

# Cheez-It Citrus Bowl: Michigan vs Texas

Wednesday, December 31, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

**Texas Longhorns**

**Steve Sarkisian**

**Ty'Anthony Smith**

**Arch Manning**

Press Conference



I am thankful that I got the opportunity to coach them this season, but also gives me a lot of hope into what 2026 is going to look like, because we have a really good football team. We have some more players that are going to join these guys that are going to be poised for a heck of a journey next year. It is a great way to end the season. I am very, very proud of our team.

Texas Longhorns 41, Michigan Wolverines 27

STEVE SARKISIAN: I am really proud of our football team. We were just talking in the locker room about the life of a competitor, and the life of a competitor isn't easy, and there is ups and downs. There is adversity. There is personal adversity. There is team adversity. There is plenty of guys in that locker room that had personal adversity this year, throughout their career. This team had its own adversity this season.

But, the real true unique competitors rise up to every challenge that they are faced with, and that is what this team did today. We played without nine starters today. We played with over 20 scholarship players not suited up for practice, and it created great opportunities.

I think it about the great game Arch had. I think about the amazing game Ty'Anthony had, but I also think about Christian Clark, a guy pro probably didn't get as many carries as he would have liked through the season and to show up the way that he did today.

I think about Wardell Mack, stepping in and playing star, but because of all the injuries and guys opting out in the secondary has to go in at corner and get an interception. I think about Kaliq Lockett going into the game making a huge touchdown catch at a critical moment in the ballgame.

And so that is the culture that we have. When people want to ask about, what is so unique about our culture, that group is so connected. It is so full of the unique competitive spirit that I am just really proud of these guys, and I am proud to be their coach.

**Q. What did you see from the freshmen receivers, getting more playing time than normal?**

ARCH MANNING: Really proud of the way they stepped in there. They haven't complained at all. Just been practicing hard and working. To come in there in a game like that and make plays, it was cool to see.

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think for us, a lot of times for our players, I say it a lot, that you guys don't get an opportunity to see the work that our guys put in on a regular basis.

And the receivers, for example, whether it is Daylan McCutcheon, Jaime Ffrench, Kaliq Lockett, they have been working at their craft, and they have been getting better and better and better. You never know when your opportunity is going to present itself. Those guys got in the game today. Emmett goes down. Ryan goes down. And they played. They weren't just out there wandering around. They were playing physical, blocking, they were making plays when the ball was in the air.

I think it just speaks volumes to culturally how our guys work in practice and how competitive our practices are to get ready for ballgames when your number is called.

**Q. I know it's only one game but what does a game like this for Ty'Anthony and Christian do for them moving into 2026? And also, do games like this provide credence to your message when you're trying to tell guys, essentially, to trust the process and what you're trying to do as far as development was concerned?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I think that is what I just told the guys



in the locker room.

Where Ty'Anthony was last season, to where he was coming into this season, halfway, three quarters of the way through the year, he was essentially a backup player but was earning more and more opportunities because of the way that he was playing.

And I would argue by the end of the season, he was the leader in that linebacker room, because of who he is on a regular basis, because of his practice habits, because of the way he goes about his work.

Now, he is in there, and he is the leader. He is playing with guys who haven't really played much or haven't been in that position. His confidence continues to grow, and all that does is spread to other players.

I think that is what unique competitors have the ability to do. It is not only his competitive spirit, but he can spread it to others.

I think it just speaks to a lot of the other younger players, is if you look to these guys and you look to their practice habits, you look to the way they carry themselves and work about and don't complain. They just do what you are supposed to do, stay competitive, don't just accept the role that you have and strive for more; that when your number is called, you will be ready to play.

I think that that showed up for him today. I think it gives him a great springboard into the off-season of 2026 from a leadership standpoint.

I left out Bo Barnes, by the way, with a sack today. Just another guy who hadn't been playing all year, and stepped in, was ready to go, and had a great sack for us as well.

Jordan Johnson-Rubell, another guy, who hadn't been playing. A bunch of these guys that stepped up today.

**Q. This kind of is a question for you, Coach, and you, Ty'Anthony. In the fourth quarter, defense seemed to dominate just a little bit more. Was there a message that was said going into the fourth quarter? What changed to allow you to make those big plays?**

TY'ANTHONY SMITH: Yeah, I think just -- Colin brought the boys in and said, "Let's finish this thing. Let's stay together, let's stay tight, and let's do it for one another." I feel like just him putting that energy in kind of helped us out too, as well.

