

# Capital One Orange Bowl: Texas A&M vs North Carolina

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

## Coach Mack Brown Coach Jimbo Fisher Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to today's videoconference for the 87th Capital One Orange Bowl. On the call we're going to have head coach Mack Brown of No. 15 North Carolina. No. 5 Texas A&M's Jimbo Fisher will join us at approximately 4:55 p.m. eastern.

Before we get started, media are reminded to apply for credentials by logging on to OrangeBowl.org and selecting credential applications from the media dropdown tab. Credentials are limited this year due to capacity restrictions. Credentials must be submitted regardless of whether an outlet is planning to cover the game in person or virtually, and the deadline to apply for credentials is Wednesday, December 23rd.

A recording of today's videoconference will be available on OrangeBowl.org shortly after the press conference. We'll be sending out links as soon as we're doing with Coach Brown and Coach Fisher. Quotes are going to be available on the website, as well, under the media section tab.

This year's game will be played on Saturday, January 2nd at Hard Rock Stadium and televised by ESPN at 8:00 p.m. eastern.

North Carolina comes in with an 8-3 overall record and an 7-3 ACC record. This is their first appearance in the Capital One Orange Bowl, although Coach Mack Brown was here in 1985 as the offensive coordinator for Barry Switzer's Oklahoma Sooners. I will now turn it over to Coach Mack Brown for brief remarks before we open it up for questions. Coach, go ahead.

MACK BROWN: Thank you very much. I was also there with LSU when we played Nebraska as an assistant coach for Jerry Stovall, so I've been involved with the Orange Bowl twice, and obviously one of the great experiences of my life, and now can't wait to come back as a head coach and let our guys experience the same thing.



It's such an honor to be chosen. You always want to have a good match-up when you're in a bowl game and we got one of the best in the country. It's feasible that A&M could have been chosen in the top 4 today because they've sure earned that right and were in a long hard discussion last night and this morning I'm sure, but our guys are very excited to be where we were two years ago to now, getting to play in a January 2 bowl in Miami, in the Orange Bowl, is really exciting for us.

A&M has been in this neighborhood before. This is new for us. So we're not familiar with this, but we're learning each week something new. We played Notre Dame down to the end and didn't do well offensively the second half, and then we learned enough from that that we were able to beat Miami No. 10, so this will be another great challenge for us to finish our season.

**Q. Two questions if I might. One, I think we were all watching television when they showed Notre Dame is No. 4 and that pretty much -- we sort of knew what the Orange Bowl match-up was going to be at that point. Were you surprised to see Texas A&M not get in, and then as the follow-up, coming back to Miami after you guys played so well here, what kind of a feather in the hat can that be for a really good season for you?**

MACK BROWN: I spent five years on the TV set so I was involved in these shows for five years, and I can honestly say everybody has different opinions of who should be in, and I would like to see us expand the playoff system because there's no doubt that A&M deserved to be in, and then you start looking at Cincinnati and that argument, and then you start looking at Florida and Georgia and Oklahoma, and you start looking at the great teams that are out there, and should we have a six-team playoff, should we have an eight-team playoff, some people think maybe 12 and cut down the regular season.

I do think we should do anything we can possibly do to keep all of the fans involved in the excitement of college football at the end, and I think the playoffs have kind of hurt some of the -- especially the smaller bowls, and we're seeing more guys that are opting out and doing things like that.

Does A&M deserve to be in? Absolutely. If there were five

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or six teams they would be in, but who do you take out?

I sat there all the time and tried to make those decisions, and you'll sit there and think you know what you're talking about and then somebody will give another side of it and say, yeah, that's true. But the committee does a great job of figuring it all out, and we're just lucky to be in the Orange Bowl playing a great opponent with Jimbo.

As far as coming back to Miami, we wouldn't be in this game unless we had beaten Miami, and Miami was the No. 10 team in the country. The guys will enjoy preparation for the game. They've already been there. They know the stadium and we'll have tremendous respect for the opponent, so it'll be fun for us.

