

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

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Hard Rock Stadium

Jimbo Fisher

Press Conference

Texas A&M 41, North Carolina 27

JIMBO FISHER: First of all, I want to say congratulations to North Carolina on a great season and a heck of a football game. They've got a great team. Mack is a heck of a football coach. They were coached very well. They gave us all we wanted and more. Did a great job on their defense mixing things up, with the blitzes and things they did. Offensively they did a great job. With those guys out they still played their tails off. Their offensive line did a heck of a job and their backs and the quarterback, receivers, Mack, they did a heck of a job and I just want to say "thank you" to those what they played. I know they're disappointed but, man, that was a heck of a football game. I have a lot of respect for those guys.

I've got a lot of respect for that team in the locker room right now. There's a lot of guts in there, there's a lot of toughness, there's a lot of competitiveness. Guys overcame. Didn't look good at times. Played sloppy at times. Did things all three phases didn't -- we had our moments of not doing it, but every time something happened we were able to step up, the competitive nature of raising your game and being able to make plays when they matter, leading us down the field making catches and throws. Listen, Kellen was outstanding in the game. That was frustrating game. Pressure and pressure and we had different things going on. Didn't turn the ball over, made the big plays, the big drives when we had to. Of course Achane making his plays. Ainius Smith, all the receivers, blocking the O line. They gave us some problems early. But at the end of the game, when we had to make it, they did.

Our defense got the stops they did. Got a big turnover in the first that set up a touchdown. Our special teams did a nice job in the game. They busted a punt on us once and we overcame that. Everything we just kept coming back and coming back.



I'm so proud of this team and what it accomplished and what it did, and the seniors and this and that, and I want to a special "thank you" to. I didn't always recruit those they got here but they gave me their hearts, they gave me their souls, everything -- they bought into everything we did. We had some good years but not where we wanted to go, and still not quite where we want to go. We're not done yet. But this senior group put us in a heck of a position in know how to work and how to pass that on to the next generation of how we need to play and what we need to do and a special "thank you" to them.

Very proud of this team. It's a heck of a team. Heck of a year for this university. So happy for the 12th man and the fans. Questions?

Q. What was your decision to go with -- all the way with Devon in the third quarter? Was Isaiah hurt at all?

JIMBO FISHER: He had a little issue, having a little banged up, and we put hit it really hard and really good two or three times. We'd say we'd keep him in. Isaiah there no reason to hurt him. He's doing pretty good, so we kept it going, and he did one heck of a job.

Q. That first touchdown run, were you anticipating that that was going to be something that could become a big play or do you just expect everything that he does to potentially be a big play?

JIMBO FISHER: We put hats on hats. Our ball carriers have a chance to get to the end zone. They're that talented. We did a great job blocking the play. Then the balance and the things he did to keep his balance, and you saw the explosion and all the ability he has. He's got a chance to be a very special player.

Q. Are you going to have some problems in the future deciding how to work in all those running backs?

JIMBO FISHER: I'll take care of that. That's a good problem to have.

Q. Kind of to start you off on humorous note: Can you touch on your explosive speed in avoiding that (inaudible.)

JIMBO FISHER: If you saw me 30 pounds ago, I really

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had some explosive speed. That was out of necessity of not wanting to get wet. I'd hate to say, I'm not very good for a long time but I am good for one time.

Q. Kind of on an unrelated note, can you touch on how you think the results of this bowl game kind of sets a tone and a precedent for moving forward and what y'all are expecting in the future for A&M football?

JIMBO FISHER: First and foremost, I think understanding how to play on the big stage. You have to be able to go to these understanding everything that went with it and understand everything that happens with it, and the pressures with it, the anxieties with it, the preparation for it, and then to perform when you have to perform and do what you have to do to get it done. That's all a learning curve. People don't understand. You think you just line up and play any game. This is a different stage. This is a different environment. It's a different atmosphere, and you have to learn that. And I hope seniors laid that groundwork and our young guys will remember, and now they'll pass it on.

Q. How instrumental were Ainius Smith and Isaiah Spiller in today's game?

JIMBO FISHER: Isn't it great? Ainius had catches and blocks. That guys does everything. He could sell popcorn at halftime. He played fullback in the games. He led us on isos. He caught punts. He had 125 yards receiving. He runs the ball. He does everything.

Spiller is just a worker. He's been a 1,000 yard back. One of the best backs in all of the SEC, and he's only a sophomore. Just a tremendous future and a tremendous football player and those guys are a big part and a huge part of our backbone.

Q. Also you guys are so close to the playoff. How close do you think this roster is to the playoff next year?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, a couple weeks ago I thought it was in, but no, they made a great choice. We were happy to go do what we need to do a little bit better obviously, so we've got to go back to work and do that.

Q. I know a lot can be said about Achane and what he did, but how important was it for the offensive line to make a little bit of a turnaround there in the fourth quarter and the holes they were opening up for him after a little bit of a slow start?

