

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

Friday, January 1, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Hard Rock Stadium

Jimbo Fisher

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Now we're going to bring in Coach Jimbo Fisher. Hi, Coach. Good morning.

JIMBO FISHER: Good morning.

First, again, I've said it many times, but again, to be in such a prestigious game and for A&M. The last time we were here was 77 years ago and haven't been to a New Year's Six for a while, either, so it's a great accomplishment for our players. Very proud of them. Very happy for our family and our organization to be here.

But again, I always say this: Orange Bowl is as good as it gets, and to be able to come to South Florida and play in such a prestigious game with great history and the great players and coaches and people who have participated in this game, it's phenomenal. You're treated first class. Everything is first class, and our kids are extremely excited to be here. Want to finish this season off the right way, do the right things.

We've accomplished a lot. Put the organization in a great situation to go forward, and where we're going to go. I'm very proud of this team and senior class and all the young guys that we've been able to be involved with.

So looking forward to this game and got a very good opponent in North Carolina. Mack has done a tremendous job of getting them this far this quick. When he took it over they were really down.

Offensively they're extremely explosive. I know they have a few guys out, but they still have great plan - quarterback, the offensive line, their scheme in general, and they still have a bunch of really good skill guys out wide at receiver. I know there will be another good back on that team because Mack has always been a great recruiter.

Defensively they mix looks up, bring pressures constantly. Secondary is very aggressive, get up in your face and man



you, and then they'll zone you. They bring multiple pressures, multiple looks from four down, three down. What they do, backers are very active; can run. Front guys can rush and bit hard guys could move and block. Special teams is very sound. So again, Mack has put together another great football team and we're going to have our hands full and we're going to have to play a great football game.

Q. How does the blueprint of taking over Texas A&M compare to when you took over at Florida State in 2010? You seem to be on a very kind of familiar and similar path.

JIMBO FISHER: Well, yeah, we did. We had the Orange Bowl the third year there. I think first of all, getting in and being able to set your culture, understand what you want offensively and defensively to the players, with any organization, the work ethic, the practice styles, the type of ball you want to play, who you want to have as a personality as an organization, and then in recruiting going out and getting the kind of guys that you think that fit. There's a lot of great players in this country and you've got to get guys that you think fit your system and what you do.

One thing about our system, it's very flexible. We can open it up and throw it, we can run it, we do what we think we have to do with the players and we have to be successful, and that's one of the things I like about our system offensively and defensively.

But I think it is -- with regard to as far as progress, hopefully, hopefully we can keep heading in the same progression in which we had at Florida State and things we did, and we were able to have great success there.

But you have to get in these situations and play these types of games to understand how to be the team that you really want to be and win championships, and this is a huge stage for us, what we have done, what our kids have done, hopefully we'll play well, but hopefully we can keep on the same track. That's for sure.

Q. Every time you've been in this stadium, you personally, it's ended pretty well for you. I think you're 6-0 here. How nice is that feeling coming back to this environment where you have so many good memories? Secondly, just broadly, I think not

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everybody got to play 10 games this year. How fortunate do you feel that you guys got pretty close to a full season in given all the circumstances?

JIMBO FISHER: You know, I don't really think -- I still don't. I don't know if we appreciate as a country or a fan base or whatever it is, as college football fans, how hard it was to get those games in and the job that the players and the pressure and the different things that went on with the players for them to be able to do that, the coaches, doing a great job of preparing the organizations and the schools in general, the administrations of putting things in place and the safety protocols and trying to get this done, then all of a sudden they change the rules in mid-stream.

But you couldn't get frustrated because no one knew. We tried to do the best we could with the information we had so did the administrators, so did the doctors, so did everybody. It's just an unknown pandemic that we didn't know anything about. I think we were very, very fortunate and very blessed and that's what I told our players, not only to go through that, which I think will enhance their ability to deal with issues later in life because of the situations they went through, but to do it and then do it at such a high level and still be able to do your job, and do it at the highest level and have a chance to be one of the top teams in the country, the appreciation I have for our kids and our coaches and our administration is amazing. To be able to allow that to happen.

To answer your question about coming back to South Florida, being in Florida I've always recruited Florida even when I didn't coach at Florida State, and to be able to come back to South Florida, this was always my area, I feel very blessed. It's always a good feeling to come back down here. Like I've always said, it's one of the best areas of high school football there is in the country, if not the best. I mean, it's phenomenal. I love coming back here, a lot of great memories, a lot of great battles at the stadium, at the Rock, and having great games with Miami, Orange Bowl, different things, and very blessed to come out with some great outcomes. Hopefully we'll have another.

You know one thing, when you walk in that stadium, you're going to play a great opponent whether it's regular season or whether it's in an Orange Bowl, that's for sure. So hopefully we can do it again. It's just great to be back down here. It really is.

Q. Your players this year have talked about changing the culture, that sort of thing, and this week Buddy Johnson even talked about the first meeting you had with the team, where everybody was kind of laughing and you walked in and said, no, this is serious business, we've got to do this. Have you seen the

culture evolve and change this year into what you want it to to build the program that you want?

