

# San Diego County Credit Union Holiday Bowl: Oregon vs North Carolina

Tuesday, December 27, 2022

San Diego, California, USA

Petco Park

## Coach Dan Lanning

Oregon Ducks

## Coach Mack Brown

North Carolina Tar Heels

### Coaches Press Conference



Good trip. I think we're excited to get out there on the field and compete and thrilled to be here. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Lanning. Coach Brown, head coach of North Carolina, the home team for tomorrow's game. Coach Brown.

MACK BROWN: Welcome, everybody. Sally and I have been blessed to be here now six times in the Holiday Bowl. It just ceases to amaze me how positive the Holiday Bowl group is. Mark Neville does a tremendous job as president. He has become a dear friend through the years.

The red coats, the volunteers, are unbelievable. They're all so proud of San Diego, and they show their city so well. It was 8 degrees I think when we got here in Chapel Hill, so our guys have enjoyed this weather for sure as they start looking at it.

As Dan mentioned, you get on the ship and you see that the Holiday Bowl honors the Marines and the Navy, and we start thinking about being away from our families for a bowl game on Christmas. These folks are trying to keep our country safe and secure year-round. So it does get your attention as you go through.

So our staff, our families have had a great time. Mesa College was a fantastic place for practice. They were an outstanding host, and we got a lot of good work done. As Dan said, you get tired of hitting each other, but teams that don't go to bowl games, don't get opportunities for 12, 15 practices to prepare you for spring practice.

So people talk about the importance of bowl games and where are they going with the 12-team playoff? This is important to both teams because we get to compete against somebody that's really good, and at the same time we get to know more about our young players, and we get to prepare for next year.

We're down coaches, which I don't like. I wish we would have a world where coaches had to stay through the bowl game. It would be more fair to the kids. We're all down players. Some opt out. Some are in the transfer portal.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate everybody being here for the San Diego Holiday Bowl coaches press conference. First up is Coach Lanning from Oregon.

DAN LANNING: Really honored and a true pleasure to be here right now. I know our team is anxious to compete. The Holiday Bowl has been absolutely a fabulous opportunity for our players to play another game in an awesome venue in a fabulous city.

It means a lot to us. We sign players from this area every year, and that's certainly been fun. But I think one of the most eye-opening experiences was for our team yesterday on the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln. Our appreciation now, I think everyone sees this from a different light and what our military does for us, for this great country.

Really excited to compete against a phenomenal team in North Carolina and a coach that I have a lot of admiration and respect for in Coach Brown. They have a great team.

This is going to be a fun competition for our guys, and I know they're ready to get out there and hit somebody else besides themselves. That's something that you do in bowl practice. You get to go against yourself a lot. It's probably time for us to go play somebody else.

Thrilled to get to go compete in this game. An opportunity to finish the season with 10 wins. It's going to be a good competition, great atmosphere. We're excited.

I know a lot of people struggled to get here today. My parents included. They're driving from Kansas City, so these flights have been jacked up. That's a 23-hour trip. James, if you are feeling sorry for yourself, look a little further (laughing).

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It's all over the place, but it's still a great game with tremendous kids that are incredible at what they do to prepare as they go.

So we're excited to play Oregon. Dan has done an amazing job. First-year coaches, it's really hard. He didn't recruit most of those guys. He goes out in his first game and has a tough game with Georgia and then pulls them all back together and regroups.

And that could have been a turning point for him in a bad way because he didn't know a lot of those kids, and he has done an amazing job of pulling it together and keeping it together and putting himself in a position to have a great team.

So what we look at this game is we're trying to take another step in our program. You've got Notre Dame, top ten team. You have Oregon, top 10 team. You have Clemson, top 10 team. For us to get where we want to go, we have to play the best to be the best, and that's why we're so excited about this challenge.

They're really good. They have great speed. They're very well-coached. They're a team that is mentioned in the College Football Playoffs every year, and there's two of the best quarterbacks in college football that are both coming back next year. I think both of them have accounted for 42 touchdowns this year.

So should be a great game. Should be a lot of fun. I really admire, as I said, what Dan has been able to do with his team. I don't remember my first year, but I didn't do as well as he did. I know that. People in Chapel Hill, they were (inaudible). It wasn't good, so they don't remember it very much. Again, happy to be here and excited about the game.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to open it to questions.

**Q. Coach Brown, as you said, this is your sixth time here. This has been known for its offensive shoot-outs, this bowl game. What is the offensive potential in this one with these two teams?**

MACK BROWN: I think it's unbelievable. Both defenses hear how great the offenses are going to be, so they're both mad coming into the game. They think nobody gives them a chance, so that means those defenses will fight hard.

Both of us lost our offensive coordinators, so that's unique. We'll have Lonnie Galloway calling our plays, who has never called a play in a ball game, so it will be interesting as we look at it, but both have really good skill, and both

can run.

So they run the ball much better than we do, which is something. I've used them to our staff and team all month is look how they're running the ball, man. We have to get back to running the ball better so we can protect our quarterback better.

In modern day college football when you have a quarterback, you have a chance, and these are two of the best quarterbacks in the country.

**Q. As you mentioned, nobody really talks about defenses in the Holiday Bowl. What role do they play? It's more a timely play here or there than kind of sustained defensive effort in a lot of these games.**

MACK BROWN: Holiday Bowl has been so blessed to have great quarterbacks through the years, and you go back and look at some of the games. And Major Applewhite's 27-point comeback in the fourth quarter here. Just so many times where quarterbacks have made play after play, and defenses have their hands full tomorrow with those two quarterbacks.

**Q. (Off microphone). Dan, let's go back a year (inaudible), national round games, and press conferences are virtual. Family couldn't be there for every game, in the Orange Bowl. How different is this setting? When people talk about the value of bowl games and the need for playoffs, their family is making that trip, and every other family that couldn't make it because of logistics is driving huge distances to be here and to be in a setting like this.**

DAN LANNING: As Coach said, bowl games are special for a lot of reasons, but certainly this is going to be the beginning for some young players' careers.

I remember not too long ago being at Georgia, and Aziz Ojulari's very first experience in a game was really in the Sugar Bowl, and then a couple of years later he is a draft pick, but really didn't play at all as a freshman in our time at Georgia and then grows into a guy that is able to make a tremendous impact.

On the same note, this is an exit for some guys that have been part of our program for so long in Alex Forsyth and Ryan Walk, some of those guys. So this could be a beginning, this can be an end for a lot of players.

It certainly means a lot to families, and especially when the game like this happens around the holidays, you hope you get to share it with more people than just yourself.

To be in a bowl game, to play against a team that's so impressive as North Carolina, and then to be able to share those moments with your family, I think are really special.

**Q. Bo said last week or a couple of weeks ago that he really just wanted to be able to play full speed again after the way he had been limited the last few games of the year. Obviously now that you know he is coming back, how important is it or how important can it be for him to have a game at full strength assuming -- do you consider him at full strength after the last month? What do you think he can take in this matchup?**

DAN LANNING: In a lot of ways this is the crescendo to a season, but also the beginning of next season. I think every one of our players -- when you play at the end of the season, you play long seasons like we play, there's a lot of guys that are banged up.

Having that opportunity to get fresh and be fresh is really the charge that we have as coaches of making sure our players are able to make it to this bowl game and be able to play at full strength, but also challenge ourselves. Coach mentioned it. We see this as 15 more -- it's like another spring practice, right? It's another window to really improve your team.

The challenge is finding guys like Bo that have great experience and making sure they make it to the game healthy and ready to play, but I certainly think he feels a lot better than he did at the end of the season. I expect to see him play some of his best football.

**Q. This is for Coach Brown. You know, in 2013 you played Oregon in your last game at Texas, and you lost. Does that give this a little more added luster to get a win this time?**

MACK BROWN: I was going to say yesterday. We were on the ship, and Dan and I and Bo were touring together. Bo was going up the steps in front of me, and I started to grab his ankle (laughing), but there were too many cameras. I didn't want to hurt him bad. It's just one game. But I've been there. God looked at me and said, No, don't do that.

So, no, we played Oregon here with Mike Bellotti. I think we got beat 41-40, when we were at Texas early. And then the last game I coached at Texas we were so unfortunate that Mariota was there, and he had been hurt for most of the year, but they all got really, really healthy to send me off right. I think it was 30-13. It was really bad.

It wasn't good, but that has nothing to do with tomorrow. In fact, I think the last time we were here, my son walked out

on the field. And he didn't touch the ball, but the official said he touched the ball, and they called it an egregious foul against Arizona State in 2007.

So that's the memory I have more than anything else because then I lied because I walked off the field, and somebody said, Who was that kid that touched the ball?

I said, I have no idea (laughing), and it was my son.

Then he said after half-time, Can I go back out there? I think he was 18, 19, something.

I said, No, keep your mouth shut and stay in here and watch it on TV.

Then I looked up after the game, and he is doing an interview about touching the ball (laughing). Those are the memories that I have.

**Q. Great stories there. You mentioned Lonnie calling plays. There's some shuffling in the coaching staff. What do you expect realistically out of your offense for tomorrow night? What do you think you can count on or hope for?**

MACK BROWN: You know, we've got a GA coaching offensive line. What an opportunity for those young guys. I mean, what an opportunity for Lonnie. He has been what we call plays his whole life, so he will get to do that.

So my expectation would be just like Dan's that all we can ask our team to do is give us 100%. If you have played the best you can play, that's all I want. I want these kids -- there's really no pressure other than do the best you can do. And if the best we can do is not good enough to beat Oregon, then we'll get ready for spring practice.

But I don't want any excuse. Dan is down some coaches too. We're down some players. So truly we can all sit here and mouth about it, but if that's the case, then we wouldn't have bowl games.

I don't want us to do away with bowl games. If you think about the 12 teams that will be in the playoffs, that leaves 100-plus teams that didn't get there. So what's their reward at the end of the year?

When you see the families at Oregon and then the families that don't get to take trips or don't make much money and they're out here enjoying the bowl week, the bowl experience, that's reward for programs that people don't get.

If you are at home now, and most of them are at home

watching, you don't get to practice, you don't get the opportunities. But most of the guys on our team have never been to California. This is a wonderful experience for them.

Now, you have to play well, and Oregon is really good, but all we can do is ask our guys to play well.

**Q. If both coaches can answer one question. For you, Dan, what do you see from Drake? What qualities do you see that have made him have this successful year? And, Mack, if you can answer the same thing about Bo?**

DAN LANNING: There's no secret that the offense runs through Drake, and he is one of the best quarterbacks in college football. I don't know if he gets enough credit with his ability to run with the ball.

He does a great job. You know, section leading rusher. He extends plays. He is able to see the ball down the field and push the ball down the field. But his accuracy, his poise in the pocket and in duress is really, really impressive. Just his ability to play a four-quarter game.

You can see the leadership really runs through him. Similar to our quarterback. Like Coach said, if you have a quarterback, you have a chance, and they have a quarterback. He is elite.

MACK BROWN: I would say the same thing. We watched Bo for years. We saw him at Auburn, and I saw him make some unbelievable comebacks in the SEC.

Then to see him transfer, and his dad is a coach, and he gets it. He is raised a lot like Drake in a coaching family, and Mark coached Drake for years in seven-on-seven and him bringing up.

They're both tall. They can both see. They can run. They can make plays with their feet. You can't sack him. He runs so much better than people even think.

The other thing that they're both so competitive. You think about modern day football. Bo is playing in the game, which a lot of quarterbacks would not be. He also is deciding to come back when he was the top draft pick, so he loves ball. He loves Oregon. He loves what they're doing, and that's the same with Drake.

**Q. You mentioned Aziz and how it was a springboard for the rest of his career. I'm wondering about players in the portal. If there are any young players you think you can identify some of those players on your current team that have an opportunity tomorrow that could**

**springboard them forward?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah, I think we wait to watch the game and you guys see what you see, right? But certainly there's going to be a lot of young guys out there for us. For both teams, like Coach said.

You know, there can be negative connotations about who is in and who is out of these games, but I would rather see the positive side. And that's the side of some young guys are going to get opportunities that all year have been sitting there waiting for their chance, and you hope that they've done everything they can to prepare themselves for that moment.

We're going to have a lot of young guys out there on the field for us, just like North Carolina will. We'll see what they do with their moment.

**Q. Mack, what does it say about Drake Maye's character that he is coming back given the opportunities he had to potentially leave?**

MACK BROWN: Drake, he loves the University of North Carolina. His family is a legacy. His dad was a graduate assistant for me. I'm just proud of who he is. The fact that he committed to somebody else early and then flipped back to us.

A lot of these guys, like Drake, he is going to have a great life after football because he is a hero in Charlotte. So many people at the university look up to him, and we have to look at what's best for these guys long-term.

Drake is so excited about our new coaches coming in. They won't be coaching in the game, but they're here. It's so good now, especially with the transfer portal that they get to know the coaches before they start in January.