JIMBO FISHER: Trying to put your will upon somebody is hard, but those guys up front for us, they keep fighting and

fighting and fighting and fighting. They had some tough moments. We got knocked back on the goal line a couple times, which we haven't had happen. We had some other things happen, some pressures that we haven't had. We had three sacks; we had four all year. Give them credit, they had a very good team and a very good plan.

But the one thing about these guys, there's no quit in them. There's character, there's toughness and that's where that line of being able to get back in the last few minutes of the game and we were able to take it over.

Q. Does the campaign start now to try to get maybe a few of those guys back with that super senior year?

JIMBO FISHER: We have to look -- I think everyone has to look and see what's your projection, where you're at and make the right decision for yourself. We'll work on that with them and try to help them make the best choice for them, whatever is best for their future. If it needs to go, they go. If not -- I want to do what's best for our young men.

Q. When this season started, did you ever imagine this level of success for this group?

JIMBO FISHER: Yes. If you can't see it, it's not going to happen. I knew there was a lot of work. I'm not saying I knew it was going to happen, but I could see it there. The potential was there. Listen, you live in vision or you live in circumstance. We try to live in vision and if you can't see things in the future and put yourself there and know what it takes to get there and understand the kind of talent you have to have, which I think we do, you're never going to get there, and we kept painting that picture and our kids believed it and they saw it and they went and did it.

Q. When you're in a game of this magnitude it's one thing to picture yourself there, but winning it and actually feeling the feeling of victory after a game like this, how much of a building block for this program can a win like this be?

JIMBO FISHER: It is because, listen, there are moments in that game where I'm sure guys say, man, I don't know if we can do this. That's what happens. When you play these games, there's a moment, can I do this? Is this going to happen? Is this really going to happen. You know what you say? Yes, don't worry about it. Play the next play, make it happen. And there's a learning curve to that.

In life you get worried, is this really going to happen? Can I do this? Can I do this? Life is like that every day. And they achieved, they persevered, they played the next play. They put everything behind them. Like I said, when they got tired and we were behind, it doesn't what else

happened the rest of the game. What happens from here on out, and they handled that and did it.

Q. Jimbo, what seemed to change there defensively in the fourth quarter after they have that 75-yard touchdown run to take the lead? You shut them out the rest of the way and they seemed pretty frustrated.

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, we did. We made the plays. We started playing up front, we started filling the gaps, started fitting things. And there's an urgency. You know the game is on the line. Listen, they're a good team. They're on scholarship too. They're going to make plays. What you've got to say, okay, that's all water under the bridge. Let me play the next play. Let me do what I've got to do, and there's an urgency and a caring and a gut-wrenching ability to raise your game to the next level to do your job, no matter how you feel. That's what great teams do. That's what competitive teams do, and that's what they did.

Q. Do you see any similarities between this year and your third year at Florida State?

JIMBO FISHER: I knew that was coming.

Q. Just the way the program --

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, we won the Orange Bowl our third year. I'll take the fourth year just like it was there, too, I promise. But listen, that doesn't happen without a lot of work, and it doesn't happen without a lot of circumstance. Is the ability and the vision there? Yes. That's our plan and that's what we want to do, but now we've got to go back and work.

Q. When you look back at not just at this year but over the last three years, how important has Kellen Mond been to the success of this program? And if this is the last game for him, how do you think he should be remembered at Texas A&M?

JIMBO FISHER: One of the great quarterbacks at Texas A&M history. A guy who persevered through a lot of things, overcame a lot of things. Willed his team -- I mean, his work ethic in practice, his preparation, the things he did, the example he set, the ups and downs. People saw him have good games, had some tough games. (Indiscernible) one tough game and some tough games in other years, never hung his head, come back to work each and every day. He's a role model for these kids about how to persevere because nothing is ever going to be perfect, and you are going to have the ups and downs to go through it.

He is a tremendous human being. I love him to death. Have the most -- more importantly I respect him to death

for what he goes through, how he goes about his business, and what he stands for and how much he loves A&M, and what he was able to accomplish for A&M.

Q. In talking about another one of your big senior players on the defensive side of the ball, for Buddy Johnson, what has he meant to this team and your defense?

JIMBO FISHER: He was the glue. He's makes the calls. He's a guy who keeps them together. He's the guy who talks to the coaches, do things right, get things right. When things don't go, we talk to him and he'd go talk to the players. Buddy is a true leader, a true great -- turned in one heck of a senior year, and did everything for a great football team here and one of the great players and A&M linebackers in A&M history.

Q. 24-7 in the fourth quarter and North Carolina had been a fourth quarter team, too, all season long. What's it say about you guys that not only in this game but down the stretch you guys just owned the fourth quarter?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I mean, listen, you can say I told you -- our kids work hard. They play hard. It matters to them. They care. You don't put that much work in and then give it up. You learn to raise your game in the fourth quarter and you don't win because you want to, you win because you practice and prepare to. We practice them hard each. We put them in those situations each and every day and we demand excellence out of them. But I can demand it all I want, they've got to get it out of themselves. I have the utmost respect for our players. They rose their game. They did what they had to do on every fourth quarter all year and they take a lot of pride in that.

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