

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday July 16, 2018

Jimbo Fisher

Texas A&M



JIMBO FISHER: Howdy. If you all don't know, you're supposed to say howdy back. That's an A&M thing. No, thank you, Commissioner. And first of all, I'd like to say it's great to kick off the Media Days here in the SEC. It's a great honor. And as I say, I'm very excited to be here at Texas A&M and very excited to be back in the SEC.

As some of you all know, this is the conference in which I cut my teeth on. I understand a lot of about it and know a lot about it.

In our short time in A&M, we've been there since December, I've been very busy trying to establish the things and put the culture in place in which we think we have to have to be successful in this league, as I know this is as good a league as there is in college football.

And we know that you'll be challenged every week, so there's a way in which you have to go about things and a process in which things have to be done to get the results in which you need. There's no shortcut. Because, like I said, whatever you don't -- the i you don't dot, the t you don't cross gets exposed in this league they quickly.

It's a very physical league, a very tough league, a very demanding league, a very competitive league. When you're a competitor, that's what you want to be a part of. Very blessed to be here, thankful to be here.

Got a lot of challenges coming up, but I think our kids have done a great job. Very pleased with the offseason, our staff and our strength and conditioning staff and our coaching staff have done with our players. I thought spring went very well. We got a lot of things established. Like I say, you never have enough time in the spring, especially in your first one.

The second half of spring, I thought we did things in a much more efficient manner, and wish we had about 15 more days, but that's just the way it goes. You don't get to do it that way. But then I think our summer strength conditioning program has been excellent.

Our kids, as you'll see, are in excellent shape. And reports we're getting back from our strength and conditioning coach has been excellent, and the

meetings, which we were allowed to have, and the short meetings we were allowed to have with him have been excellent.

The guys are really starting to grasp what we want to do and how we want to do it, and looking forward to the challenges. We have a very challenging schedule, great season coming up, and looking forward to it. And like I say, it's going to be that way every year in the SEC. Any questions?

Q. Jimbo, you've had some early success on the recruiting trail. So what's the most consistent message you're giving about Texas A&M to those recruits?

A. I think, first of all, the direction which we're going and the way we believe and why we can have success. It's a whole comprehensive package. When you're recruiting, I mean, you want to win, everybody thinks about winning.

When you get to Texas A&M, when you see the academic success it has, the Aggie Network at the end, and the commitment from the university as far as facilities and the things in which we are, and then the success in which our staff has had at previous stops in which we see the vision of our program, and then playing in the best league in college football, it makes it very easy to recruit to.

Our staff has done a heck of a job there. And also our players. I think our players have gone a great job, once we got guys on campus, of selling what we're doing and being a part of that, as I say, because I think your players recruit for you every bit as much as the university or your coaches.

I think they can sell your program because, as I say, when you're around the players and there on a visit, they'll tell you in five seconds, as soon as the coach walks away, he's either full of bull or telling the truth. That's the way it is. Our players, our current players have bought in and been -- had a big part of that success.

Q. James Foster's one of those recruits that came in. What has been impressive about him to you so far and his role within the quarterbacks right now?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think, first and foremost, his ability. He wants to be great. His work ethic, his demeanor. I think the things he did in high school, from building the high school program which he was at and the levels he took them from, because I believe they were winless when he started out, or had a few wins when he started out as a quarterback as a sophomore there, and took them to 10, 11 wins as a senior.

I think his competitive nature stands out to me. He has great arm talent and physical talent. I love his demeanor and work ethic as much as anything.

Also "Tank" Jenkins in that group, too. We got "Tank" from Montgomery, too.

Q. Jimbo, in the back of your mind, in retrospect, all of the years you were at Florida State, did you always think you would be back in the SEC at one school or the other?

JIMBO FISHER: No, I really didn't. As I said, I had no intentions leaving Florida State. I was very happy and very content there. As you know, life takes changes and decisions are made. I was very happy and at a great university there.

Q. Howdy, Coach. You talked about there are no shortcuts, but I see you have Clemson and Alabama in the first four weeks. How does that daunting task that you have, how does that affect your preparation for when you tried to change the culture?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think it gets your attention, I'll say that. It definitely makes your kids wonder. I think when you have those kind of games in the early parts of the season, I think it makes your summer that much better. I think it gets your attention. They understand the competition level and what you come to.

But, you know, the great teams I've ever been a part of, as crazy as this sounds, you prepared for your opponent, but that wasn't what it was about. It was more about the culture in which you created from within yourself and the way you wanted your team to play, and I think that's what we have to understand first and foremost.