**Q. When you took this job two years ago, you talked about there being unfinished business for you. Where does this accomplishment, reaching the Orange Bowl, fall in that order of items you had on your list?**

MACK BROWN: I had some texts from friends today that said last time you were here at the end of your second year you were 2-20, so you must have learned something. You're making progress here.

But really from two wins three years ago to an Orange Bowl bid, that's tremendous strides for our program, and I'm proud of these guys. I'm proud for our fans. We haven't been in this neighborhood. We haven't been to major bowl games.

So this is just a step forward for us, and to do this now you've got to play a great team that's one of the best in the country, and I've told our guys if you want to live in the neighborhood of the best in the country then you've got to beat the best in the country, so it'll be a real fun challenge for us.

For the second year for us to be able to play in this ballgame is really significant. These kids have been incredible, especially in a year of COVID. They've been able to do what's right. They've been able to play 11 games. We've had some tough games that they came back afterwards and picked themselves up, and we continue to get better, and we're a really, really young team, so this should really help us, playing Notre Dame and Miami and A&M at the end here, playing three of the best opponents in the country, three top-10 opponents as we get ready to start next year.

**Q. I know A&M is a program that you have some familiarity with in your past. When you think about A&M as a program and what are some of the things that stand out to you?**

MACK BROWN: Texas A&M is one of the best programs in the country, and I always love going to play them at College Station. Those fans are unbelievable. The place is as loud as anyplace I've ever been to coach against. The loyalty of those fans is just amazing to me. They're always good, and Jimbo won a National Championship at LSU as an assistant, then he wins a National Championship at Florida State, and he's really got A&M playing at a very high level.

This will be a tremendous challenge for us but one that we're looking forward to because it just gives us another opportunity to see how far we need to go to get where they are.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, for the seniors that were a part of kind of this rebuild, what does it mean for you to see these guys, they're going to be graduating or leaving, they get an opportunity to play on one of the biggest stages nationally that they've had in a long time? And also parlay that into recruiting; you're hauling in some great recruiting classes. What does this do for North Carolina as a program and for those seniors?**

MACK BROWN: First, those seniors could have left when I got here. They decided to stay. They fought through a year last year, and we had to win our last game last year to get to a bowl game, and then they go to the Military Bowl and they win, and then coming back this year we didn't know, our expectations were probably better than our experiences at that time, and we got rated fifth in the country before everybody was playing, so that was a little facetious, but it was what it was, and we've been very honest with them.

And then we are a team that just keeps getting better. We've gotten better and better each week. They haven't quit. They've played hard each week. When they've been behind, they've come back. All of that is talking about senior leadership and the way that those guys have stepped up and made sure.

In fact, early this summer when we had our spike in COVID, the older guys got all the younger ones together and I didn't even know it and they said, We want to play. If you want to play, then clean it up and don't go out, don't go to parties and don't go in groups. If you don't want to play, that's fine, but leave, and we haven't had problems since. So I think that, again, bodes well for that leadership.

As far as our program, recruiting is going really, really well. This only shows people that this North Carolina program at this time is different. We have a chance to accomplish things because the league is different than when I was

here before. It was the BCS. It was Florida State and the rest of us. And at one time it was Clemson and the rest of us.

But now we've got Clemson who's been the dominant program in this league. We've got Notre Dame who came in for this year and dominated. But everybody understands there is a path now to get to the College Football Playoff, where before there wasn't.

We've got one of the best teams in the country in front of us in Clemson, but all of us in this league know that we've got to really pick our game up before we can have a chance to beat a Clemson, and to do that you've got to learn to play with the Notre Dames, the Miamis last weekend and then the Texas A&Ms in this game.

I'm really excited not only that we got here, the publicity that it will give us for recruiting, but also the challenge of playing such a great team because our guys need to see what it's like to be the fifth team in the country, and we'll get that experience here in a couple weeks.

