

# Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Michigan vs Texas

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

**Texas Longhorns**

**Steve Sarkisian**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we appreciate you being here. We have No. 13 Texas playing No. 18 Michigan. That will be the 2025 Cheez-It Citrus Bowl, the 80th edition of the Citrus Bowl game, 3:00 p.m. eastern, Wednesday, December 31st.

We will open it up for Coach Sarkisian with an opening statement, and then we will take questions.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I would say just in opening, it is an honor and privilege to be part of the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl against a great opponent in Michigan, someone that we have some -- having played them last year to start the season, and we are set to play them to start the '27 season.

The opportunity to play a quality opponent for them, for our team to extend our season is one that we are looking forward to. It is an opportunity for us to go win ten games for the third consecutive season, something that hasn't been done at the University of Texas since 2007 through 2009.

We have had a great season. We have accomplished a lot of great things with one more goal in mind now of going to win in the Citrus Bowl.

With that, we will open it up.

**Q. How big a letdown was it not getting in the Playoff? Do you think Ant Hill and any other players will opt out of the bowl game?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think there is obviously a level of disappointment of not making the CFP. I thought that we put a body of work on the field. We stated our case. They made their decisions of who they felt was worthy and deserving of being the 12 teams to play in that tournament. You have to respect that. That is the system that we put in



place. Congratulations to all those teams that are in that tournament, that get that opportunity.

As far as us moving forward, for me and I think for our players, one of the key messages has to continue to be it is not about what just happened to us, it is about what are we going to do moving forward. That will be our message starting tomorrow morning with the team and the players.

Naturally, we are going to have to have discussions with a variety of players, some that have NFL aspirations, some that may be thinking about potential going to other schools. That is the reality of the state of college football right now, but I think jumping to that too soon and making an emotional decision I think can be where we can make a mistake.

We have to be cognizant of that is the reality of the state of college football, but also let's make sure that we are making really good conscientious decisions with the right information and not do anything with emotion or frustration.

That will be the process starting tomorrow, and I am sure it will take a little bit of time to get to the final number of who may and who may not play. That is okay.

We have a really young football team. We have a lot of good young players that are champing at the bit for their opportunity to play. We are going to get a lot of extended practice time.

Essentially, this is going to turn into another spring ball for us where a lot of young players are going to get an opportunity to show how much they have grown and developed over the season and with the opportunity to potentially play in this game where this game doesn't count against their eligibility.

Looking forward to all parties on our team hopefully contributing to the success in this game.

**Q. With Notre Dame's decision to opt out of their bowl game, I'm curious, number one, did you even consider that? Number two, how rippling an affect can that have on college football and the bowl process in general?**

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STEVE SARKISIAN: Which part? What rippling? Teams opting out? I'm sorry. I just want to make sure I answer the question correctly.

THE MODERATOR: I think that was the question, yeah.

**Q. That part of it, just how big an affect can that have on college football.**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think a couple of things. One, no, we did not. We felt like if we didn't get into the CFP being right on the cusp, we would have an opportunity to go to really good bowl game.

You think about the long-standing history of the Citrus Bowl with a quality opponent being in Michigan coming out of the Big Ten, that this was going to be a great opportunity for us, for our players, for our team.

When you really look at our guys last year, we didn't get the bowl experience at all. When you go to the playoffs coming right out of the SEC Championship game, we didn't get the bowl experience.

I think that part of playing college football is getting some of that bowl experience. If we could have earned a bye, we could have had a little different experience, but we didn't. So, I want our guys to enjoy this. I feel like it is the right thing for us to do for a lot of reasons.

I don't know about the ripple effect for everybody. I think we all have goals and aspirations of winning conference championships and being national champions. At least, we do, but I also think that there is an experience factor in all of this. There is growth in all this. There is development in all this. There is camaraderie. There is so much that goes into this that sometimes a bowl game is about celebrating a season and finishing a season the right way.

Like I said, I can't speak for everybody else. That may change some as we evolve potentially into more teams. I don't know. I think we all can agree, we have a flawed system right now that needs to be revamped, needs to be looked at, needs to be looked at from a lot of different angles. Where it goes from here, I don't think anybody really knows.

So the point being, I don't know what the effect is going to be down the road. I just know for us this is an opportunity to play another game against a really good team in a great game, great bowl game, and we're going to cherish it and put our best foot forward and try to go win this game.

**Q. Steve, when we spoke with you, I believe it was last**

**week, you really emphasized that you wanted to see the best 12 teams compete for a championship and take obviously the Playoff discussion that's done for your team, but as someone who coaches in this sport and has been in this sport your entire career, how close do you feel we are or the sport is to seeing the top teams play for a title?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I mean, I think we're close. Again, I honestly believe we were closer when we were at four teams, because the committee really had to narrow it down to four, who are the four best teams to go play? We were in that playoff two years ago.

Then when we went to 12, there was going to be some real growing pains I think that we all were going to have to figure out. I think there were some scenarios that some thought that will never happen, just put that in, but it's happened.

We've got two G6 schools in the playoff, right now. Congratulations to them for the seasons that they had and winning their conferences and their opportunities to go play in this game.

But, I think the overall consensus would be there's probably a few other teams that college football would like to see in this tournament.

But in the end, I think in my mind we were going to have to go through some of this to try to get it all right. I would love to be on the other side of it. Don't get me wrong.