It's great that we play those two teams, the top two ranked teams in the first four games of the year. I think great teams, it's not that your opponent becomes faceless, it's not that you disrespect them; it's just that you understand how you want to prepare. I'm hoping that's the way our kids go about it.

It doesn't matter, because when you play those two, it doesn't matter, when you go play LSU, you go play

Auburn, you go play Mississippi State, you go play Georgia, you go play Florida, you go play Ole Miss, you go play Arkansas, whoever you're going to play in this league, it's going to be that way, the venues and the competition level.

Hopefully it's about us getting ourselves ready to compete against everybody all year long.

Q. Jimbo, you were -- various schools came after you to coach. Besides length of contract or money, what elements did you always look for at considering a school? What has to be in place for you to finally sway you to go somewhere?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think, first and foremost, as I said before, the administration had a big part of it. My relationship with Scott Woodward in the past, knowing Scott and what he brought to the table. Like I said, we were at LSU together many, many, many years ago. There was a lot of changes that had to be made at that time. He was a big part of that and understood what has to be done.

I think it's very important. You can coach and you can have players, but if your administration doesn't see -- not that the one that the press present didn't, it did, we had great administration in Florida State, I'm not saying that, but his relationship was also one that I knew I could trust when you're making a change.

When you're in such a good situation, if you're going to make a change, it has to be something that you know is credible and someone you've maybe worked with in the past or you know has the same vision in which you have. I think that had a big part of it.

And then you start researching the history of A&M, and you have a tremendous recruiting base and you have an unbelievable academic institution and you're able to take care of kids afterwards with the Aggie Network and the job placement program and the things that go on.

I think it's just an opportunity there and a challenge that I didn't want to walk away when I knew we had the administration in place that will allow to have the same vision in which we have.

Q. Your first head coaching job you transitioned within the program, what has been the biggest challenge for you in taking over an entirely new program?

JIMBO FISHER: I think first when you're a head coach in waiting, as we -- might have been the first one at that time, I don't know, at least it allowed you to know the people in the organization, as far as in the building, about who controlled what and also the players, what

their strengths and weaknesses were.

I think the biggest thing was the evaluation of your players, evaluation of personnel within the building and structure of the university of how it operated to get things done in the timetables it had. I think those are challenging when you first go in.

As I say, you have a plan, but that plan has to have a little flexibility until you figure out how things are done. Again, I say this, with the administration, knowing the administration, that helped tremendously, but that is a different venue than being the head coach in waiting.

Q. Hey, Coach, I was reading, I guess last February, the A&M chancellor gave you a plaque at a public deal --

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah.

Q. -- with an open date with a National Championship. Did you know he was going to do that? What was your reaction, and does that put more pressure on what is obviously a pretty pressurized job anyway?

JIMBO FISHER: People are never going to put more pressure on me than I put on myself in this business.

This is about dealing with pressure. I thought it was kind of nice. I liked it. He had the same commitment that we did. And I think they -- and they also put their actions in place by the things, the programs and the things and the help and support in which they give our university and the athletic world.

I think Chancellor Sharp doing that, there was no problem with that at all. I have a great relationship with him. In fact, a very good relationship with him. I thought it was kind of nice myself. Hoping we can fill that in quickly.

Q. You were speaking about pressure just now. Do you think there's a more intense pressure on new coaches to succeed in the SEC more so than the ACC, especially with Kirby Smart excelling so quickly?

JIMBO FISHER: I don't. We were able to do it more quickly at Florida State. He's able to do it here.

I don't. I think the pressure in today's world, everybody wants instant gratification. Everybody wants things quickly. That's just the world we live in. And that's all part of this business, is dealing with that and putting things in place to do it.

So what you can't worry about, suppression, you can't work about the results, you have to go through the process of doing things the right way. Because if you

don't set things up right, you're never going to get the results. It's like the foundation of a house. It may come up quickly, but it will fall quickly if the foundation is not there.

You got to do things right to be able to execute. But pressure is just part of this world. It's the world we live in.

Q. Last year you said at ACC Media Days that you thought the ACC was the premier conference in college football. Has your perspective on that changed at all?

JIMBO FISHER: No, I played in both conferences. I'm going to tell you this: I think the ACC's progression to where it has become in football is because of the SEC. From being in the South and having -- not just play against but to recruit against and compete against daily and the way you have to operate your organization.

