

# Capital One Orange Bowl: Georgia vs Florida State

Sunday, December 3, 2023

Miami Gardens, Florida, USA

Hard Rock Stadium

**Mike Norvell**

**Kirby Smart**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everybody. Welcome to the Capital One Orange Bowl Selection Day press conference.

Florida State will be the home team for this game as the ACC representative comes in with a record of 13-0. This will be FSU's 11th appearance in the Capital One Orange Bowl, most of any ACC team.

Georgia, the visiting team in this game, comes in with a record of 12-1, finishing first in the SEC East. The Bulldogs are making their fifth appearance in the Capital One Orange Bowl, first since 2021.

This year's game will be played on Saturday, December 30th, at Hard Rock Stadium, and be televised by ESPN at 4 p.m. eastern.

I'll pass it over to Orange Bowl CEO Eric Poms for some brief remarks.

ERIC POMES: We are so excited to have this exciting matchup in the 90th Capital One Orange Bowl between No. 5 Florida State and No. 6 Georgia. It is the highest-ranked non-Playoff Capital One Orange Bowl in the CFP area, topping last years No. 6 versus No. 7 Clemson-Tennessee matchup.

We're very excited to host ACC champions Florida State Seminoles. Amazing season under Coach Norvell. Then the SEC obviously is also a tremendous partner of ours. Thrilled to have the SEC now for six years in a row.

Georgia, what can you say? An incredible run the last few years. In fact, we had them here in 2021 playing Michigan in the national semifinal.

We also congratulate Coach Kirby smart and the Georgia Bulldogs.

The fan excitement and demand is certainly there. Tickets are almost out here. Of course, the schools have their allotments. Very few suites remain. We're eager to host these two teams, No. 5 Florida State, No. 6 Georgia. The national spotlight will shine bright at Hard Rock Stadium Saturday, December 30th.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Eric.

Now we'll welcome in Coach Smart to say a few words.

Coach Smart, why don't you start us off here.

KIRBY SMART: First, thanks for those kind words, Eric. We at the University of Georgia are honored and excited to get to go down to sunny South Florida and looking forward to an incredible environment. Although obviously our players are very disappointed today with the outcome of our game last night, we are looking forward to this opportunity.

I don't think there's another team that we would love to be able to go compete against than Florida State. I have so much respect for Mike, his staff, the job he's done there. I grew up going to Tallahassee every day of my life from where I grew up in south Georgia. To watch what he's done with that Florida State program is just incredible.

I know firsthand how hard it is to have an undefeated season. It is hard. It's hard to win games in any conference. It's hard to win games repeatedly. He had a perfect season and won every game. That's really hard to do. A lot of kudos and congrats to he and his staff and his team and his players with all they've overcome, the team he's assembled.

This should be a great matchup. Two giants in college football across history and recently. I always worry about when you get in bowl games, the matchups you get to have. This matchup is really exciting. I know our players are pumped and excited when they found out today who we get to play.

The Orange Bowl is one of the best bowls we've ever been



to in terms of the sunshine, the beach, getting to enjoy it, be in sunny South Florida.

Major congratulations to FSU, Coach Norvell, his staff, but also to the Orange Bowl committee and the people that host the Orange Bowl. Our players are looking very forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Smart, thank you.

Let's pass it over to Coach Norvell to open it up with some remarks, then we'll open it up for questions.

Coach Norvell.

MIKE NORVELL: Today has been an emotional day. Coming off of last night, just so proud of our team finishing up undefeated season ACC champions.

Absolutely respect the opportunity that's here at the Orange Bowl. There's such a great history with Florida State and the Orange Bowl. To be able to get matched up against the best team in college football over the last three years...

You look at Coach Smart and the job they've done, this is a special team that we're going to go against. Obviously last night did not go how they wanted, but this is a team that's really set the standard over the last few years. The work that's gone in, I've got a lot of respect for Coach Smart over the way he operates the program, the consistency that they've shown.

To be able to match up with them in what I believe is two of the best teams in all of college football here this year, it's really going to be a special matchup.