**Q. Your '96 and '97 teams, the last two you had your first time at Carolina, thought they probably should have been in a game like this, and 23 years later and your second year in stint two, you've got the team in a game like this. Are you allowing yourself to have any personal gratification over being able to deliver this this quickly? And there was something mentioned about unfinished business; kind of connecting back to your last couple years at Carolina and actually getting there now?**

MACK BROWN: I haven't yet. Today has been a whirlwind, and I wanted the -- number one, we had to make sure we were in the Orange Bowl, then number two you've got to make sure who you're playing. I actually stopped our team meeting in the middle and watched the ESPN television report of the announcement because I wanted the kids to see it and feel it and understand the incredible accomplishments that they've had over two years here from where we were to where we are.

I do remember being disappointed our last year here when we were 10-1, I think, and fourth in the country and we didn't have a chance to go to what would be considered a major bowl at that time, so this is a huge accomplishment for our program and for our team, and now we've got to play well because we don't -- we want this to be who we are. We want this to be every year and not something that's so unique for us.

As far as me personally, I've been to a lot of the great bowls. Our sports information director at Texas texted me

this morning and said, You've never been here, another box that you can check off. And I thought, no, I've been here twice as an assistant but never taking a team. So this will be a wonderful experience for our kids.

There will never be a team that will be more excited about coming to the bowl game than ours.

**Q. Just talk about you're a Florida State graduate, Jimbo won a title at Florida State, he goes to A&M, which was a rival of yours for a long time. How often have you crossed paths with him over the years?**

MACK BROWN: I haven't crossed paths with Jimbo that much. I really did during my TV days because Florida State played a lot of Friday night games when I was calling Friday night games. I actually got to spend some real quality time with Jimbo talking about game plans and his program on Thursday night before those Friday night games and got to call maybe three of his games in three years. I think Boston College maybe two of those three. But it was a lot of fun to be able to visit with him. He's tough. He's smart. They're a very physical team. It'll be a great learning experience for us to play a team that's as physical.

They run the football. They're great with play action. He knows what he's doing offensively. Mike Elko is someone that's known in these parts from the Wake Forest days to the Notre Dame days. This will be one of the best -- one of the more well-coached teams in the country. I really admire and respect what Jimbo has done everywhere he's been.

**Q. You know that program well and the facilities they have and the emphasis they put on winning, et cetera, et cetera. When he took the job, what were your expectations of how soon he might have a season like this even though it has been shortened a little bit?**

MACK BROWN: I think that Jimbo has gotten it to this point much quicker than I thought he would. To be in that division in the SEC and to be able to compete like he has and put his team in a position that arguably should be in the Final Four today, and half of the people that are arguing would say that they should be in there, I think it's amazing what he's been able to accomplish in such a short time.

**Q. Talk about you guys going to the Orange Bowl; what does it mean for your program knowing that you came back after your first time around, now you guys are going to the Orange Bowl?**

MACK BROWN: What you want is verification to your

players and your staff that what you're doing is working, and they're reaping a reward at the end of the second year that most people don't get a chance to do. So just the simple fact that we've been chosen and that people are giving our program that much credit at this stage really reinforces what we're trying to do moving forward.

**Q. I just want to ask you, is there any specific memories, any incidents, games, events from the series with A&M when you were coach at Texas that really stands out to you?**

MACK BROWN: Absolutely, and it's the bonfire event, the 10 days there. I remember when we lost 12 young people that were working on the bonfire, and the bonfire fell in on them. I remember driving to work on a Thursday 10 days or a week before the ballgame. It was the open date before the A&M game on Thanksgiving, and hearing on the radio that 12 young students at A&M had lost their lives working on a traditional bonfire.

As a parent, it just took me back, and I stopped and I really started crying. I heard on the radio that parents call this number to check on your kids, and then they said, the lines are just overloaded, so you're going to have to drive to College Station, and I thought, you're going to have to drive to see if your kids are alive, and then I called Sally and said, What do we do, and she said, All we can do is pray for the families that have lost their children; but there's some others hurt; let's start a blood drive. So we actually started a blood drive that afternoon and there were Houston and Texas Tech and TCU fans and Baylor fans and A&M fans, and R.C. Slocum to this day is a dear friend of mine and we all tried to pull together and said should we have a game or not, and then we canceled our pep rally and had a memorial with a lot of A&M students.