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, I mean, I believe I have. I mean, our seniors and our older leadership have done a tremendous job of understanding -- listen, there's times in this business you have to relax, you have to enjoy yourself but there's times you have to work. Listen, the standard of where you want to go doesn't change. You can't lower the standard.

The standard is not just what you play on Saturday, it's more importantly the process you go through Sunday through until you get to Saturday, how you prepare mentally, how you prepare physically, how hard you practice. Do you just practice or do you practice the right way. When you practice you're either practicing a good habit or a bad habit so you've got to practice good habits. You've got to have the right mentality that every play matters. You get yourself psychologically ready to play and deal with the pressures of playing excellent football and doing those things. I think our senior leadership has done a great job of that. And hopefully it's shown in how we've played this year and hopefully it'll show one more time this year, and more importantly, carry over into the future for not only the older players coming back, but younger guys seeing the standard at which we want to play, but also the work ethic and the process with which we have to go about our business to be able to get to that standard.

Q. When we talked to Buddy earlier this week he used the phrase, this is the calm before the storm. The real storm is coming as far as how good this program could be in a couple of years. Do you feel like this is kind of the turning point for this A&M program, that the best is still yet to come?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I hope so. That's what our plan is. You've got to understand something, no matter what you do in the past and how much success you have, the next day the score is always 0-0. You have to establish that and I think that's going to be, do our young players understand the standard in which we've set down, how do we carry it on and how do we improve it, because the standard now has to keep going up, no matter what happens, because that's just the way life is, you've got to continue to get better.

Hopefully it does. Hopefully we can culminate this season with a great effort and a great performance as far as playing well. Let the scoreboard take care of itself and the key to that is playing well. Hopefully the older guys have laid that groundwork with the younger players and established that this is the way we want to do things

forward. Now you guys have to take that torch and you have to move it on and show leadership and how we do things year-round, not just during the season of how to prepare for a great season and we're planning on hopefully the future gets better and better.

Q. When you guys look at UNC do they remind you of any team you've played this year or any --

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, I mean, listen, they're extremely explosive offensively. I know they've lost a couple guys, have opted out, but man, their quarterback is dynamic. He can throw it and he can run it. Their other receiver, they had the one receiver tap out as far as getting out, he's going to be a high draft pick, I understand those things. It is disappointing but I understand those things.

But the rest of those guys are great athletes. There's going to be another back on that team and you know it. It's like when we say, we have guys get hurt in practice and I get worried about it, and all of a sudden we get a young player we've recruited and jumps in and I say, man, we're going to be all right. Mack has done a great job recruiting defensively.

I don't know if -- I'm trying to compare -- I don't know because they go so fast on offense and a lot of the no-huddle teams, they can create points with their quarterback, his legs, they can run it and they can throw it. That's a tough combination. And then they're big and physical up front, coached well.

Then defensively, multiple looks, pressures, aggressive in the secondary. I mean, they're like a lot of teams we've played, and I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean with styles. That's kind of how people are playing now, hurry-up offense but these guys have done it a very high level. So it's going to be one of the best teams we've played all year without a doubt.

Q. I know we asked Coach Dickey earlier in the week, but is your team intact as far as opt-outs and testing goes for this game?

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, we should be in good shape as far as that goes. Nobody opted out, and testing we're all good to go.

Q. Secondly, I asked Coach Brown, I know when you were at Florida State and he was doing the ESPN thing, you had some sit-down conversations to prep for games. What do you remember about any of those conversations or that time kind of spent talking to him before those games?

JIMBO FISHER: One, you always have great appreciation for Mack and great respect. He's a guy that was going to be a Hall-of-Fame coach even coming back on this second stint he's had, you knew he was going to be a Hall-of-Fame coach, and what he's done here proves it again, but he was already going to be Hall-of-Fame coach during that time, what he achieved at all the places he'd been. We have great respect for him.

So the conversations were great in depth what you're doing offensively, defensively, and more importantly the culture of your team and the things that only a coach can sometimes understand about the things you go through in practice, and you explain them to other folks but they get them how they get them and those things. So it was great to have Mack. Always made you feel very comfortable when he talked. Great knowledge of the game, and you could see that in his teams and how he's played.

But just always enjoyed those. Very insightful, and got a few comments here and there from them, some things as he watched film and observed, you say, you're right. You take it, you kind of see that but when you get it, it'll confirm with you or even bring sometimes you don't even notice that much from another great coach on your team that really helps. Those conversations were always great and very insightful, and like I say, Mack knows what he wants in his teams and it's proven out. His teams have always been great teams and hard teams to play against wherever he's been.

Q. I was talking to your quarterback last night and I know you were a quarterback guru throughout your career. What does Mond bring to your team because he seems like he's right on the same track of Winston, not a Heisman track but good quarterbacks that you've had over the years?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, listen, this guy is -- when you're the guy who kind of helps change an organization and get to this level and you've come through some tough times and you come all the way up, first of all, you commend their competitive nature and their ability to help the team have an identity, and that takes a strong will. It takes a strong work ethic. That means you are very respected by your teammates that they will follow you like that, because you go through those tough times and this guys keeps going and getting better and better, and he sets example for the rest of them with a standard of how you've got to work, how you've got to practice, how you've got to prepare and he's done all of those things.