Like I said, where I was at in Florida State, we were surrounded by Florida, by Georgia, by Alabama, by Auburn. That was the closest schools to us. That's who our big recruiting battles occurred against. We had Clemson and Miami and all those things, and we were surrounded that way. We excelled, Clemson has excelled, Miami has taken off, NC State, I mean, Louisville.

I think in the South, in general, because you're so close, I think it enhanced the ACC's ability to compete and rise its level of ball because of the recruiting competition, and then, once you get better players, you play better.

And I think the commitment to those universities as far as jobs and money and salaries, if you look at that league, they've grown immensely in the last five, six years.

I think the SEC's pressured to stay on top. Once somebody gets on top, like the SEC had the great run of the National Championship, we were able to break it at Florida State, that was our goal. We had to compete with the SEC, so that raised the level of play in the ACC.

Q. Hey, Coach. Vance Joseph, the Broncos coach, has been saying Tre Marsh has been really impressive through camp. If he's able to make that final roster, what kind of player do you think Denver is getting?

A. Let me tell you something. Tre Marsh is a guy now, when you put pads on him, he loves football. Let me tell you this. He doesn't like contact, he loves it. He seeks it out. He's a guy that is truly committed to football. He plays it.

That's the Lake City way. Those kids in Lake City grow up that way. They are hard, tough. Football means a lot. Physical. Tre was a guy who would do everything in his power to be successful, gives every ounce of effort, toughness, the things we try to embody there in our program.

I'm very happy. You'll get a tremendous special teams player, get a guy who's very physical, can tackle, can cover, can play. I hope he does make it. I thought he would actually get drafted before that. He got in a great situation and hopefully do well. I'm proud of him. He was a heck of play player for us.

Q. What's your timetable for winning the National Championship at Texas A&M, and what are some of the unique challenges that you found being a Texas school in the SEC?

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think your timetable is as quick as you can put things in place and everyone buys into what you're trying to do. You have a timetable, your timetable is now. You want to win immediately and that's your place, but is that realistic? I don't know. Could it be? Yes. Could it not be? Yes. It's all about the process of putting things in place. Because you want to build a program the right way up and get kids to understand and buy in.

I will say this: Our attitude of our players has been tremendous. I've been very proud of that. They've come in, there's a lot of change, we do things differently. Not that the other side was right, just a philosophical difference. The way they've handled it has been tremendous. You'll never know.

When we went to Auburn that year in 1993 and Alabama was defending national champs of '92 and they came off 5-16, we went undefeated. It can happen quickly. At LSU it took three or four years. At Florida State it took us I think four years to do it. I don't know.

You never put a timetable on things because you can't judge people. You don't know how each guy's going to respond and what's going to happen and the chemistry of your unit, the camaraderie of the unit and your coaching staff. Hopefully we'll do it as quickly as we possibly can.

Q. Coach, obviously you meant a lot to Florida State. In hindsight, how do you look back on your years there? Any regrets about how it ended, and did it end because of commitment?

THE COACH: No, I mean, listen, Florida State is a tremendous place. I have unbelievable memories.

Like I said, I grew up loving them, around the Bowden family. Coach Bowden had taken me in a long time ago. I played for Terry and Jeff and all that.

I have unbelievable memories of Florida. I have a great respect for them. I think they'll have a tremendous year this year. The program is in a great situation. I think they'll do very well.

My time there, hopefully -- when you leave, is there ever a good way to leave? You try to do it the best you can and wish you could finish out the season. But that just -- the circumstances, it came about.

Like I said, I had no intentions of ever leaving there. It was very emotional. Very tight to those players and to the people in the community. Everyone there was wonderful to me, and I have nothing but respect and admiration for what they do and wish them nothing but the best in the future. It's a tremendous place. It really is.

Q. The rave turnover in the SEC West for coaches has been on the rise in the last decade or so, and there's been a lot of national championships in that division since '07.

Can you talk about going head-to-head with your former boss, Nick, and just competing in the SEC West?

JIMBO FISHER: I think -- I mean that's where I grew up in. I was at Auburn for six and LSU for seven. I mean, every week is for the national championship because the teams you play have the capabilities of being there.

And whoever can survive that gauntlet of games and come out of there, you know is going to compete. And whoever wins the SEC has a chance to win the national championship. You can play with anybody in the country.

I think the biggest thing about it is, as I said before, the toughness, the effort, the discipline, the pride, the grit you have as a team and your ability to compete and understand that it's going to be physical. It's going to be tough. I'm not going to be good. I'm going to be hurt. I'm going to be banged. I'm going to be bruised.