And then it was an unbelievable day at the game because I thought we probably shouldn't play the game and I told R.C. whatever you all want we'll do, and then not only did we play the game but I think we were ahead 16-0 at halftime, they came back and beat us 21-16 right at the end and I thought that's one of the few times in my life that it was probably a really good healing experience for A&M, so I'm not sure that it wasn't best for them to have won that game.

But that's a memory that every year at Thanksgiving I think about those families and those kids that were lost.

THE MODERATOR: Now we're going to be joined by the head coach of the fifth ranked Texas A&M Aggies, Jimbo Fisher. The Aggies come in with an 8-1 overall record and SEC record. This is their second appearance in the Capital One Orange Bowl. Their first appearance was 77

years ago in 1944. This is Coach Fisher's third appearance in the Capital One Orange Bowl as a head coach, winning in both 2013 and 2016 at the helm of Florida State.

I'll now turn it over to Coach Fisher for brief remarks before we open it up for questions.

JIMBO FISHER: Hello, everyone. Great to be with you. Very excited to be in the Orange Bowl. I can say this is one of the most prestigious and historic games in the history of bowl games. I always remember as a child on the last day of New Year's Eve -- I mean on New Year's Day at 8:00 when the Orange Bowl, having that last game when you watched them all all day and you finished with the Orange Bowl and had the great halftime shows and the great Oklahoma teams, the great Nebraska teams that used to play in it all the time.

Florida State, actually the first saw Florida State when they played Oklahoma. Loved them. The great Miami game with all those games and the history, and to be a part of it again, being able to be blessed to be able to do it twice, it's one of the most well-ran, classy games that you can be a part of.

Very excited for A&M to be back. 77 years ago. I'll have to ask my mom, she's 84, so I'll have to ask her if she remembers that and see if that's okay. I don't quite remember that. I'm getting up there, but I'm not that old yet.

But great to be back. Great to get A&M brand across the country and be in any other games and be in the Orange Bowl in the classic and be a part of that great history and tradition is a great honor, and we're very happy and excited to be in the game and play a great opponent in North Carolina.

Like I say, having Mack Brown, who I think is one of the great coaches in college football and probably will end up being a Hall of Fame coach and won National Championships, son 250, 260 games, whatever many he's won, great guy, great opponent.

He's done a tremendous job with North Carolina. To get them in the Orange Bowl and how quick he was there and where that program was when he took over, it's an amazing accomplishment. Again, but it doesn't surprise you. Everywhere Mack goes, he wins. That's going to be a very well-coached football team who's playing great football and had a great win down there against Miami just a few weeks ago to put them in it, and we're going to have our hands full.



We need to play a great game, but we're excited and blessed to be there, and looking forward to it.

Questions?

**Q. What is the level of frustration today that you're feeling?**

JIMBO FISHER: There's no frustration. We're excited to be going to the Orange Bowl. We're in a New Year's Six game against a great opponent, and we're very happy to be there and there's no frustration at all.

**Q. Mack said that he thought you guys belonged in the playoff. How appreciative were you to hear him share that sentiment?**

JIMBO FISHER: Well, it's from somebody who knows football as well as Mack does and one of the great coaches. But that's this world we live in. You get in, you get out, and you've got to move on. You go to the future and listen, we get an opportunity to play in the Orange Bowl, like I said, one of the great games of -- bowl games in the history of this game and having the tradition to be another part of that game and play a great opponent like North Carolina, and having Mack as one of the great coaches in college football, I think it's a great match-up for us and a great opportunity for us to continue to grow and build our brand and build our program to where we want it to go.

**Q. I know you've moved on, but I know some of your players expressed and your staff even expressed disappointment with coming in fifth in the CFP. I was curious your thoughts about that, how that played out the last 24 hours.**

JIMBO FISHER: Well, no, it wasn't. It's like having a bad play. You get disappointed for a minute and then you play the next play. You move on. That's life. We've had a great opportunity. We've had a great year. We've done great things, and we put ourselves in a position to be in it, but we weren't, so now it's time to move on.