You talk about him as a player, he's such a dual-threat guy. He can beat you -- I always say that he can beat you with his mind. Heck, his protection calls, his run checks, getting

us in and out of the right plays, reads, I know with the ball, beats you with his arm, throwing the ball excellently, 19 to 3, 65, 63 and a half percent completion percentage, and he can beat you with his legs. He can win the game in a lot of different ways, knows when to use them all, knows how to do it. But more importantly I love his toughness, his competitiveness and his overall just command of what we do as an organization.

Q. If I could follow up on a question, you've been down to South Florida a lot, big rivalry games against Miami and Florida State. Why is it so great for you to go down to the Rock because that stadium now looks like it's a brand new ballpark, and it's home pretty much because it's the favorite place for you to be there?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, we had some great memories there, had some great competitions there, but first of all, it's a great accomplishment because this is the Orange Bowl and to get to an Orange Bowl, Texas A&M shows we're heading and doing things in a great way, and it's a great reward for our players to be able to come play in such a prestigious, historical game to college football. Like I say, there's over 20 National Championships here. So they'll be included in that history and greatness of the Orange Bowl, and that's first and foremost.

Secondly, we continue to keep recruiting players down here. Our brand, and we're recruiting Texas to death, but we're also recruiting nationally. This has always been a great area for us. We've signed guys from down here since I've been here. We'll sign more guys this year, and it's expanding your brand and what you do, and you have a lot of relationships that are in South Florida, and so it's always great to get back down and hopefully see some of those folks and let them see you play.

Q. A lot of the guys this week have talked about how close this team is with no one opting out for this bowl game and everything they've been through this season. Is this the closest-knit group you've had in the past three years? And with UNC having some of those opt-outs, how has that changed your game plan at all?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think this team is very close. I think anytime you have success at a high level and get to an Orange Bowl or have the success we did, to be No. 5 in the country, you can't do that without being very close, because there's so many things that you go through, trials and tribulations, as a player, as a team that they lean on each other, depend on each other.

There's times they'd say, "hey, man, I don't know if we can

do this." "Yeah, we do, come on." Or "I'm hurt, I'm banged up, I'm bruised up," and wait, let me help you through all the times that goes on. And then what you went through this year with the pandemic, social injustice, all the different things, I think it's really bonded this team. And I think your great teams, as you find out -- like I tell them, and you won't even realize how close you are even until you -- five, ten years down the road, how much each other meant to each other because sometimes you're going through it and you don't realize it.

But I think this group does. I think they are extremely close, and I'd say it's hard not to -- it's hard to have as much success as we had and not be close. You have to be because there's got to be a respect there and then there's got to be a love and a trust there that comes with that, and that brings you close.

Listen, all right, we're playing this game, and I know they've had a couple opt-outs, but that doesn't change the way we've prepared at all. We know defensively they're going to be outstanding. We know offensively they're going to -- they still have other receivers. The quarterback is dynamic, the line. They'll have another back in there or two that can really play, the tight ends, and we're not looking at it any different. We know they're going to be a tremendous, tremendous opponent and we're going to have to play extremely well. Sometimes that lets new guys come in, and they have some advantage there. They've got unknown guys that are going to play that we haven't seen, so you don't know how that reacts.

It lets them go at it so they can have the ability to come at us in different ways or they may change some things. So there's a lot of unknown in a football game, so we have to be sound in everything we do.

Q. When you look at this sophomore class, and this was your first full recruiting class at Texas A&M, and the playmakers who have developed out of that class, even at this point, how important has that been in kind of laying a cornerstone for you guys?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I mean, I'm glad that they are -- to develop as quickly as they have, you say a guy has talent and when does it really click in. Is it his freshman year, sophomore year, junior year? It used to be as a redshirt junior back in the old days. It's very rewarding that these guys have done that, and it's a great tribute to two things: One, their work ethic and ability to adjust and come in and want to make a difference; and two, for the coaches developing them in the organization, whether it's Schmitty in the weight room or assistant coaches, the guys that are in charge of them and everything we're doing that allows that to happen, and that's a big thing that we're doing the



right things.

And also a lot of those guys let you know that, hey, we made good decisions on our evaluations because we talk about recruiting and the guys you get. We spend a lot of time going back and looking at guys that we evaluated, successful guys, guys that weren't as successful and why they weren't, why they were successful, and also if we missed on a guy that went somewhere else and they'd go what did we miss in recruiting? What did we not see in the film? You know, to make yourself better. So that's always a process as a coach you're trying to make sure you do.

But very proud of that young group of guys. There is a lot of playmakers in that group, and some of those guys were very highly recruited, some weren't as highly recruited, and that's encouraging, too, that your evaluation process is doing the right things.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Appreciate it, and we'll see you tomorrow night.

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