Going into the venues you do on the road, the travel, just the physicality of the league, you have to understand that and embrace it and run with it and take pride in coming through that gauntlet of games to be there.

Like I say, I don't think there's any -- the regular season schedule of that league is second to none. I know. I

lived it for 13 years. I understand what's it's like. I understand the way your players are Monday and Tuesday after the game. You think I just played that big game, you look up and that's a big game.

That's a big game. They're all big games to coaches. All of these teams have talent. That's why there's so many guys in the NFL. That's why there are so many all pros. That is why there are so many rookies of the year. You go down the list of everything you have, and it's a great challenge. As a competitor, as a coach, you love that.

People say if you're a competitor, why would you run from it? Why don't you go find out. That's what we're going to do.

Q. Coach, you've had a lot of success developing quarterbacks in your career. And now, what do you look for when you're evaluating the position and how does that transition to the battle between Kellen Mond and Nick Starkel?

JIMBO FISHER: That's a great question. I think people say, well, what makes a great quarterback? I don't think it's any one thing. I think it's a combination of things. Some guys have different things than others. And I think it's finding out what each guy's strengths are and featuring those.

First and foremost, I think you have to have a certain level of arm talent. You have to have a certain ability to throw the football. Then there has to be an unbelievable competitive nature in you. I think there has to be a toughness in you. I believe this, if the quarterback is not the toughest guy you have on your team, your team is not going to be tough.

That's the only position in the world you have to stand there and let 310 pound guys run at you. You don't get to hit them back. You have to stand there and take shots and get hit and consistently do things.

When that quarterback is tough and he is competitive and they know he can make the plays, to me, it energizes your defense because they know if they get the ball back to him one more time, he can play. He'll win the game on offense. They are going to block him. They are going to make catches. They are going to do the things you have to do.

I've been blessed to be around phenomenal athletes and phenomenal competitors. I think when you get down to it, they all had a certain level of arm talent. I don't think I have ever coached one of them that wasn't a tough guy, I mean, extremely tough and competitive.

When we get down to it, we featured off that, how they process information, what their strengths and

weaknesses are. We tried to feature how we called plays and multitude of our offense. I have been blessed to have a great deal of guys that have, as I say, laid it on the line to be successful.

Q. Coach, you had said -- I saw a story, I guess, a couple months that you agreed with some of the critics that Texas A&M was soft last year. Can you tell us what you saw?

JIMBO FISHER: No. I didn't say -- I just said we're going to play tough.

How they played, I have no idea. I have no idea and again did not refer to anything back. And it's hard to -- the way a coach plays his team until you understand and been in his shoes and understand that team, I think it's very hard to say anything about him.

I just say we have to play with great toughness. We have to play with tremendous physicality. I think the teams in this league that win, the teams that win national championships, and the success we had at Florida State, that's how we played.

I think there's got to be a certain level -- you got to be able to run the football in this league, and you got to be able to stop the run. You have to be able to create big plays. You have to be tough and skilled. Because you're tough don't mean you can't be skilled. Because you're skilled doesn't mean you can't be tough. I think there's a great combination there to be able to learn and be able to do that.

I think the offensive and defensive lines, if you watch in this league, the guys who control them are the guys who win. You have to go from there and what you do.

We have to play that way. When I was in this league and we had success is when we had physical tough teams. When I was at Florida State, and we had tremendous success because we had tough physical teams.

We get caught up because of all of the spread stuff and going fast and all of this. You still have pads on. You still have to tackle. You still have to block. You still have to be physical in how you run routes and how you catch balls and how you just do everything.

I think there's a toughness factor that you have to have and a level that we have to get to.

Q. Texas A&M is 2-14 in the last four years against ranked teams. Obviously the division you're playing in, you're going to have a few of those games.

How important are those games going to be for you this year and how much emphasis are you going to put on winning them?

JIMBO FISHER: Hopefully put winning on all of your games because I think each games builds your confidence and your level of how you play. Even though you say that game wasn't important that we played, it's how you played. Are you playing well and doing those things because in those big games you're talking about, all of those games are eventually going to come down.

I don't care how good you are in this league. They are coming down to the last five minutes of the game. When you're really good, there is going to be a drive, two drives, here and there that separates the games. And can you have confidence to execute under pressure because like I said, when pressure comes, your habits are coming straight to the surface.

What do you believe, who you are, do you really believe you are going to win or hope you're going to win? You sit up here as I say whistle by the graveyard and saying things that don't mean anything because you know the press wants to hear them or do we believe them? Is it in our culture to think and picture yourself as a championship?

