

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

Friday, January 1, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Hard Rock Stadium

Mack Brown

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Happy new year. Welcome to today's video conference for the 87th Capital One Orange Bowl. On the call today we're going to have head Coach Mack Brown of No. 13 North Carolina, No. 5 Texas A&M's Jimbo Fisher will join us in about 20 minutes.

Good morning, coach.

MACK BROWN: Good morning. Thank you very much, and happy new year to everybody. I was talking to the players yesterday. We're glad to get 2020 behind us in so many ways. But for this team, it's been a blessing in a lot of ways, too. We've learned a lot. We've handled adversity really well or we wouldn't be here. The first time we've gone to a major bowl in 70 years, so these kids have really accomplished something.

We told them we're excited to be here. Now we want to play well and win the game. That's very important, against a great opponent. Our local reporters understand we've played against No. 2 Notre Dame, No. 10 Miami and now No. 5 A&M at the end of our season. This is great for us to see where we are as a program and where we need to be.

A&M and Notre Dame have been in this area before. They've stayed here a lot, and we haven't. It's important for us to start trying to do everything within our power and recognizing what it takes to be a top 10 team, and then you work to the playoffs and then you work to the National Championship game.

The Capital One Orange Bowl in our short time here has been wonderful. The fire department met us with a welcome yesterday. They had a tribute to our plane as we were pulling up. We had a 26-car escort coming to the hotel, so the kids liked that and it was fun. And then a great team dinner last night with both teams, even though it was on Zoom, and they had an entertainer that was really good. Kept their attention for like an hour.



It's been a fun time since we've got here. The hotel is gorgeous. We're right on the water. So the guys have had a good day and a half.

Understanding that the week is not going to be like a normal bowl game, the Orange Bowl is doing everything within their power to make these kids feel like it's bowl week and that they can get every advantage out of it that they possibly can.

With that, if you have any questions, we'll have a walk-through today, we'll have our meetings, we'll have a walk-through at a high school stadium. So this will be our normal Friday leading into a Saturday night game.

Q. You're dealing with four opt-outs on the roster this week; how have you kind of prepped the other guys this week to fill bigger roles?

MACK BROWN: Well, what we've done is, number one, we love and applaud the four guys because they played so well for us that we wouldn't be here without them. That's 4,000 yards' worth of offense and our leading tackler on defense and two captains. And this is new for me because I've never had a guy not playing in a ballgame.

What we've done is we've handled it like guys are injured, it's next man up, you've got to do the best you can do. We can one opt out a week ago tomorrow, so we've had three practices without him. So what you do, you take the other players you can, and like you would do on any week, try to figure out what you can do to be the best offense you can be with the players that are available and not talk about what you don't have.

Q. I want to ask you, do you consider this -- obviously getting to this game, this stage, it's obviously a perk for this team, of course. But in the bigger picture, is this the end of 2020 for you guys or is this the start of 2021 season in some respects?

MACK BROWN: We think this is the start of 2021, simply because we're a different team now than we were when we were here a few weeks ago to play Miami. We've said, let's honor our seniors, the guys that are playing. This is their last ballgame with us. It's the last time our team will be together tomorrow night. So let's play for the seniors,



let's honor them. But also some of the guys that will play tomorrow night haven't played very much, so they will step up next year and they will be part of the future.

Let's also take momentum from tomorrow night into the '22 recruiting class and into spring practice that we'll hopefully have this year unlike last year, and that's the way we're approaching it. We have not mentioned the guys that aren't playing have not been mentioned since the last press conference we had to the team. I mentioned it one time. I said, we're not mad at them. I'm disappointed that they won't get to play because they want to play, and circumstances keep them from playing, but we have moved forward.

Q. You mentioned the team not being in a bowl game of this stature in 70 years. The players haven't played on this type of stage. I'm curious, with the condensed bowl prep, is this actually a good thing, with the guys being able to work within kind of a typical structure of a week by week practice setup?

MACK BROWN: It probably is. I wish we had longer to have worked because of the guys that aren't playing because we're going to be a different team than we were when we were last down at Hard Rock Stadium.

But our game with Miami -- our game with Clemson last year, nobody thought we had any chance to win. Everybody said, they're going to kill them, and then we got in the game, had a chance to win and didn't do it, but really it showed us that we could. So we're better than we played, so let's play up to who we are, not just average.

And then this year's game with Notre Dame, I felt like we thought we were going to win. We were in it for three quarters. We just didn't do what we needed to do in the second half offensively, but I thought the kids realized, this is the No. 2 team in the country, and now they say this is a playoff game, and I constantly say, who's going to win, Notre Dame or Alabama? Who's going to win, Clemson or Ohio State and why? Tell me why. Why are these teams in the position they're in and what do they have to do to win.

So it's fun to listen to the young people and what they believe and what they think and talk, and they know that A&M is just as good as Notre Dame and it probably came down to a really hard discussion at the end on who should be number No. 5 and that at some point we'll probably expand the playoffs and A&M would have been the first team in.

So they understand the magnitude of the game. They know how good A&M is. They're very aware of the four

guys we don't have playing. They know that not one person in America is going to pick us to win outside of our room, so we have very direct transparent conversations all the time. So they're fully aware of the fun challenge, is what we call it, that's ahead of us tomorrow night.

Q. You're taking on Jimbo Fisher; what type of offense does Jimbo Fisher run at A&M prior at Florida State? Is it the same offense?

MACK BROWN: I was fortunate to do three of Jimbo's game when he was at Florida State when I was on TV. So I got to study them, I got to watch them, and they're like a pro offense. They're huge on the offensive line. Their tight end is as good as anybody in the country. At 6'6", he can run. He's a mismatch for everybody on your team. You cover him up to his hip. I mean, he's that much taller than everybody else with his length. They've got a 225-pound running back. They run downhill.