I know our players, they're disappointed here today with the news of not getting a chance to compete for a national championship. We've had a team that's responded throughout the course of the year. They've responded to adversity. They've had to fight through, overcome. I believe in the heart and character of this team. I know that they will respond once again.

It's going to take a tremendous effort on our part, but I know we're excited for the opportunity to be a part of this tremendous game with all the historical value that comes to it, just to be able to play against such an outstanding opponent in Georgia.

It's going to be one that the fan bases are going to be excited about. To be able to be here in our home state, to be down in Miami, to get a chance to compete once again for this team to showcase their identity, who we are, what

we truly are aspiring to be.

Just grateful for the opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

We will now open it up for questions for both coaches.

**Q. Coach Norvell, we saw your reaction on television when Alabama was placed into the No. 4 spot. Could you tell us what was going through your mind in that moment when you put your head down, then what you said to the team afterwards?**

MIKE NORVELL: I was just hurt for our players to be honest with you. It was one of the tougher moments I've had to experience just for all that they've done. You talk to a team about responding to adversity, getting up and going to give all that you can, to be able to find a way to win a college football game. Like Coach Smart said, it's hard. It's hard to do, especially when you face some of the adversities that we've had this year, whether it's injury or different things to overcome. It's all part of it.

As we tell our team all the time, Your truest identity shows up in times of great adversity. We faced it. They put it on display. So that was really that feeling in the moment.

With all due respect, I put out a statement about the committee, my feelings on that decision. Out of respect for the Orange Bowl and the opportunity we have, I would like to keep any questions focused on this matchup. Obviously if there's any other follow-up at a different time, it will be welcomed. Let's respect the Orange Bowl and the opportunity we have here, not so much on the decision of the committee.

**Q. Kirby, I think Georgia has won six bowl games in a row going back to the Baylor Sugar Bowl. You changed a direction on players that only players that were playing were going to the bowl games. Your program has shown commitment even to non-playoff games. Can you talk about that connectedness? I guess you probably saw Kendall Milton had some strong comments after the game about his commitment to play in this game, not abandoning his brothers.**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I didn't see his comments actually. Before I got on here, I've just been swamped. This time of year for college football coaches, I don't think people actually acknowledge. I haven't watched one thing outside of the naming of the four because it's also close to the portal opening. These teams that play the championship games, today is like drinking water through a firehose. I

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

have not seen anything posted by Kendall.

I did talk to our team. They are very excited. I think of all the ballgames we could be in outside the Playoffs, this is where our kids would love to be. This part is good.

Yeah, really high-character team, a bunch of fun guys to coach. The guys that want to play in it, they're going to continue with us, they're going to enjoy that. We'll have guys go into the portal, guys looking for their future, it's bright for them maybe at other places. That's what the portal is for.

We'll lose out on some guys, like everybody in the country will. The guys that come back, they'll have a commitment to getting ready, getting better. It's not just about this game, it's about the practices you get to have for this game. A lot of guys are going to be guys that will play for us next year that are going to get 13 or 15 practices, that they get ready, almost like an extra spring practice, not to mention the midyears that get to come in and get to practice with you, too.

This is a tremendous time to develop and get better. We're going to do all we can to get our team in the best shape they can to be ready to go compete against Florida State.

**Q. Coach Smart, having players that will play and some won't be there. Fran Brown, one of your assistants has moved on to Syracuse. Thoughts on what Syracuse is getting, what he brought to your program. Mike, Jordan Travis and the legacy that he leaves with Florida State.**

KIRBY SMART: I'll go first with Fran.

He's an incredible person, human being, beautiful family. Nobody is more upset than my 11-year-old son who one of his best friends was Braden (phonetic). When he first came down, they got to be buddies. Now they spent a year, two years together.

Fran is just an incredible person. Anybody that met Fran knows the impact he has on people. He has great relationship strengths. He'll be awesome for Syracuse. They're getting a great recruiter, leader. He's going to do a great job. He knows everybody in the Northeast. Better watch out up there because he knows everybody in Philly.