But he is a special young guy that loves his school. It's cool when somebody can find the right fit. I noticed today, Dan, I think there's seven starting quarterbacks in the ACC, I read a few minutes ago, were transferred. Seven.

So it's hard to find that guy. It's hard to find the fit. And we both have that, and we're really, really lucky. We couldn't be happier than to have Drake at North Carolina.

**Q. Dan, can you just speak about five or six guys last year this time that said they wanted to come back for a sixth year and use that COVID year. They wanted to leave the program in a good spot, Alex, Ryan, Cam, Bennett. Can you speak on the impact they've had this season and where the program is because of that decision?**

DAN LANNING: Yeah, your first-year coaches obviously it's such a fun experience. My experience sitting here would have been so different without those guys. They put trust.

They didn't stick around because of me. They stuck around because they love Oregon, right? They love football, and they love their teammates. But this season wouldn't have been the same without those guys on our team. It wouldn't have been remotely close.

You talk about going into the game, and you want to play with great effort. You have pride in the performance for your university. But for me I want to go coach this game with those guys. Those guys that gave us one last shot, one more time.

I'm grateful that the rules played out the way those guys could have an opportunity to play because I think it was a great experience for them. And every one of those guys gets their opportunity to see the next level and beyond football just because they were able to be associated with our program one more year.

Grateful for them. I want to see our team go out there and play with great effort for those people.

**Q. Coach Brown, what have you noticed about those young guys and their response of how the season ended? This is the next generation of Carolina football? What's it been like watching them practice and prepare, and how have they responded?**

MACK BROWN: You know, you don't win nine games unless your team responds, and they play hard. What happens is you look at our wins. All except for two came down to the last drive. Our losses, two of the three came down to last drive, so it's who we are.

Notre Dame was better than we were. We did not play well defensively in that game. Then NC State, Georgia Tech came down to a holding call, a dropped pass in the end zone, and missed field goal. That's just what it is.

We have to play really well to have a chance against these guys because Clemson, we turned it over three times, and (inaudible). We can't do that. We're not at that point yet.

I think the most important thing for our program is four years ago we won two games, and this the fourth straight bowl game. We won the Coastal. We're making progress. We're taking steps.

We haven't taken a step to beat the Clemson. We haven't

taken a step to beat a Notre Dame. We've lost to Notre Dame three years in a row. We lost to Clemson twice, and Oregon is in that group. That's out there for us. It's a huge hill to climb, but a fun challenge.

I didn't want us to go play an average team. I wanted us to play somebody that's really good so it mattered, and I know our guys will give it their best shot.

**Q. I've got a question for both coaches. Coach Lanning, first of all, what was the biggest adjustment for you going from defensive coordinator to being a head coach?**

DAN LANNING: I was talking to Coach Brown about this yesterday. You know, all of a sudden every problem becomes your problem, right? Before it was just the defensive problems were my problem. I didn't really have to worry about the offensive problem or special teams. That's certainly been a transition where you're part of every decision that's made within a program.

I've been fortunate enough, I hired outstanding coaches. We have phenomenal players, and we're able to let them do their job, and they do a great job. But it lets me kind of oversee, and some of the best coaches that I have ever been around they do a great job of facilitating that but letting their coaches coach and players play. That's been my goal sitting in this seat here and certainly feel like I've been able to do that.

But you don't get to do near as much ball as you think you do. You do a lot of other things besides football, and that's part of the job. I've certainly embrace it, but that's been a little bit of a change.

**Q. Coach Brown, you were out of football for a few years. You were running around doing the ESPN gig. A lot of times when you are in the pressure cooker, you are so focused. Having the opportunity to travel around, do games, talk to other coaches, you know, how other programs are doing it, how did that make you a better coach when you came back to North Carolina?**

MACK BROWN: First, I told Dan yesterday, I've been doing this 34 years, and I'm 71. So he is going to look like me (laughing), because he is in great shape, and he is young, and he is energetic. He didn't like that.

I enjoyed my five years in your all's seat. I think if every coach could go to the media for five years and see how hard your jobs are and see why -- a lot of coaches think you're sitting around trying to beat them up, you're trying to find something. Really not. You're trying to get someone

to read your stuff. Trying to get somebody to look at your stuff, and it was healthy for me to see that for five years.