So what they want to do is dominate the line of scrimmage, keep the football. Kellen Mond is a game manager very much like Ian Book. He knows what to do. You sit and look at the end of the game, he hasn't turned the ball over and he's 23 out of 28 passing, and he makes no mistakes.

Jimbo has done a great job of coaching these guys and making them understand who they are and who they want to be. I think they had the ball 40-something minutes against Tennessee, and Tennessee had 37 offensive plays.

So you look up and the game is over and you haven't touched the ball. So you have to make sure that you make something out of every possession because they're just -- they're going to be a physically dominating, time-of-possession dominating team that takes care of the ball.

Q. I want to ask another question with the weather coming tomorrow, the humidity always down in Miami is a factor this time of year. How do you get yourselves ready for humidity? I think you were just down there for the Miami game, but this time of year people from the north coming down to the south are not used to the heat and humidity.

MACK BROWN: I wouldn't call us the north. We've had a little warm weather the last couple days, but we're north of here, for sure. But our strength and conditioning staff and our nutrition staff, training staff going into the pandemic age has done a tremendous job of making sure that we're hydrated, making sure that we're in great shape, and making sure that we're healthy.

But one of the real concerns this summer that we haven't had to deal with were soft tissue injuries - a lot of hamstring pulls and pulls groins and those things because you didn't have spring practice. You didn't have an off-season program. You didn't have your summer work like you normally would. And our guys studied it really well and they've done a tremendous job of making it work.

I think we'll be okay. Biggest problem is trying to get off the field because A&M stays on the field and keeps the ball.

They're the best in the country at 3rd down percentages, making 3rd downs, and it's because they're 3rd and 2, they're 3rd and 1, they're 3rd and 3 because they do so well on 1st and 2nd down. They're doing what you need to do to win football games, and that's what makes it so tough to beat them.

Q. With so many young guys on defense especially like a Tony Grimes, who he's coming in and his first postseason experience is the Orange Bowl, what do you want to get across with this whole experience to kind of make guys understand they can't take this for granted but also that this is the standard that you want this program to have?

MACK BROWN: Yeah, it's a great question. I talked to all the freshmen last night at different times and said, you do understand that not everybody gets to go to the Orange Bowl in their life, so come on, man, this is pretty cool.

And there's Tony Grimes gets to go as a senior in high school. That's even more crazy. He knows more of the incoming freshmen than he does the guys on our team because that's his class, and he keeps waiting on those guys to get here, especially the early enrollees. He already knows who he's going to room with. So he'll actually have a class that he can relate to better.

I went back to -- the guys do know I'm old. They understand that. So I went back the other day and said, you know what, I was born in 1951. It's been since 1950 since we went to a major bowl game. I was not alive. So that got their attention. They can't put history in perspective very often, but they said, oh, my God, that is a long time. So they get that. And that was kind of fun for them.

And then I showed them, there's 12 teams that are playing in the January Six games. There's just 12 out of 130.

So understand that you are one of the top 12 teams in America chosen to play at the end of the year, and that's where you want to be. Last year's Military Bowl was fun. We enjoyed it. It was a great bowl week. This is more real

about where we want to be and where we're going, and that's what they've got to understand.

Q. I know coaches usually talk a lot about how important a typical traditional bowl practice is. How much does it put you back or put any program back not necessarily having that full month of bowl practice to get some reps for those younger guys and what you utilize that for?

MACK BROWN: We love to use bowl preparation as an extra spring practice, and it makes it better. We're one of only six teams in the ACC out of the 15 we've got this year, with Notre Dame, that are going to a bowl. So it's a tremendous advantage when you get that.

It does hurt us that we lost last spring practice and we didn't have as much, but I do think with 10 days or so, eight days of really good, physical practice will help us, and it does make a difference. Hopefully we'll have spring practice. But even if we don't we've got a little better idea of some of the guys and where they would be. And we talked to the guys before we started bowl practice and said, some of you will improve your status for spring and some of you will take a step back in the next week or so. So this is really, really important. We treat it like a spring practice, and it's really physical.

We've seen some guys with the guys that aren't playing step up. There's some receivers that have looked better this week than they've looked all year because they see a chance to play.

So we've still gotten a lot out of it, but I think you're right on that it's not going to be your normal advantage that you would have with 13 days of practice and really pretty much a full spring practice.

Q. And then I know you mentioned that you covered a couple of Jimbo's games when he was at Florida State. I know y'all usually have those pregame interviews. What stood out to you about some of those conversations or when you think back about Jimbo and the conversations and the time you had with him?

MACK BROWN: Well, Jimbo won a National Championship, and to do that you've got to have a plan. You've got to be confident. And Jimbo knows exactly what he wants in his football team. Mike Elko does an outstanding job with their defense of stopping the run, and after you stop the run, then you're going to get to the quarterback. Jimbo has -- you can tell whether he got it from Coach Bowden or whether he got it from Coach Saban, he has a plan of knowing exactly what he wants in every case. You can just watch his offense, and his

offense you can just in some ways you can predict who they are and they're not changing. They're not going to change regardless of the time of the game or who it is.

He knows he's a great coach. He's done a tremendous job. He gets them in the right place. They've recruited as well as anybody in the country every year, and I'm really, really impressed with Jimbo Fisher and what he's done at A&M.

When we were at Texas and A&M went to the SEC, I said, I don't know. I don't know if I'd do that or not, and they are a factor in probably the hardest division in college football, and they've done a very, very good job in that area and they're recruiting well.

I applaud Jimbo and A&M for all the success that they're having.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We appreciate it, and see you tomorrow night.

MACK BROWN: Thank you. Everybody have a happy new year and let's enjoy the games for the next couple days and I'll see you tomorrow night.

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