I think it's needed. And not just because we finished fifth, but I think -- here's the point I want you to ask. Name me a sport in any collegiate level that, that except for the top five conferences, which are about 60 teams, where the other 60 teams have no chance to win the National Championship. There's not a sport in our world that that is not -- that can't happen.

It happens in college football. Those guys have never been in the playoffs from the other conferences if you're not a power five conference.

From that standpoint, something -- I think it's very important, but also I think, because of the way conferences are and you're only picking four teams, I think certain teams in certain leagues have big advantages. And I will say this, playing in the SEC, the number of great teams that are there that can get in the playoff, and you see it in pro football all the time, with a wild card or the team that finished second ends up winning the Super Bowl.

That can happen very, very easily. Some people don't think it can. I think it can. I think it's going to be great for the distribution of players in recruiting that you know you don't have to go to certain schools all the time. You can distribute the players out when you know your team's making the playoffs. I think the talent levels will balance out in different areas and different teams, and more guys will get great players knowing that we can stay home, we can go in the playoff, and we can go win a National Championship.

I think it's very important for it. I think it's needed. I'm all for it, 100 percent.

Q. I wanted to ask you about quarterbacks. I know you do a great job at developing them, and you've done a great job in your career doing that. What did you see in Zach Calzada and in Haynes King when you recruited them? How big of shoes they have to feel with Kellen Mond moving on?

JIMBO FISHER: Kellen basically started four years, the whole three years I've been there, and his growth and what he's meant to the program and helped changing the culture. I think hopefully, Kellen, how he prepared, how he grew, and what he did is passed on to those guys. That's what great players do. It's not just the talent level. They pass the expectations and how to prepare and how to be a

great player. I think he's educated those guys.

When you talk about those two guys, Zach is a very talented man, can throw the football very well, but everybody gets caught in his arm. Zach is a really good athlete and can run around. I think Zach is an NFL talent. I think Haynes King is an NFL talent. Haynes can really throw the football. He's smart, he's competitive, he can run, just like Zach is.

Those guys have great minds. I'm telling you, I was extremely pleased with both of those guys in spring ball. They have great knowledge of what we're doing. They can get the ball to all parts of the field, deep, short, understand what we're doing, understand protections. They have escapability. They have creativity.

But more importantly, they're great decision makers, they're accurate with the ball, but they have an unbelievable competitiveness to them, and they affect the guys around them. I think great quarterbacks have a great effect on guys around them and they have a great presence. When they get in the huddle you know that guy's on our team, we can win.

On defense, let's get the ball back to him, something good's going to happen on offense. Let's just do our job, do what we're supposed to. Let him do his job so we can have that ability. I'm very pleased with both guys. I think we're in a really, really good situation. I love our room, however that situation turns out. But very excited about those guys and their future.

Q. I guess a while back you were at a booster event.

JIMBO FISHER: I was at the Houston Touchdown Club.

Q. Right, okay. And you got asked about -- I think I got this right -- you were waiting for Nick Saban to retire to beat him, and you were like -- I'm paraphrasing -- we're going to beat him while he's there, which I think fans -- what Coach wouldn't want to say it. Did you think that got blown out of proportion? Do you have any regrets about that? Or with some time passing, how do you feel about that how that played out?

JIMBO FISHER: I don't have any regrets. That's what we're here for, isn't it? Isn't that why everybody's here? That's what makes this league this league. That's what we expect to do at Texas A&M. In saying all that -- Nick and I are friends. We've known each other a long time. We coached together. We're from the same world, if that makes any sense. I have the utmost respect for what he's done and what he's accomplished. He's the standard, and

the standard is what you have to play to.

Just like the standard at Florida State to take over the ACC and go win a National Championship. That's our standard here, and you have to play at that standard, and they have set that standard. That's what great teams do. You've got other teams that want to match it, accept that challenge and go play at that level and go play him and beat him. We have to play him each and every year.

We look forward to playing him. Understand we have the utmost respect. Understand me saying we're going to beat them doesn't beat them. We have to develop the skills, the right practice habits, coach the heck out of the players and let them play, and be able to play those games and understand how to play those games.

How you do that is that Ken State is Alabama. Colorado is Alabama. New Mexico is Alabama. You play at that standard all the time. You play big games is how we had such success at Florida State. The bowl games, the National Championship games, that's the standard you play.

Your opponent has nothing to do with how you play. You play to your standard. The standard is the standard of excellence, and you have to meet that standard. It doesn't matter who your opponent is. They have set a high standard. We have to play to that standard each and every week, so when we play them, it's like playing another game. You have respect for them. I have the utmost respect for Nick and his program and everything he's done. That's what we're here for, why we're here, and what we expect to be able to do.

That's how we approach it every single week. We can't sit here and say we're going to do it. Everybody talks about winning. Everybody wants to win. Preparation wins games and not being able to worry about the results. Create the standards each and every day, and no matter who your opponent is, it's how you play, how you measure yourself, your sense of accomplishment, your sense of how you see yourself and what you want to achieve, and do you have the discipline and the self-discipline as a team, as a disciplined team, and the self-discipline as an individual player and coach to get where you need to go? That's what it's about.