You wanted to be in it, but at the same time we're in the Orange Bowl, man. We can progress, keep going, doing what we're doing. Everybody does that, but our players are moving on. They were excited when they announced that we were able to play in the Orange Bowl. They were very excited, knowing A&M hadn't been there. I couldn't tell them how many years. Now I know it's 77. I know it was pre-World War II or somewhere in that range right in there. So it was pretty good.

**Q. I'm curious if you had any power or any say, what**

**would you change, if anything, about the selection process in the College Football Playoff?**

JIMBO FISHER: Oh, I mean, listen, you've got great people who do a great job. You can complain about every selection that's made. It's like, who complains about every call I make. Well, we should have ran the ball, we should have thrown the ball, we should have done this, we should have done that. That's life. I have no -- those people do a great job. They spend all year doing it. They gather the information. They do one heck of a job, and they came to the conclusion and did it. I wouldn't change anything.

**Q. Mack had just talked about expanding the playoffs to six teams, to eight teams. What are your thoughts on that, and this year you've seen a lot of other sports kind of with all the uncertainty going on adding teams to the playoffs for fan engagement. Would that have been something you think would have been a smart decision for college football?**

JIMBO FISHER: You know, I've said this, and I said it the other day and it's not because we're fifth right now, but I think the playoff does need to get expanded because you're not encompassing all the conferences. You're not encompassing all the things.

And listen, you can't -- it's hard to judge in terms of schedule. You're not crossing over who you're playing and what you're playing, getting a Power Five team in there to a Power Five team. There's so many things. The only way you're going to find out is expand the playoffs. I'm a traditionalist, and I never thought I would ever say that. I really didn't because I love the bowl games, the history. I think it took away from the nostalgia of our game and what the Orange Bowl means, what the Sugar Bowl means, what the Fiesta Bowl means, what the Cotton Bowl means, what the Peach Bowl means, what the old Blue Bonnet -- whatever they are. All those games. I'm a true traditionalist and that, but I just think with today's times and the changes we've made, I never thought it would come out of my mouth like this, but we do, and I think it matters to kids, matters to people, because there's no easy way to judge this thing and get it fair.

It may not always be, but I think if you expand it more and include the bowl games in it, I think you have to going into the future and I truly believe it's got to happen.

**Q. If you look at the history of college football back to '98 the top two teams in the BCS, now the last six playoff years, the one team that was fifth or third that got left out, they went one of two ways; they were flat, their heads were somewhere else, they were disappointed or they were extremely motivated and**

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**took it out on the other team. How do you keep your team in the latter as opposed to the former there?**

JIMBO FISHER: You know, I hope we're neither. I don't hope we're motivated, I don't hope we're mad. I hope we're doing our job as a football team and what we want to do and accomplish as a program because that's what we do at A&M. It's to play great football when the next game steps up, whatever the circumstances, whatever the consequences.

You always create -- you can create chip on your shoulder, but if those are the real reasons you have to motivate yourself to play, your program is not where it needs to be. I believe that. I think it's the next game, it's the next play, it's the next situation, whatever it may be. You handle it and move on because that's what you do as a human being and you move on in life.

Hopefully we're neither one. I hope we're just ready to play a very good North Carolina football team who's a very well-coached team that I have a lot of respect for and that we do our job and play our best game.

**Q. Just curious, with what a lot of your players said on social media, they felt like A&M's brand, A&M's name is what held them out on Notre Dame, how do you address that and have those conversations with your players to give them a different perspective on the program after what happened?**

JIMBO FISHER: I don't. If that's what they say on social media, that's their belief. You want your brand to be better? Play better, do what you handle, handle your business. I don't. I don't get into all those things. I don't believe in all those things.

We're going to play our game, do what we do and handle our business. We have a great brand. A&M is a tremendous brand, and we're building it each and every day, and we'll have consistency in the things we do and how we play, and that's what you can handle. Control what you can control and move on.

I really don't. I don't know what they said on social media because I don't have it.

**Q. And then also Coach Brown said that you had some time to be able to bond when he was doing the TV analyst stuff. What was some of that relationship building between the two of you?**

JIMBO FISHER: It was actually really fun because you've got an ex-coach who really understood what you're going through and what goes on. No offense to anybody in the

media, but understanding you can have some deep conversations and really understand what you were doing and where your team was and why you're doing things.