MIKE NORVELL: To touch on Jordan, just a special man. The example he's been for our football team, the way that he's grown, the work that he's put in, the way that he approaches every day whether it was practice, meeting rooms, what he's doing in the classroom, he approached every day as a champion.

I think that he's been one of the bright lights of college football that you see somebody that was in a challenging, tough moment that has really improved at a drastic level. He's become one of the best players in the country. He did it the right way.

He cares about people. He cares about this university. He cares about his teammates. Unfortunately he got injured. That was the end of his playing career. Even through that, I mean, he's been so present in everything that he could be just to help his teammates, to continue to be supportive, the encourager. I mean, he's what's right about college athletics. Just so glad to have his example. Just a wonderful Seminole.

**Q. Kirby, you've become well-known for being a great motivator for your teams. Can you just talk about the aspect of getting FSU in this type of situation, a team that's obviously going to feel very slighted, they're obviously good enough to be undefeated. It almost feels like you guys might be walking do a kicked hornet's nest or something like that. I'm sure as upset as you were about how things turned out, there's some empathy here, as well, right?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I mean, I empathize with anybody that goes undefeated and doesn't get in. I personally feel like we deserved to be in. We've got a really good football team and we're considered No. 1 in the country all year, then fail. We have a hornet's nest around here, too, of players that are disappointed. That works both ways.

The good news is we got each other to go play. I know they'll be up for us and we'll be up for them. You worry a lot more when you have a matchup that they might not look forward to. I don't know who that would be because it shouldn't be that way. It is that way. I have learned that.

I also think that it's a time for coaches to grow their team, grow their roster and grow the depth, and still get to play in a game. We're going to have kids that didn't play a lot during the year, they're going to have an opportunity that we're getting better at the end of the year that they're going to have a chance to play because of the redshirt rule and things in post-season play. I'm excited about those opportunities.

I know our kids are going to be up for FSU. I know FSU is going to be up for us. We're going to rely on each other to have that, to be able to go out and play.

Look, nobody knows better, I don't know if this is correct, I think we've been fifth or sixth and finished fifth or sixth more than anybody. That's tough. It's tough. I can't



imagine it being undefeated. It's tough when you finish fifth or sixth because there's always a case for being in it. We've been there maybe two or three times.

**Q. Can you touch on the significance of this being the 90th Orange Bowl as well as the impact that will have on recruiting. You guys are impactful in the transfer portal. The effect of the outcome of this game...**

MIKE NORVELL: I believe the Orange Bowl, it's a special game. The impact not only of the game and the event, but really of the whole week and the impact in South Florida to the community.

That's one of the things you get to experience as you're down there recruiting, you see just what the Orange Bowl does to the youth sports programs, to helping facilitate opportunities for young kids that you have a dream of becoming college football players, to come to a Florida State, to go to Georgia, to have the open doors of what their future can be. The Orange Bowl has been just such a staple for opportunity.

To be able to be a part of the 90th game is special. It does have a great recruiting impact. I mean, a lot of our best players are from South Florida. It's going to be a chance for them to be able to go home, to be able to play in front of their families, just to be able to showcase once again the identity of our team, where we're going, what we're building here in Tallahassee.

It's going to be a great opportunity for us.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I agree with what Mike said. There's no greater place to recruit than Miami, Florida. Kids love football. Kids down there are different. They come in ready to play. There's no anxiety. They don't fear anyone. The kids we've had in our program from that area are incredible.

So getting to play down there allows us to stretch out our tentacles and have contacts. There's a lot of good programs in the state of Florida, but we've been very fortunate to have three or four first-rounders come out of that area. I love when we get a chance to go down there and play.

**Q. Kirby, this isn't your first rodeo in the opt out of bowl era. Have you found there's any sort of balance between a benefit to playing younger guys, getting a sneak peek, but also trying to win the game?**

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I think it was the year -- I don't know if it was the Texas year. I don't remember what year it was. Man, it was a struggle. It was tough. There was a

lot of disappointment I think. We just took the motto that: Hey, you're either in or your out, man. It's that simple.