The one thing we have learned under the current format, we have to win more games, and we have to win the games that are right in front of us. It doesn't matter how hard your schedule is. That doesn't matter. It matters what your record is.

So to complain about your schedule or how many good teams you play or how many teams you play on the road is really irrelevant. What we have to do is control what we can control, and that is win the games that are right in front of us, as long as this is the format that we are going to use.

Does it evolve? Where does it go? How does it grow? Time will tell. That is for the powers that be to try to figure that out.

I think, like I said, for us, it is control what we can control, and that is the next thing, that is right in front of us.

**Q. As disappointing as today might be, does this maybe give you guys an opportunity to when you are**

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**always going from one thing to another to another to another to maybe just take a step back, do some inventory, a little bit of an audit that you haven't been able to do in December and really not only get prepared for the bowl game, but then gear up for the next season?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, this is a drastically different December than we have had from two years ago and most notably from what we had last year. You think about what we were doing last year at this time, we were playing in a conference championship game, Wall Street signing date going on right in the middle of it. Then the portal opens, and you are trying to recruit, all the while get ready for your first round playoff game and then the next game and then the next playoff game.

The idea that we do have more time on our hands to really, like you say, audit our own organization from top to bottom from schemes to play calls to personnel to roster to what we have coming in that we just signed to where we maybe can enhance that throughout the portal to the way we do our offseason program. There are a lot of things that I have been evaluating last week, when we had that time off, and will continue to do so throughout January.

I am big into believing in it is easy to whine, complain, moan, poor us, poor me. I just don't live in that world. I live in, okay, this is what it is. Let's move forward.

If I am going to move forward, then we've got to use our time wisely and we have to attack the things that are attainable right in front of us and then start looking at some things down the road long-term. This time gives us an opportunity to do that.

Again, we are going to use it wisely, not only from a coaching staff perspective but a player perspective to make sure that we are not only putting ourselves in the best position to play well on December 31st, but putting ourselves in the best position to have a really good 2026 football season as we embark on that next year.

**Q. Is there anything built into y'all's contracts, whether it's revenue sharing or NIL, to incentivize players to play in bowl games like this one rather than opting out?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: No, we don't.

**Q. I know you guys would much rather be he playing in College Station or Eugene, Oxford this week coming up, but what benefits will this give such a young team to get these extra practices and for you to evaluate what you got coming back?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think it's, one, the quality of the opponent. We are playing a Michigan team that won five of their last six games. They have elite players. They have a fantastic young quarterback who got better as the season went on. They have a really good young runner. They have really good schemes on both sides of the ball. We know that from facing them a year ago.

I think what it does is it raises the competitive level for some of our younger players and an opportunity to play them and to get them in the game, but also some players that have been developing as the season has gone on, can we continue that growth to really springboard us into 2026?

Like I said, the first goal is to go win ten games, because we are always trying to do things that haven't been done around here for a long, long time. The idea that we can win ten games this season for the third consecutive season since '07 to '09, that is a pretty big accomplishment for this group.

To go along with as we touched on beating our rivals for back-to-back years and beating OU by double digits two years in a row, beating Arkansas by double digits two years in a row, beating A&M by double digits two years in a row, those are some really cool things that this team gets to hold onto.

I want to make we get that tenth win for them. For the younger players against such a quality opponent in such a great bowl game I think is going to be a great experience for them that hopefully, you know what, next year the goal is to be in the playoffs.

But if we are not going to be in the playoffs, let's be in the game that is closest to the playoffs that gives enough feel and energy and competitive spirit so they have an idea of what they can look forward to next December.

**Q. Along those lines, is this a chance for you and the staff also to kind of gauge guys and the fact that it may not be the Playoff, but just to see how they react the next couple of weeks and into the game as far as their work goes?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: Well, I think so. One thing that we are going to look at that we didn't have the luxury of last year, but we had going into the Washington game in the Sugar Bowl is how do you manage the time off. I am really looking at this schedule in December with a forward-thinking mindset as well.

If you have an opportunity to win an SEC Championship and then you get that extended layoff to that bowl game.

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Okay, in that playoff game, what are you doing with the time to keep your team fresh, to keep your team not only fresh, but yet competitive with the physicality.

This gives us an opportunity to tinker with that as well, too, for the future. Hopefully, we get back into that spot where we have been the last two years. If we do that, maybe there are some things in our scheduling that we can do better than we did the first time around a couple of years ago when we were in the Sugar Bowl against Washington.

**Q. With all the conversation around the committee's decision today, would you be interested in a play-in tournament and just getting rid of the committee at all?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I would be interested in a lot of things, you know. But again, I think we just can't rush to let's go over here and do this, if we don't look at the unintended consequences of doing something like that.

I think some of the things with us going to the 12-team Playoff with some of the A/Qs and some of the formatting of how teams were going to get evaluated and what was the criteria and the principles of teams getting elected to play, I think that needs to be evaluated first before we start talking about more teams, before we start talking about play-in games.

Who is playing in? How do you earn those opportunities? Those are the things, because I think there's unintended consequences that come with everything, and we have to drill all the way down on this stuff.

We are finding out there were some unintended consequence with this format that they're going to have to work themselves through. So there's a lot of work to be done, and we have some great people working on this stuff.

Don't get me wrong, the leadership is really good, but we can be better. Just like we can be better as a football program. I think the CFP can be better, and I think we can all probably agree on that.

I think what's important is not just to rush to judgment. Let's take our time. Let's get it right or at least let's get it better the next time around.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, Coach.

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