

Florida Citrus Sports Bowl Selection

Sunday, December 7, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

Camping World Stadium

Steve Hogan

Chief Executive Officer

Press Conference



BRIAN COMES: Hi, good afternoon. I'm Brian Comes, president of the Florida Citrus sports board of directors. We are thrilled. The 80th edition of the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl will feature the Michigan Wolverines against the Texas Longhorns on New Years Eve at 3:00 pm on ABC.

It's going to be an incredible game. Look forward to it. Great event for our community.

Any questions?

Q. Steve, just how did this matchup come about?

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, you know, (we're) super excited. I mean, we've never had Texas come play here, and of course, you can make an argument for a lot of teams this year to be in the playoff.

To be hosting these two brands -- the biggest brands on the planet come play here on the 31st in what is our 80th Cheez-It Citrus Bowl, (and it's) special for all of us here in our community.

It's going to be, I would venture to guess, the highest-rated game in the country. Might even outrate some CFP games. That's what we expect here. When you pick first in the SEC and the Big Ten, historically, that's going to yield these kinds of matchups.

So highly ranked, big helmets. It's going to be a big year. Some stars all over the field. But, you know, at the end of the day, the playoff seeding comes out. We see it when you see it. There is a lot of prognostication together with your league partners -- 'if this happens here is what we'll do.' That was the case here, so there was a lot of preparation on both the SEC side of the ball.

The Big Ten side kind of was slotted in a little bit earlier, it seemed a little bit more obvious than it would in most years.

Although the SEC side of that, depending on what happened with the playoff or Alabama, that would warrant a discussion, since there would be a repeat bowl appearance for Alabama and Michigan in that case.

Anyway, it worked out, and to have these two teams emerge after the rankings, it was an easy decision at that point, and everybody is excited to play each other.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, so far, Chris Del Conte, Warde Manuel, very appreciative. Very excited. View this as an opportunity to set up their year going into next year and make a statement this year in front of what they know will be probably one of the largest, if not the largest, television audience you can have out and around the playoffs.

We were equally excited to hear how excited Texas was, who has never been here before. Michigan and Warde, who have been here before, know this is kind of the standard bearer in the Big Ten lineup.

So, it was so fun to have these guys both be excited to play each other.

Q. Obviously, Texas' quarterback, Arch Manning, has family ties to this game actually. What was that like, beginning to have the idea that...

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, I mean, it's a neat opportunity, of course. You know, I was blessed -- I'm pretty old, as you know, so, I was old enough to be here for Peyton Manning's game against Eddie George in the 1996 January 1 Citrus Bowl.

So to think that maybe there is another Manning that has an opportunity to put their name in our record books is cool and fun. I don't know how much of the family otherwise would be here, but if they are, it's just a neat kind of reunion.

Part of the 80th anniversary, those kind of stories make the 80th anniversary of the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl exciting and



more special.

Q. Could you ask for a better matchup? Are you excited about the 80th game events.

STEVE HOGAN: We are. You know, Jordan Davis is going to be a great postgame concert. Huge country music star. Something we haven't done before. We really wanted to have this year be special. There are a ton of opportunities between now and then we'll roll out to the community.

I couldn't think of a better way to do it. We're making history with Texas playing in our game. They're new to the SEC lineup. This opportunity for them to play in one the legacy games in the SEC, with a blueblood like Michigan to go against. I mean, it's just -- I could not have done it any better. If you asked me at the beginning of the season, pick two helmets, put them in the game at a high level, this is probably what we would've done.

Q. (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, you'll see a little bit of kind of dust if you will, under construction. Not in a major way. But there will be some things prepping for the work to come in January, February, March. A little bit of north end zone seating, things like that.

For the most part, we will be intact and have a full show and a great stadium. There will be some areas where we're getting ready to do some aggressive construction in the first quarter.

BRIAN COMES: I'm also excited to announce the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets will meet the BYU Cougars in the Pop-Tarts Citrus Bowl on December 27th in Orlando. Looking forward to a great game at 3:30 on ABC.