STEVE SARKISIAN: Yeah, I would be remiss if I didn't reference Colin today. He was extremely disruptive in the

game. Colin is another guy that as you grow in our program, you start to assume new roles, new responsibilities. He has grown into one of the leaders on that defense with this guy, and it felt very natural and comfortable. It didn't feel fabricated when he went to speak to the team. It felt like that's exactly what he was supposed to do in that moment.

Like I said, it is a good sign for us moving forward.

**Q. You were in full command, such a great way to cap a season. You've grown a lot. It's been that kind of ride. How important was it to cap this season, a season of growth, the way you did tonight?**

ARCH MANNING: Yeah, it meant a lot. I think go back to Coach Sark's point, just staying the course and continuing to compete.

I think we had a month of preparation before this, and getting new guys acclimated, and it was cool to cap it off like the way we did.

**Q. You guys have dealt with setbacks but then rebounded, whether it's losses, whether it's the committee Bowl selection. What have you learned about your team during the process and what do you want these guys to learn and carry over going into 2026?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I was talking about the life of a competitor, but I think about how you respond to adversity. We live by a simple rule: Life is 10 percent what happens to you, and 90 percent how you react to it.

There are some things that we caused with our play and lost games. There are some things that, hey, we were told we couldn't get in.

But any way you shape it, it was a form of adversity. I think one thing with this group, all these guys don't know any different from the messaging they have had since the day they have arrived and grown in our program: How do you respond to adversity? What do you do about it; that's the key. It's not about what happened to you; what are you going to do moving forward?

And these guys continue to respond. I will say this: That is not easy to do, because if you live in the world of the Internet and social media, and what is going on at home, people want to keep dragging you back there and talking about what happened. We keep talking about where we are going and how we are going to move forward.

I credit them, and I credit them in the locker room, because

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I need them, too. Their energy, their spirit – there are days, I was disappointed. I will be honest with everybody. I was disappointed we didn't get in the Playoffs.

But then showing up and seeing these guys in the team meeting, and their energy and the way they go to practice, that inspires me, too. We feed off of one another.

But it takes special leaders, and it takes some of your better players to have that competitive spirit about themselves to send a message to everybody else that this is how we are going to go about our business.

I will say one thing about our practices over the past about two and a half weeks or so. We practiced a lot more together. We were all on one field with the offense and the defense kind of alternating reps, and I think it was good for Arch probably to watch our defense practice. For Ty to watch our offense practice, it created a little more dialogue. It created a little more competitive spirit. It created more physical practices, faster practices. That was helpful and needed to pull everybody out of the funk and focus on the next thing and the next task at hand which was this game.

**Q. Over the past few years, it seems like the Bowl season has been dumbed down a little bit by some of the general public. After TCU last night and the game you played with a lot of the feistiness or both sides, is this a pitch to the world that this is an important part of the sport; that these games do matter and these games matter to the players and coaches alike?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I would say this. I don't think that the Bowls are dumbed out. I think we have to reframe our picture of what the Bowls are.

For us today, I talked about we had nine starters that were not even on our team by the time we kicked off this ball today that either are going to the NFL or decided to transfer. We had just a little over 20 players that are no longer on our team.

That doesn't mean that this game doesn't matter to these guys, but there are just new faces. I think sometimes we have to reframe the narrative and the picture of what the goal is. There are a bunch of guys in that locker room who are trying to go seize this opportunity, seize this moment individually, so that we can seize the moment, seize the opportunity as a team.

Now, there are going to be some teams that don't have the competitive spirit with guys like this, and that is on their bad. That is not about the way we operate.

I thought Michigan to their credit. They had a bunch of fight

in them today, too. I think they only had three opt-outs, and that is a credit to their coaching staff and to Biff and that organization for keeping that team together through some of their adversity, too. I credit them. They showed up ready to play today.

All in all, I hope, and I can't wait to see the ratings from this game. Because like I said, I think a lot of people watched this game today and were tuned into a very exciting football game with two really good teams and very talented players.

**Q. Third straight year where you've eclipsed ten wins. Got this program in a good spot. I just wanted to get your thoughts on where you feel like the trajectory is still headed for this program, and any update on Mosley, as well.**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I am excited about where we are at as a program. We always -- every year, we go into the off-season and we are going to go into winter conditioning here in a few weeks -- you got a few weeks, okay -- in a few weeks. There are natural goals, right. We want to be SEC champions, and we want to be national champions. I get that and those are the ultimate, right, for every team.