Q. Just curious, with a few weeks in on NIL stuff, what's your initial takeaways? Is there any parts of it that you see popping up that might need to be looked at or need some regulation?

JIMBO FISHER: I think it's too early. Again, there's not enough information for us to know how it's going to affect

us. I know this: None of it's going to be equal. Just like in pro sports. Certain players get deals; certain players don't. I'll say this: A lot of our guys are getting a lot of attention, they're getting deals done, from what I understand. That's one of the great things about living in the state of Texas. The economy of Texas, being right between Houston and Dallas, two of the five largest cities in the country, the corporate opportunity for those guys to get represented and do the things they need to do is through the roof.

We have a lot of guys in deals right now that are coming through that are making significant amounts of money, from what I understand, and have opportunities in the forefront. I'm all for them being able to do it.

How it affects your team, and everybody is not going to get the same deals. That's what you got to understand. None of that is fair about what you're gonna go. One of the great advantages we have is that we're in the state of Texas, which has a lot of resources which allows those opportunities for those kids.

There's plenty more of them in the name, image, and likeness thing. That's a big thing. Heck, some people have been doing name, image, and likeness for a long time, just they ain't telling nobody. Now we're all on equal playing field (laughter).

Q. You host Alabama week 6. Alabama lost eight starters on offense and also lost their offensive coordinator. You guys are bringing back nine starters on that No. 1 ranked defense. How confident are you going into that matchup that you guys can rectify last year's loss and get a victory, and why is that?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I don't know whether we're confident. We have to go play well. We have to be playing well at week 6 to be able to do that. Each team has its own identity, own personality. Each team has a one-year life expectancy. You've got to understand that. As soon as you change one person on a team, the whole personality of a team changes. We have to identify those things that allowed us to be successful last year, continue with the culture of our players, and reinforce that right now in the off-season, and we feel very good about our team.

Listen, whoever Alabama puts out there is great players, they're going to be coached very well, and they've got a heck of a team. We talk about we have to meet that standard. We have to meet it week 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 to have a chance to meet it 6. Then what that one's over, we have to meet at 7, 8, 9, because everybody in this league can play. Everybody's got players.

So that standard is there, and hopefully they raise that bar,

they make us a better team knowing we have to play well to play with them and come out victorious on them. That's our ultimate goal and what we want to do.

We feel confident in ourselves. Me setting here saying that doesn't mean it. We want to beat them. They want to beat us. Who can do the most work and become the best football team until then is what's going to make the difference.

Q. Considering last year's success, just explain the vibe of the program right now.

JIMBO FISHER: I think -- listen, whenever you do something and somebody tells you, if you do this, this, this and this, this will happen. As it starts to materialize and really starts to come, you really start to understand the benefits of doing things the right way in a certain way with a certain mentality and a certain pressure amount that you put on yourself in practice, not just the physical part, but the mental part.

I think the buy-in for our team right now, and I guess the best way is not to ask me, ask our players. From what I seen in the summer, what I saw in spring, and what I see by the results and the questions and the meetings I have, I feel extremely confident in our guys.

Again, we have to go re-establish that again. I think we're starting to get the results we were talking about, but there's still another level we have to go to, and I think they buy into that and understand there's still a lot of work to be done.

If we do those things, we have a chance to be a very successful football program.

Q. What do you like in Jamere Johnson, a transfer from Tennessee?

JIMBO FISHER: If you watch the film, he played really well against us. There's a guy named Leal running around here today who's a really, really good player that's going to make money at the next level who blocked and did some good things.

He's long, he's athletic, he's big. He played junior college ball. He started seven or eight games and won that job at left tackle job for them in the first year there. I think he's a guy that has a chance to help us, to really help us when it's another experienced guy up front that's played SEC ball, has length, has size, has power, and has had a great summer.

He's a great guy to be around. He's got a great personality, great work ethic, and very impressed with his



off-season work ethic so far. I think he's got a chance to really help us.

Q. I don't know if you've heard this, but there's a report in the Houston Chronicle that Texas and Oklahoma are inquiring about joining the SEC.

JIMBO FISHER: I bet they would. (Laughter).

Q. What would you think about something like that?

JIMBO FISHER: I don't know. I'm just worried about A&M, you know what I mean? Listen, we've got the greatest league in ball. That's the choices they make or what they do, I don't know, but I don't know how I feel about it. I'm just worried about A&M. I control what I want to control here.

Q. Accurate to say offensive line is your biggest concern going into the season, and how important is it to mix and match those guys as well?

JIMBO FISHER: That's a good point. We lost -- as you know, we had a great offensive line. We gave up four sacks on the year, had almost negative plays.

Almost zero negative plays, which are huge, giving up those negative plays and sacks and tackles for loss. It's hard to move the football. We were able to be so good on third down, No. 2 in the country on third down last year in the things we did because we didn't have those penalties or didn't have those negative plays.