Q. (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, we have a selection in the ACC, we have a selection in the Big 12, and until we're assigned the team pool that we select from, we can't make a pick.

So, it took a lot longer than anticipated. We were on a call for a couple of hours just kind of working through exactly what that pool would be. As soon as they gave us the pool, we jumped at the chance to take Georgia Tech. Notre Dame wasn't in that pool when it came time to pick, so we were circling Georgia Tech in this town.

If you've been watching the projected picks for the Pop-Tarts Bowl for weeks now, you were looking at Tech atop of that list. So the fact that the opportunity to get BYU

here to go with them is a special treat. They were in there early, but it's been a while and (they) had a chance to get into the playoffs. The fact that things fell the way they did, you get one of the first two teams out of the playoff going to play another ranked team, that I think Haynes King, Coach Key, these guys have put on a show this year.

They played Georgia very tough down the year. This is, probably, next to the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl, two of the top games in the country outside of the CFP.

Q. (Regarding Notre Dame not being in the pool.) How concerning was that that they decided not to play in a game based on being left out of the CFP?

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, you know, you would love to see them take that opportunity to play. You understand the rawness of the last few hours, the way they received the information was about as raw it can be.

Everybody is kind of experiencing the 12-team playoff together. All of you, all of us -- they are. So, you can understand the disappointment.

I think when you step back, again, Georgia Tech and BYU is something we were circling. You know, if Notre Dame were going to be in the playoff, either one of those teams for us were a win.

But I think the opportunity to have played in a game like this is something that I would think that team and the players ultimately may step back and say, 'I wish we could have been considered alongside Georgia Tech to play the No.12 team in the final CFP ranking.'

You know, I hope this isn't indicative of some of the decisions being made in the future. I understand when it's a little bit further down the lineup, you have some six-win teams or five-win teams trying to fill a spot, or a coach is gone.

That's not the case here. You're playing at the highest level. You're playing in games that are highly watched in terms of ratings. It's a huge opportunity.

If you step back, maybe some may regret not taking that opportunity. But we'll have to let that play out. We're really happy with what we have got. Very happy with Georgia Tech.

Q. When you say things like this happen, what is it like for people who don't understand the intricacies of the planning?

STEVE HOGAN: Our board, you know, Brian Comes, our



president and Sharon (Line Clary) our Chairman, so many others, Jim Hunter, our incoming president -- they're in it with us for weeks, especially in the last number of days.

I was up at the SEC Championship and came back last night. You know, you're just on the phone constantly and preparing for scenarios -- 'What if? What if this is what the CFP looks like. What will we do?'

So many other games depend on Orlando, just because of where you pick. When you pick first in the lineup in all these leagues, the rest of the system has to wait on that.

It just intensifies the sheer numbers of calls and communication. It's a very exciting time. Everybody you talk to is kind of pitching, 'Hey, we would love to be in your game. What do I need to send you?' I saw some real creative ones this year for the Pop-Tarts Bowl. I'm not going to say which school, but one of them even prognosticated the sheer amount of Pop-Tarts distributed through their region as a qualifying factor to get into this game.

It is The People's National Championship, and we're blessed that Georgia Tech and Brigham Young are here. It's a lot, but in a fun way it's a lot.

Q. (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, I mean, to be honest, you knew it was going to be a debate, all of us did, between Miami and Notre Dame and Alabama, depending on what happened in the championship game with BYU and Texas Tech. We thought those three teams were going to be the debate. We had no clue which way that would shake out.

I mean, it felt like Notre Dame was not going to be available under any certain terms, and then they were -- but I feel like every time we all kind of get into this when we're making our selections, you look back and almost every year you probably could say, 'I was surprised to see this.'

That's been true for me in the four-team iteration, the 12-team iteration. There are surprises. But here we are, in a good way. When you pick first, the team options may surprise you or shock you when they come out, but you couldn't be happier. You feel blessed that you have that choice, right?

So had Notre Dame been in the pool, would've been a tough decision between Georgia Tech and Notre Dame. But we ended up in a great place, and we (have been) circling this game for a while.

Q. After the Big12 Championship game Texas Tech coach said BYU was deserving of the playoff spot. Maybe a lot of coaches didn't think they would get in. Are you ever reluctant to chose a team that might have playoff aspirations and feels like we're the last ones out here or one the last ones left out and maybe we're not going to have that incentive?

STEVE HOGAN: We don't have any reservations at all. The history of this game -- here we are in game 80 -- this game has dominated the college football postseason ratings. The quality of the teams, if you just look through the decades in this town, we've all been blessed.

That's a choice you make. That even in the two-team iteration, as you all know, oftentimes we would be faced with a decision around a championship game contender that had just lost a game to knock them out of a two-team playoff field that ultimately went to four, right? Now it's 12. And every single time our teams were on the edge of those systems.

But we chose. We knowingly chose. We want ranked teams, winning teams. We want nationally relevant matchups. We know what that comes with. So that's just part of what Orlando is all about.

You get past the disappointment at some point, and these teams want to prove they deserve the ranking that they have and maybe should have had some more, so that's what comes next. But that doesn't change our decision-making. We want quality teams, winning teams, nationally relevant teams.

Yes, we want them to fill our hotel rooms, but we want people to turn on TV sets all over the globe, if we can. We want to stay where we are and continue to press the gas pedal down to get more.

Q. (Regarding BYU's call.)

STEVE HOGAN: They wanted to be here. They wanted to be here.

Q. (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: Well, to your point, they can drive down 75 and make a nice long weekend of it. They have a nice team. They have a tremendous program. If you look at how they played Georgia, really No. 3 in the country, I don't know anybody that wants to play Georgia right now when you look at the way that defense is going.

They were in that game to the very end. So, to think about that, their fans know where they are. The fact that they're



now starting to get picked at the top of the lineup, the ACC's lineup, which is the Pop-Tarts Bowl, which is Orlando, people know that.

The fact that they're here is another step in that journey. They want to get in the playoff picture as well in the future and they know this is one big step. The opportunity to play those guys, BYU, someone on the bubble, you know, this will get intense as we get closer.

Two class acts; two really good football teams; stars all over the field. We feel blessed.

Q. Are you hoping that (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: Say that again. Sorry. Owner's meeting?

Q. (Regarding the Jacksonville Jaguars' 2027 season.)

STEVE HOGAN: Yeah, you know, we've done our work. We've continued to amend that work with the league and the Jags over the many weeks and months.

So we're just waiting, as Mark Lamping said in the press, so I'm not speaking out of turn from the Jaguars. The general manager was very open about the fact that this is interesting to us, and Jacksonville and Gainesville.

But at the end of the day, the rest of the league is like, 'That's in '27. We have a lot of other more pressing issues to get through.'

So don't read anything into the delay as much as we are all impatient. We would love for it to be official. I've said this, this is the best home for the Jags. I think what we'll be able to do for this community, I cannot wait to celebrate this officially. Maybe that will come before the next owner's meeting.

Right now, I just our work is done. I think their work is done. We just need to let them work through the process in committee. And when they do, we'll all, I hope, have a number of games to celebrate.

Q. (No microphone.)

STEVE HOGAN: I do. I've said that consistently, right? I'm optimistic. I know. I believe Orlando is the best option. Now, you have EDC, a whole host of events in November on the calendar that put pressure on our building in terms of its availability.

Do I know that if we are successful and that's formally announced that we get everything that they don't play in Europe? I don't know, right? Maybe there is a game or two

that you have to navigate around the availability of the stadium.

But in the end, I'm confident that we're going to be successful. I can only speak for my confidence, only speak for Orlando and what it would do for us, for us as a community. I think we have an opportunity to show the world, show the country, that this city is very much NFL-ready.

To have games like that and show them how we fill the stadium, the excitement here, the corporate base, the new building that we would have, I think it really tees up that new building for the future.

I expect that to be a yes, but we'll stand by and see.

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