I thought he did a great job as an analyst. Mack is very intelligent guy. Always has been successful in everything he's done. It was very fun being around him. I enjoyed Mack. Like I say, I still consider him a friend. Actually we haven't been around a lot, but on occasion we'll text each other or send a message or something like that.

I think he does an outstanding job, but it was very fun to be around Mack. He was very bright, and like I say, got to have some deep conversations about ball, and you don't always get to go into that detail. No offense to a lot of announcers, but he's an ex-ball coach so you had some great conversations to go there.

**Q. Did you even surprise yourself at all, third year here, did you think before this year started you would be in this situation, a fifth-ranked team and playing in the Orange Bowl?**

JIMBO FISHER: I thought we had an opportunity to. It was just a matter of how quick we could focus and stay attention to detail and eliminate clutter and play our game. We expect to be good every time we play, and hopefully it could have even been sooner than that, but we have things in position and our guys have done a great job. They've bought in, and our assistant coaches have done a tremendous job, our support staff, everybody here at A&M. The administration has given us things we need to do to be successful, and our players have one heck of a job. This is a tremendous football team with great leadership who has done a great job with our young players, old players and sending the message and selling the message of what we do, especially during this year with so much turmoil going through and so much change in our life and so much up and down. It's remarkable what they've done, but it doesn't surprise me because -- listen, people are amazing when they want to be. When there's an urgency to do things, it's amazing what people can do. We've had the ability and they're doing it now.

**Q. Just talk about going back to the Orange Bowl. You actually are playing against North Carolina. You recruited Sam Howell to come to Florida State. What type of quarterback was he when you recruited him before you went off to College Station?**

JIMBO FISHER: We started and they picked it up. I didn't get into a lot of depth with Sam, but listen, I had tremendous -- he was one heck of a player. Guy can throw it, he can run, and it's amazing the amount of success he's had in two years. To be able to jump in like he did last

year as a freshman, I think he threw, what 35, 36 touchdowns last year. Man, I don't care, that's hard to do as a senior. Most guys can't do that.

He is a tremendous football, tremendous leader but he's not the only guy they got, too. They ran for 500-some yards last game. The defense, what Mack has done there has been amazing. They throw it around. Coordinator does a great job. I know all those guys. So I mean, Sam is -- but he's the key to the drill and makes him go, and he's made a lot of big plays and it's going to be a heck of a challenge to stop him, or try to at least contain. You're never going to stop him.

**Q. You brought up yesterday and today the two teams in Notre Dame and Ohio State, obviously six games played, Notre Dame got beat 34-10. Which one of those would you have left out for you to go to four?**

JIMBO FISHER: I have no idea, to break it all down. I just felt strong about our players and what we did. Listen, they made good choices. Those teams are very deserving. Nothing against that. I thought we were deserving. That's what happens when you've got a lot of teams are deserving and only so many spots. You have to make a choice. The committee made a choice; that's their choice and we'll move on. I have no idea which one you take out or which one you put in or if you put us in. I just felt strongly about our team and what we have done. I'm very proud of them and what they've accomplished, but I have no idea. I can't answer that.

**Q. Just curious with what you've gone through, being in that discussion as it's played out and being in a New Year's Six bowl, the Orange Bowl, what does this do for your program in year three and going forward?**

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think it shows the trajectory we're on and what we're trying to accomplish, that we are being relevant in the national conversations and where we're going. Our brand is becoming a national brand and things we do, which I think you have to do in today's game. We've got a great state here in Texas that we want to recruit the heck out of, but we also got to brand ourselves nationally across the board, and I think it sends a sign to players out there that, hey, A&M is on the rise, we're doing the things we need to do to have success and this is a tremendous program, and hopefully they'll want to come be a part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach Fisher. We appreciate it. We'll see you in South Florida in a couple weeks.

JIMBO FISHER: Thank you, gentlemen. Everybody had a

merry Christmas. Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: That concludes today's press conference.

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