When you are talking about playing a game, you have to picture yourself winning the game, not saying you're going to win them, but believing you are going to win them and preparing to win them and practicing things you know you have confidence in and can execute under pressure. And when those moments come, be able to execute them because it is going to come down to it.

I don't care how good you get, how many good players we all get in this league. They are all coming to the end. Who can execute under pressure at the end is going to make a difference.

But to do that, you have to see it, believe it, and you have to go do it and go relax. As I say, don't practice until you do it right. Practice until you can't do it wrong and have confidence in doing what you are trying do.

Q. Jimbo, you have a couple former defensive coordinators now, head coaches in the league. How do your relationships change with those guys now that they're opponents?

JIMBO FISHER: Just try to beat them when you play them. No, have great respect for them.

You know this, when you play against Mark and play

against Jeremy, those teams are going to be extremely well prepared. Mark has done a great job in Kentucky getting to the Bowl game and playing. I think we did an unbelievable job at Florida State.

I have great respect for Mark. He's not only a fellow coach, but a friend. He's a great guy and a better person than he is a coach. He's one heck of a football coach. I have a lot of respect for him.

And you know, again, there are opponents on the other side. You know this, you are going to have to play and how tough they are going to play.

Jeremy did the same thing. We won the national championship when he was there in '13. He did a great job of being very multiple in the looks he has and has a great knowledge of the game.

As I said, he could have been a head coach a long time ago. He has bided his time and got the right job. I think he'll be a great opponent.

Q. Coach, you have talked a lot about running the ball and stopping the run. So, my question is this, when you talk about those two important units, running back core, and your defensive front and what you've seen from them so far?

JIMBO FISHER: Trayveon is a star. He has a thousand yard season before and can run the football. But more important, I like his leadership. I think he's very diverse, catching the ball, doing things out of the backfield. I was very pleased this spring.

Keke is here with us today. Durham upfront. Clemons upfront. Daylon Mack I thought made as much progress this spring as anyone we had, 320 some pounds. You have Peevy coming back, Rogers in there, Diallo, a junior college guy coming in, Brown, Wright, Wilson. There's a great group of guys that are mixing in that group.

Guys that put their hand in the dirt in this league on the other side make a difference. I think that's what separates this league from any other league in football. I think the defensive lineman across the board that everyone has. You have to be dominant in those areas. I'm pleased with their progress.

Of course, we're not where we want to be. At the same time, we have the potential to be. I like the work ethic in the summer we had. I'm really anxious to see how the fall comes.

Q. Tell us about your defensive staff and what they

bring to the program, particularly Coach Elko.

JIMBO FISHER: I think Mike is a guy, they always said, who would you hire on defense?

Well, I figure it's the guy that gives you biggest pain in the tail when you prepare for them.

Mike always did that. He was a pain in your rear end when you had to prepare for him because he did a multitude of things while he was at Wake Forest. And playing the run and playing the pass was very -- understood how to play the run upfront, understood the physicality part of the game. Coach is very tough and physical, but was very diverse in the back end, which I think causes quarterbacks problems.

Also in your running game, how he fits in the game and how he fits with his extra defender to get the guy in the box and what he does I think is critical in today's time because how it exposes your secondary to play action passes in different things can be very tough. And I think Mike does that as well as anybody. I think Terry Price is a guy that has been in this league forever. He was at Auburn for all of those years.

I went against Terry for a long time when he was at Auburn. He was at Ole Miss. He has done a great job. He coached a first pick of the draft at A&M. He can coach them. He had them at Auburn for years. Terry was a great player at A&M. Bradley Dale Peveto, a linebacker coach. Bradley Dale, I coached with at LSU. Great job. We had great teams, great defenses, has been a coordinator, been a head coach. You have a guy who has been across the board.

Mo Linguist is another guy in secondary, a bright, young guy. He was actually at Mississippi State one year with Dan Mullen and left out of there. He did a great job. We interviewed him. I thought he did an unbelievable job. I think he is a bright, young guy.

Elijah Robinson was a guy coaching at Baylor. He was at Temple with Matt Rhule when they had those great runs. He recruited and coached and had some first round picks at Temple and did a great job. Great fundamental coach, great energy, does a great job on and off the field with those guys.

I really like the staff. And I think Mike does a great job with those guys getting them to understand. They are young, but very intelligent. And you'll see there's some guys in that group -- you'll hear their names quite a bit as coordinators, possibly head coaches, down the road in the future of this game and very blessed to have them all.