There are a lot of victories along the way to be proud of, and I am not going to belabor all the ones on beating your rivals and doing all that stuff. Those are great moments for that team, and for that team to go win 10 games and to fight back the way that we did. Like I said, hey, we made our case. We didn't get into the Playoff and have that opportunity, but we were a 6-2 team in the SEC. We were 13-3 in two years in the Southeastern Conference.

We are recruiting really well. We have a great nucleus of players coming back to this team. We will find the right mix of potential portal players to add, but we have to retain our players, too. That is really important.

We have a great football team in there that I promise you, not a lot of people wanted to play. There were probably a lot of teams that were hoping we didn't get into the playoff, and that's okay, too. Our trajectory is right where it needs to be. We are a very good football team. We lost a couple tough ballgames. We fought back. We have the right culture, the right mentality.

We have a really tough schedule that we are going to have to play next year. We are going to have to build the depth out for the team next year. Then, we have to build this culture back, because we have a lot of new faces, 20-some-odd high school kids that are going to join these guys. There are going to be some transfers that join these guys. New leaders have to rise up, and then we have to

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build that culture, winter, spring, summer, fall camp and get ourselves ready to go for another challenging schedule.

There is no other group I would rather go into that schedule next year with than the group of guys that we have, that is for sure.

**Q. First down conversions, the throw to Kaliq, the big run at the end, which one was the most pleasing to you and why?**

ARCH MANNING: Probably that throw to Kaliq, him stepping up in that moment. It was special for him. I am glad he came down with it.

**Q. What was the reaction off the bench when you get your second pick and you look up and Arch is doing a long-distance house call just like he did against A&M?**

TY'ANTHONY SMITH: He just looked up and said, "Thank you, Jesus." I looked up and said, "Thank you, Jesus."

**Q. I want to redirect the conversation back to Colin. Do you remember the beginning of the year when he was getting all these penalties and you telling us, "I don't think that's the statistic he thought he was going to be leading in." Well, tonight he is now the leader in the SEC for sacks. So you and Ty'Anthony, can you both tell me about his growth throughout this season and his journey to get here, and what it means to y'all and what it means to him and just the rest of the defense?**

STEVE SARKISIAN: I'll touch on it. I think about Colin at the start of the year -- and I am going to get back to Colin, but I'm going to kind of pull it all together.

I think about Colin at the beginning of the year. I think about Arch at the beginning of the year. I think about Ryan Wingo at the beginning of the year. I felt like, if you guys used to hear me say, sometimes I feel like they are trying too hard, and letting the game -- allowing the game come to them, and then building confidence through that.

And what amount of growth we saw in those three, how about the amount of growth we saw in this guy -- what did we say about the OU game, the light switched for you (turning to Ty'Anthony) halfway through the season, probably about the same time for you (turning to Arch).

It takes time. I know all these guys come in with four stars, five stars and all this stuff, and we want instant, bam, they are going to be All Americans and be great.

It takes time. It is a process. We play tough schedules, but

I credit these guys for continuing to work at it and trusting us that this is how you can get there. Colin is a great example of that.

Colin is an extremely disruptive player. I thought Colin shifted at Florida. Maybe, we didn't play our best game defensively in that game, but I thought Colin played a good game, because he was defending the run. He was now becoming a multi-dimensional player. It wasn't just about rushing the passer. He was stopping the run, and he was starting to affect the quarterback and then the sacks and things started to happen for him.

He is a disruptive guy. I told him today the best play he made today was on his interception. On the play, Colin was in pass coverage and the quarterback had nowhere to go with the ball, because he took away his outlet, and then Ty'Anthony got the interception. The versatility of Colin I think sometimes gets overlooked.

**Q. From a player's perspective, where is this program headed towards?**

ARCH MANNING: Yeah, I think we have to attack this off-season, getting these new guys, whether it's the high school guys or portal guys and keep our guys, attack winter workouts and continue to be better leaders and get this thing going. The standard is the standard at Texas. Got to keep it going and have a good 2026.

TY'ANTHONY SMITH: Just what Arch said, picking up the leadership role. Trusting in the guys, the young guys, getting them acclimated to the program. In the end, that is what is going to build a National Championship team.

**Q. Your uncle got MVP here and now you have one. If I'm not mistaken, he threw for his, and you ran and threw for yours. Do you have some bragging rights? What's that conversation going to be like?**

ARCH MANNING: Nothing against the Citrus Bowl, but I think he played in it twice. I don't want to have to play in it twice. (Laughter)

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