I felt like that when you are in a box for 30 years like I was and we were winning enough that you don't really look outside your box enough. And you keep doing the same stuff, and it's working, and you keep the same staff because you're winning, and you don't have an influx of new ideas.

So it was really healthy for me to go watch other people practice, to call games on Friday night, to watch 24 games on Saturday to see who the young coaches were because if you're not careful, when you, again, get in your box, you don't see new coaches.

You don't see who the young talents is out there. It was a real fun five years for me to up away.

**Q. It's such a huge undertaking to hold a football game at a baseball stadium, and it was supposed to happen last year. It was canceled at the very last minute. San Diegans were so disappointed and heartbroken when that happened, and I'm sure North Carolina team was also heartbroken when that happened. For it to happen finally this year, everyone is doubly as excited. How excited and how meaningful is it this year for it to happen for your team?**

MACK BROWN: Yes, I didn't realize that the game had not been played the last two years because of COVID, obviously, and then last year the disappointment right at the end.

We're all excited. It's a fun matchup. We like each other. The players were on the ship yesterday. Some teams I've been in bowl games with you couldn't have players on the ship at the same time. They would fight (laughing).

And both teams have nice young people that are excited to be here. I think we'll see a great game. Our guys -- I've never walked to the stadium, so we'll do that this afternoon. Our players have never been in the stadium. It will be fun for them to see it.

**Q. This is a question for Coach Lanning. You talked about being able to bring back guys. Can you tell me a little bit about how you have instilled a culture where guys want to return to your program?**

DAN LANNING: I think today in college football more important than ever before I think there's a lot of other things that overshadow what really matters.

The number one thing that matters to me as a coach is

relationships. If you have genuine relationships with your players, I think that goes a long way, and we've got some phenomenal young men on our team. Ultimately to build a great program, you want to be able to have great relationships.

Somewhere we can all grow as coaches. In the day it didn't used to matter. It matters. It matters a lot. If you can get a guy to run through the wall, that is one thing. But if you can get a guy that's prideful to go out there and to work every single day and play hard for his teammates, as coaches, I think that's that speaks volumes. So we feel like the key to that is relationships.

MACK BROWN: Can I say, too, for both of us when you look at college football players, it's incredible how hard they work. They work year-round like Olympic athletes. They go to class. They've got tremendous scrutiny.

Now they've got pressure every minute of every day to win, to play. We've got 120 on our team, and 11 get to play at a time. So there's so many kids on that team that work hard that don't get to play.

So when Dan looks at our team, he admires the kids. When I look at his team, I like to speak to them and congratulate them because they're amazing kids. They're not good kids. They're amazing kids, and they don't get the credit for how hard they work and all the joy that they give all of us to watch in college football.

**Q. Mack, it's been a long season for you guys. You all talked since July about the feeling after the Mayo Bowl game last year losing to South Carolina and what the locker room was like. It seems like that scene was sort of a really motivating factor for you guys, a driving force just coming into this year? Can you go back to what the mood was like in that locker room down in Charlotte last year this time, and just I remember you saying you were embarrassed, and it just felt awful.**

MACK BROWN: As a football coach, you are embarrassed if your team doesn't play well. And I mean by that play as hard as they can. We're going to mess up some stuff. Kids are going to mess up some stuff. But if they give us 100% effort, I'm good. I'm good. That's all we can do.

Last year we didn't do that. Not everybody tried hard during the game. I can't stand kids loafing. I can't stand kids not caring, and there was some of that. That's all my responsibility.

I told the guys this week before we started out here, I said, If you are not going to give us 100% during the game, do



us a favor, do the fans a favor, do the Holiday Bowl a favor.  
Stay home. Stay home.

I told the ones yesterday, If you are carrying water to the starters, whatever you are doing on that sideline, if you are not going to do it 100%, don't go. Sit in the stands because it's not fair. It's not fair to your teammates. It's not fair to your coaches. It's not fair to your family. It's not fair to your fan base. It's not fair to Oregon to go out there and stand around.

It's sure not fair to the Holiday Bowl. You all have treated us great. You deserve a show. That's what we're here. We're in the education business during the week. We're in show business on the weekends. That's it.

So we didn't treat the Mayo Bowl fair last year. I've been doing this a long time, and that's one of the worst feelings I've ever had in my life walking off that field thinking, you know what, we didn't show up.

You can't say your team didn't show up because some did. Some of those guys play their tail off every game, but as a team we didn't show up. It made me want to throw up.

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