Definitely replacing those four guys, those guys did a great job. I really like -- you got Kenyon Green we've moved out to tackle who I think is one of the best pure football players in America, I really do. I'm very high on him. Luke Matthews at center is another guy who was injured last year; in the mix big time; I'm very high on. He's a very smart, intellectual player. Getting Jamere in there. He's going to be able to fight for the tackle positions. That gives you some great experience in those three guys. Layden Robinson, one of the guards right now. One of the most powerful guys I've ever been around. You saw on the film when he played, has experience, has been around, understands what we do. I think has a chance to be an excellent player.

Aki, our left guard, listen, guys, I'm going to say this once. I've been around a lot of athletic guys in my time. Not many I've been around more athletic than he is, and he has power and explosion. He's going to continue to play as a young redshirt freshman, but he has a chance to be a really, really special player in my opinion.

And we've got some guys we recruited with a tremendous incoming class and other guys backing them up. Again, we lost a lot of the experience, but the guys we have are very, very talented. I mean, very talented. They'll all be draft picks, in my opinion, if Lord willing they stay healthy and keep developing the way they can. I'm very excited about that.

The continuity to get five guys to play as one, that's the challenge in how quickly they can adapt to that. But they had a great spring, summer's been going well, and that's one of the things I'm most excited to watch, because I know what their ability is. In saying this in a crazy way, if that can come together, it can even raise that level of play we had there. That's no knock on anybody we had. There's some very, very talented guys in that group.

Q. I'll ask about the wide receivers. Last year by the Orange Bowl, you're basically down to three. Looks like this year there may be some more.

JIMBO FISHER: I'm excited about this. You talk about our offense, when you bring back Spiller in a chain at running back, Wydermyer is an All-American tight end, and then your top three receivers, because Ainas Smith is a slot receiver, is outstanding, as good as anybody in America the way you can use him and things you can do.

You had Hezekiah outside and Chase Lane, who are playing excellent ball, great summers. When you want to put a new quarterback in, all your receivers back, all your tight ends, and all your running backs back, and that really helps. It really does.

And the thing you keep forgetting about, we get Caleb Chapman back. He's a very healthy guy. He had three outstanding games, playing really well. 6'4", 4.4 flat guy that can really play. Getting him back is going to give us the big play. You've got Moose Muhammad coming back, Jalen Preston coming back, Devin Price, and Demond Demas, who is having an outstanding spring. I'm really excited about the potential we have out there.

But we've got three guys coming back that have outstanding, been there, know what to do, how to do it, big plays in big games, won nine football games with, made a lot of big plays in key moments, who got thrown in the fire, and they're going to be out there next year ready to play.

I'm excited about that group. And then we've got a young guy Yulkeith Brown who I'm really, really excited about in this group. He's a freshman, done great things this summer.

I'm excited about that group. When your quarterback has

all the pieces in place, you know guys are going to be where they're supposed to be, it's easy to break in your new quarterbacks. The new quarterbacks are very talented. If those guys do what I think they can do, it's going to be very exciting for those guys.

Q. First of all, kind words about Coach Bowden. Some coaches, when expectations rise, they like to downplay those expectations. How can you utilize those high expectations for your squad this year to get them mentally ready, able to meet their goals this year?

JIMBO FISHER: I look at myself as a realist. I mean, I don't try to sugarcoat things. I don't try to downplay things. I'm not a braggart about what we are and what we do. When I was saying about playing Alabama, I'm not trying to brag on Alabama. It's our standard. It's what we're in the business to do. It's the same thing, too. I love our football team. Sometimes it's important to be good, and it's important for them to know I think they're good, which I do. I think we have a chance to be a very good football team.

Now, me saying it and us wanting it is one thing. Wanting to win doesn't matter. Are you prepared to win? How we prepare, how we practice, the amount of detail we have, and how we go about things, and the camaraderie and the chemistry and the culture we created, does it continue, and does it continue to grow and even get better?

Like I tell our players each and every day, when expectations come, pressure comes. When pressure comes, your habits are coming straight to the surface. You can't stop them no matter what they are, what you've done daily. Are you going at every rep mentally and physically that you understand every time you run, every time you take a step, it's for a National Championship?

When you put yourself in that mindset -- because a lot of guys do it physically, they don't do it mentally. Again, I go back to the greatest statement I ever heard made about ball. Finishing a game they asked Michael Jordan, Michael, how do you change at the end of a game? What do you do differently? How do you change from everybody else? He said, I don't change. Everybody else changes. Every play in me for practice was for an NBA Championship. You saw that in The Last Dance. Everybody thought he was crazy. People thought Tom Brady was crazy, too. Those guys win. They put pressure on themselves in everything they do.

We want to hit that standard, where a standard is a standard. That standard is never going to lower. I can't bring it down. In our world right now all we do is keep bringing the standard down for people to make them feel

better. When you're playing ball, the standard is a standard. We've got to meet that standard every day. When you learn to meet it, that's going to be a habit, so when those big pressure situations come, those big moments come, we don't know any other way to act. That's what great teams and great programs do, and that's the challenge we still have to get to, and we'll see if we can do it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