We're going to go compete. We're going to go practice. We're going to have our practices and get after it, after a long, tough, grueling year with a championship week on top of it. This is what we're going to do. We're going to practice this many times. You're going to buy into it or not. That is how teams win. It is how you win, is be committed to the calls, be all in on it. If you're wondering or trying to decide then you probably don't need to.

That forces you to play some younger kids. Especially with the timing of the portal now, people really don't understand what's going on in college football right now. So with the timing of that and the ramp-up of the number of kids entering in general, you can't even play the game without playing some new faces.

I don't even know what that looks like right now for us. I'm sure there will be some guys take on some roles that they're moving towards next year.

**Q. With how close you guys got this year to getting into the Playoff, both feeling like you were deserving, does that make you look forward next year to a 12-team Playoff and disappointed not to have a 12-team Playoff this year?**

MIKE NORVELL: I mean, we don't have an opportunity to compete for a national championship when you have a year like we had and that Georgia had, I mean, it is disappointing.

You look at this Georgia team - I'm going to say it for Coach Smart - you go undefeated throughout the regular season, you lose in the conference championship game by one score, and that be the end of your opportunity to win a national championship, it's hard.

For us, we go undefeated throughout the season. We accomplished the things that we did. You try to teach players about response. You try to teach players about consistency, things that you want to see them grow and build in.

Knowing that next year it will be an expanded opportunity when teams compete at this level that both of our programs have been able to accomplish this year, there will still be that avenue.

But it is what it is this year. We can have our disappointments. Like I said, I respect the opportunity we have. Of all the games that are out there in this bowl season, there's not one that will be more exciting or

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®



probably more anticipated than having these two teams.

Like I said, it's a special group and a lot of great players on both sides. I think coaching staffs respect each other in how they go about their business.

It's going to be a fun one for our players to compete in. Obviously the venue and this bowl game is special. But absolutely that next year with 12, I mean, it's going to open those doors for the best team to really be able to prove itself out there on the field when they put themselves in the situation.

KIRBY SMART: Yeah, I don't want to be longwinded because I could talk for a long time.

Football is a very unique sport. It's unlike other sports. It's hard to say, because I've always wanted to say, 64-tournament basketball team, baseball team, soccer team, all these teams I follow in college sports... I love college sports. I watch college athletics all over the country. They can have these big pools and tournaments to determine who the national champion is. It just seems fair and nobody is upset with it.

College football hasn't really been able to get that done because it's much harder in a sport where you play the game that's so physical once a week. You can't have a 64-team playoff at the end of a regular season. The model becomes what is the appropriate model and where is the number? They've landed now on 12.

There will be a debate over who is 13, 14. There will always be that debate. I certainly don't think it will be an undefeated team that gets left out of that. Maybe from a non-Power Five.

When you look at it and say the playoff model that the NFL has put in place, earned on the field, a lot more parity, eight and eight teams making the playoffs. Their schedule gets set for them from a league. The schedule is set that way so there's a little more balance when it comes to you.

If you look at the bigger picture, until it's regulated by some supreme body, it's probably not going to be balanced. It's going to be led by conferences that are merging together in different forms. You'll never be able to have a long tournament because people can't play these number of games that long.

We'll find out how the 12 works. Certainly would have been good for Georgia the last four to five years because we would have been in the hunt. We would have had a shot, just like FSU this year. We'll see where it goes in the future.

**Q. Kirby, I didn't know how many guys are you expecting to not play in this game? When do you have that conversation with the guys about when they'll play and when they will not play?**

KIRBY SMART: It's probably going to happen throughout the week. They need some time to decompress. I'm not expecting anyone to not play, to be honest with you. When the conversation comes, we'll have those conversations with 'em. We'll talk to 'em.

I know we'll have some enter the portal. Those conversations have been happening for several weeks now leading up to this time. So we'll have guys into the portal, opt to not play in the game.

To be honest with you, I'm really not stressing or worried about it right now. We have a week to kind of get ourselves together. Our guys will take some time off, take a little break they need, get back and get back to working out, throwing, practice time.

It's not a major concern for me right now because I know we have a good core of our team that's going to want to be there and play. I just don't have specifics, though.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coaches.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports