

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

**Texas A&M Aggies**

**Coach Jimbo Fisher**

Press Conference



GREG SANKEY: Our next coach is Jimbo Fisher, the 2020 National Coach of the Year finalist, 2013 National Coach of the Year, one of three current SEC active head coaches to have won a national championship. He has a 9-2 overall bowl record, which is one of the best winning percentages ever, including a 3-0 mark in his leadership of the Texas A&M football program.

Go back to Destin, a lot of you had expectations about conversations that would take place. At dinner, Jimbo with his wife, me with my wife. Walked in and we had a conversation about something I've mentioned repeatedly, which is Jimbo's son Ethan who has a rare genetic disease, Fanconi anemia. That's resulted in Jimbo being involved in the start of non-profit called the Kidz1stFund.

That conversation was about a trip to Minneapolis and really positive news about his son's health, but also about the impact being made in scientific research by Kidz1stFund.

In the middle of football and all of the other things we like to talk about, name, image and likeness, transfer portals, this non-profit has raised almost \$12 million for research.

The positive news about his son Ethan was truly rewarding.

It's my privilege to introduce to you the 14th coach of the week by schedule, Texas A&M head football coach, Jimbo Fisher.

JIMBO FISHER: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. Great to see y'all.

We know this time of year, when I get to come over here, it means we're ready to play ball. And that's the funnest time of our life as coaches, we get back to coaching, doing the things we got to do. I hope everybody has had a good summer. We've had a good summer, busy summer, fun summer. It goes across.

Excited about our football team, as everyone is this time of year. Great new additions to the class coming in that we're excited about with some of the older guys, fun watching them develop and play. Very pleased with our off-season as far as it goes.

Back to spring, I think some of the things that went on last year in our team, we were 8-4, disappointed in that, that we didn't play as well as we needed to in some critical situations. But still very excited. We had some really young players, because of injuries, that had to play. Last year we had to bring those guys along slowly. Right now I think that's turned into a strength for us, a young center, a young tackle, and some situations occurred at corner, situations that occurred at wideout that I think let a lot of our young guys to develop.

I'm very excited about our team coming up, as everybody is. Everybody in this league has players. Everybody in this league has good coaches. It's what you do and how you play. We can sit up here and say what we're going to do, how we're going to do it, how good we feel, but it's about what we do and creating a culture within our organization, which we feel like we have. The young guys have adapted to it very well. I'm very pleased with our senior leadership right now with a lot of guys jumping out and doing a really good job. You'll see two of them here today in Demani and Layden.

I think our coaching staff and new additions with Steve Addazio and DJ Durkin, those guys have really fit in and done a great job and added some different twists and nuances to our program. They've all been successful at different places they've been. Excited about that part of it.

One thing today, I actually saw rain. That's the first time I saw rain in three months. It's been 100 to 106 in College Station for three months. I didn't know rain existed. I thought it went away. I hope y'all can push some of that rain our way. That's the biggest news of the day for me, that it does rain again. I didn't know if it did. Excited about that.

Like I say, we're getting ready for camp coming up. We'll



report next week as a staff to have everybody full go on Monday, what we do. Looking forward to the season, where we're going.

Questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. When you look back at the press conference in May, do you have any regrets over how that was handled? Do you feel like you owe Nick an apology? How do things stand between you and him?**

JIMBO FISHER: Listen, we're great. Two competitive guys that go at it. We all learn from things we do in our business. Two competitive guys on a topic that is very -- everywhere, as they say. There's no rules in this thing, where it goes. Each state has different laws and everything.

And like he said, I heard a statement he made, the arguments we had in the staff room and on the basketball court and all those things. But on the basketball court, we didn't have them. We were always on the same team. So we usually had them against other people.

I have great respect for Nick. Unfortunately, our thing went public. Sometimes that happens in this world. Nothing is private anymore, is it?

Anyway. But, no, have great respect from Nick. We all learn from him. We all will learn, like I say, he will learn, hopefully I learn from things we do and say, and we move on from there.

But I have great respect for him and their program like always.

**Q. You did say some very poignant things about Nick Saban, and NIL is very real, it's here to stay. One of your staff members was caught on video telling some recruits that they were going to be paid very well for playing football --**

JIMBO FISHER: No, that's not what he said. Those guys pay down there very well, and what he meant was, he was a young guy, been there about a month, the guys behind those seats is what paid for your program. That was the donations and boosters and how he said it and how he spoke. Do we all have NIL? Yes, we do. But that's what he was meaning. It's a transfer thing that we say with all recruits. The guys behind those things are the guys who pay for our program, what we do, the donations. That's what it was. He had been here one month.

**Q. You worked for Coach, worked for him at LSU. You used the terms like organization. What is the thing you took most from him that has influenced your coaching career?**

JIMBO FISHER: I think diversity in organization, different aspects of a program that they've grown. I think he was one of the first guys into mental health and things, which has been a very forefront thing for me ever since I've been a coach, as an assistant or as a head coach. We put a lot of time into it. I used to joke in the ACC meetings, I told some guys sometimes, The biggest issue we have in college football in my mind is mental health.

They said, That's not our problem.

I said, I think it is for everybody, we just didn't realize it.

He was in the forefront about getting help, getting guys how to understand how to handle the different pressures that they go through as a person. Each year it's changing. Because of social media, the different things it's going on, it's huge. I think those aspects and organization, and he's a great football coach.

**Q. Hypothetical question. If there's no NIL, do you and Nick have this public beef?**

JIMBO FISHER: No, because the -- listen, what he said and what I said, we moved on from it. But NIL, like I say, guys, there's no rules. Each state has its own rules. I mean, it's not just an NCAA thing or a national thing. Each state. For instance, in Texas, we cannot bring up NIL to a recruit. We can't say it, we can't promise. All we can say if guys on our team have it, that's all we can say.

Other states can present written contracts. They can send you a written contract to a guy. I've been going through that in a recruiting thing. It's just the world we're in. We are frustrated because there's no unification of what happens and the way it happens. It's a different day and time.

Change is inevitable. That's the rules we have to play by, so we all have to adapt and adjust. You either adapt and adjust or you don't, one of the two.

**Q. With all three quarterbacks on campus since January, how has that competition evolved in having them together?**

JIMBO FISHER: Very well. I think they're learning off each other. I think they're doing a great job of watching each other and being very competitive with each other. But also helping each other.

I mean, very pleased. Finally, as I say, at the end of spring, you finally saw Max starting to grasp what we were trying to do. You saw Haynes' health come in. Really in the last month, I've seen his feet, the way he's throwing the ball, he's really jumped out at me. Connor, so natural and effortless. As he grasps what's going on... It's going to be a fun battle. Last year we needed three. You saw Zach in the Alabama game. As I said before, he took -- he had a knee hit, came back from that. In the Auburn game he actually popped his shoulder back in place, and the doc said he could play, so he played. You really need a third guy. Having three guys, that's rare in today's time. But I think we got three outstanding guys. I'm very excited to work with them.

**Q. A lot of scheduling models thrown around. If there were three permanent opponents, which three would you like to see Texas A&M have? What are some of the strengths of your offensive line?**

JIMBO FISHER: Well, I think the scheduling model is critical, especially as conferences expand. I think the ability to get everybody to play everybody, because you're talking about a conference champion now, and not being able to play each other and make sure you do when a guy is there in school is going to be critical. And I think conference champions can be determined by now by how the schedule falls. That's never been the case because you always played them all.

Probably the model of three is much better because it gives you more consistency, helps keep some traditional rivalries. I think that's the one thing we're trying to do in college football. To me it makes college football special, the rivalries of college football, trying to keep as many traditions as you can with the expanding world. Things are inevitable, they're always going to change. If you can keep as much as you can, I think it's great. I think that model will be there.

What was the second part of your question?

**Q. Strength of the offensive line.**

JIMBO FISHER: Like I said, last year we had to play a true center, a true freshman center, that only had half a camp and never played center because we had an injury to a guy, and we had a right tackle who had to play as a freshman. That was tough times last year.

Being able to have that now I think has really turned into a strength. I think it's going to be a strength of our football team, one of them. I'm very excited about our offensive line. Coach Addazio has done a tremendous job. But he

and Layden and Bryce and Trey Zuhn now playing at left tackle along with some of those other guys and the battles that are going to be had, size, athleticism, I think Steve has done a great job. What we struggled with early last year, I think it's going to be a really big strength of our team.

Turnovers and big plays determine the outcomes of games more than anything, and you got to have them. But in this league, if you look in the history of it, the guys who can play in the trenches on the offensive/defensive lines have always had tremendous success.

**Q. In your coaching career, you've been very fortunate to be with programs from your assistant coaching days to as a head coach. How does that prepare you year in and year out?**

JIMBO FISHER: I think you know how to get there. I think not -- the expectations are, but all those places -- we had a 20-game winning streak at Auburn. We won national titles at LSU. We won national titles and won 29 in a row at Florida State.

It's not just the expectations of it, but knowing how to put it in place.

I'll say this about our program right now. From a depth standpoint. Listen, when you're a great team is when your practices are so heated and so competitive and that you know you can't take a day off as a player because someone's taking your job. That's when you really become.

The first time from a depth standpoint, not from a great player standpoint, but from a depth standpoint, that we're getting to that point right now at A&M at a level which I'm very excited about, with some young guys pushing older guys, older guys getting better. It's going to be a heck of a battle. That's got me the most excited.

When you're talking about winning national championships, it's not just understanding how to handle the expectations, it's organizing and structuring the team to get to those points. I think we're really right now at the beginning of that stage where we can do it consistently. I'm excited about the future many our program, really am.

**Q. Earlier you mentioned Calzada popping his shoulder out. What was that game like? What is Auburn getting in Zach Calzada?**

JIMBO FISHER: Zach is a tremendous human being. I hated to lose Zach. He's a competitor. He has tremendous arm talent. He's competitive, he's tough, he's smart. He's a team guy. Zach will do anything in the world

to win for his teams.

As they say, when your quarterback takes shots like that and does things like that, your team has great respect and plays hard. I think they're getting a great human being with a talented football player. It's going to be a pain in our tail when we play them. I know that. I know he's in a battle right now, but Zach is a very talented guy, and they're blessed to have him. He will do a great job for them.

**Q. Memories of that game?**

JIMBO FISHER: That game? I mean, looking over on the sideline and going, What am I -- who am I -- I got to put a walk-on in, Blake Bost, I was very confident in him, but he looked me with those big eyes, scared. The ability for him to play with that shoulder, not only play but play well, make plays, make throws, it's one of the great memories I have as a coach.

Football is a game of sacrifice. We don't want guys to ever be hurt, play where their bodies can be injured for a long period of time. But football is a game there's going to be times like that you have. To me it's just a great honor to have coached somebody that tough and that competitive.

**Q. You've long had a policy that true freshmen did not talk to media. How do you adjust that in the NIL days when they are now available for pay?**

JIMBO FISHER: We're going through that whole process right now of how we do it, guys that are ready for it. It's not just that you don't want them -- you want to make sure they're ready to talk to media. Listen, I know y'all want sound bites, news. Freshmen are the best place to get it. I understand that part of it.

But we'll make sure that those guys are the guys who are ready for and going through it in the future.

**Q. It's your fifth season, I know you recruit at a high level, how do you feel about the overall strength of the program, just how you are going into season five? Obviously disappointed you don't have Ainius here. Kid screw up. What was your reaction to that? How do you think he'll respond?**

JIMBO FISHER: Well, with Ainius, we're getting all the evidence and the things that go on, then we'll make a comment. We have no comment at this time.

Like I said today earlier, I feel what's great about our program right now as I have since I've been there, because of the depth of it, because of how we're recruiting, what we're recruiting, and I think the foresight to be -- a year ago

to be fourth in the country, to be one game -- we're the only SEC team with one loss in the Playoff world and never get in the Playoff. I thought we were at that time as good as anybody in the country, I really did. Alabama had a great -- maybe the second best team, like to have a shot in the Playoff.

But, hey, that's part of it. Should have won 'em all. Disappointed we didn't play as well as last year, had some injuries. But doesn't matter. You still have to finish, and we didn't finish at the end.

I like where we're at right now, I like the mentality. I think we've been to the highs, been to some disappointment right there. But we have depth and talent. Looking forward to the competitive battles in practice which are going to allow us to develop.

Listen, you are what your habits say you are on a daily basis. When pressure comes, that's what's coming to the surface. You have to practice that way because you know somebody is there to take your job, it makes a lot better habits created. I think that's what we have to do, and we have to learn to finish at the end of games. That's what got us last year.

**Q. You've got LSU's starting quarterback, Auburn has your starting quarterback. How crazy is all this?**

JIMBO FISHER: South Carolina has Oklahoma's starting quarterback. USC has Oklahoma's starting quarterback (laughter). Wild, wild west.

It is crazy. It's the times we're in. That's just the world. Did you ever think it would come to that? No. But at the same time, it's not transfer. There's reasons to transfer, I get that. But I think -- sometimes I hope these guys will try to stick things out at times. But there are reasons. It makes it an interesting show, that's for sure.

**Q. I don't think you mentioned the three permanent rivals that you personally would want. Do you feel like you have everything in place to be a top-10 program?**

JIMBO FISHER: Yeah, I do. We've been it once. We have already done it once. Been top 15 a couple times. We're in position to do those things.

You want Texas. When Texas comes into the league, when that schedule comes in, definitely because of that rivalry. I think LSU is a great rivalry. But that's probably our two biggest. Then Arkansas goes into that, too. But I don't know if that was one of our three that they equated to us in what we did.

I mean, you're going to play great teams all across the board. You have to get those rivalries. I would right now probably and Texas will be definitely for sure. I think the third time on our gamut if I am not mistaken was Mississippi State. Another West team. I believe that's the way it was. I'm trying to think off the top of my head.

I think the Texas rivalry is important. I think the LSU rivalry is important.

**Q. This question comes from someone who transcribes interviews for a living. How do you speak so fast?**

JIMBO FISHER: Got to get the thoughts out. How long you want to be here (laughter)? If I talk slow... I give you lots of information in a short amount of time. I'm a reporter's dream. Daggum, huh? How can you all be complaining about that?

I could be slow and drawn out, let me think about it, where we're going, what we're doing. You want me to do all that?

Heck, I get you in, I get you out. You know what I'm on, on a limited amount of time I'm used to in coaching. You only so much time with a player, stupid 20-hour rule. You get a one-hour meeting. You have to get in as much information as you can (laughter).

**Q. You sounded like Saban when you were talking a second ago.**

JIMBO FISHER: We're from the same place, so...

**Q. What is your wide receiver depth without Ainius? Do you hope to have him back early in the season?**

JIMBO FISHER: Like I say, I have no comment because I don't know all the information. I'll get it. Chase Lane, I really like what he did, the thing where he was playing a year ago. I think Evan Stewart's evolution there, Devin Price. Moose Muhammad is a guy that played really well at the end of last year. I'm happy about him. Kenyon Jackson is a guy we got. He has been hurt off and on. He's a big body.

These young freshmen I'm excited about. There's three guys that I am extremely. You saw Evan who was the MVP of our spring. I've never had a freshman come in and do that. You have Chris Marshall, Noah Thomas who I think are both highly, highly gifted skill guys that can jump in there. Plus you have your tight end. You worry about your tight ends.

The other thing, our backs, (indiscernible) is a big-time

receiver, too. The ability to throw the football, we get concentrated on receivers, but tight ends and backs are a big part of that, too. We signed three, very, very gifted tight ends. Jake in the spring, and the other two guys I'm really high on this summer, too. You got Max Wright coming back, Blake Smith in that group. All those guys will have a chance. So we'll see.

Receiver wise I feel good about. Passing game, we need to get better. We need to throw better. We were throwing for four thousand yards before people did it. Three, four thousand yards at Auburn and LSU. We were throwing it everywhere. Florida State we did it. Jameis and that whole group. We've gotten some great backs.

We have to throw the football better. We know that, and we will. We know how to do it, we'll get it down.

**Q. It's seems like the transfer portal players move around the league, so do coaches. You hired Ole Miss' defensive coordinator. What do you like about D.J.? What has he brought to y'all? You mentioned you'd like Arkansas to be a permanent team.**

JIMBO FISHER: I just said that's a rivalry in Texas A&M history. You can only pick two. Really you pick two, then we rotate offer.

D.J. goes back to my days when I was at Florida. He was at Florida, a coordinator there, assistant coach there. They had some great D. They had great players, but they had a great defense. Their scheme was very hard to go against, it was very sound, multiple, did different things. As their players' talents changed, they changed what we did. He was very difficult to go against at different times.

What he's evolved to and doing different things. He's always been a four-down guy, but he went to a three-down package at Ole Miss because of the personnel they have, which shows you how good a coach he is, what he does, being able adapt to his personnel.

I think his diversity, his knowledge, wisdom, been around a long time. He did a great job for us in the spring.

**Q. Commissioner said earlier this week that college football isn't going back to what it was before.**

JIMBO FISHER: Yep.

**Q. But he also said it doesn't have to be what it is now. What is the sweet spot for college football? What makes sense?**

JIMBO FISHER: I think some kind of uniformity. I think

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

that's what he's talking about. Change is inevitable. Conferences are going to change a little bit, they're going to move, the rules. The NIL, the uncertainty of NIL and the difference in the rules per state, what you can do and how you can do it, affects recruiting.

Listen, at the end of the day we can coach all we want, you got to have good players. You got to be able to get that uniformity together and create some kind of balance that everybody has the same rules about what you can and cannot do. I think that's what he's talking about.

Like you say, change is inevitable. Life is always going to change, it's always going to move. You either have to adapt or get ran over. To me, that's what he is probably talking about. The transfer portal, I don't know where that goes either, the situations with that.

I think where there's such chaos. You got conference realignment, you got NIL, then you got NIL on top of transfer portal. I mean, that's three major, major changes in everything we've done for how long? I don't even know how many years it's been.

What we're all scared of... What does two man nature make you scared of? The unknown. We have so much unknown. That's why we're all on the edge and panicked about what's going on.

**Q. In this NIL era, you talked about, you've dealt with talent and players throughout your career. How do you balance it with a freshman coming in, like than Evan Stewart, with the returning players, how you kind of manage the locker room?**

JIMBO FISHER: We've always recruited at a high level different places I've been, whether it was LSU, whether it was Florida State. Competition, honesty, the best players play. If you're the best player, you play. It's about competition. I think great players respect that. I think it makes them raise their game. I think the honesty and communication is the key. Communication is the key to everything.

That's where we got disenchanted in college football to answer your question. There was no communication. All of a sudden instead of ready, aim, shoot, it was ready, shoot, aim. Everybody started implementing rules and everybody started panicking. There was no communication, there was no unification. I think that's what you have to do as a coach. That's our job to make sure they understand what we do, how we communicate with them.

Listen, it's open competition. I ain't seen a rule in the rule

book that said freshmen can't play, but I haven't seen one that says they have to play. That is all up to them based off of opportunities they have. I think that's where you have to be in your locker room to always be on top of those things and have a fresh line that kids can talk to you, you can talk to them. I think as long as you communicate, you can always work out every problem.

**Q. Philosophical question here. With the combination of NIL and the transfer portal, what would you like to see as far as hard deadlines for transfer dates?**

JIMBO FISHER: I think the dates are very important because they unify you. At the end of the day they're still going to leave, in that time frame or the other. They already have it planned all the way up.

I don't think that's going to have a huge effect. It is as far as your roster management maybe for practices and things. If you lose during the season, you have bowl practices, spring practice, those types of things. You either know right before spring or after spring if they need to go through it. I think from that regard, it will be there.

Man, the unification thing is just give us all the same rules in the NIL. Just give us all what each state can actually do, what you cannot do. To me that's the rules we have. Just so we have all the same rules, you can't complain. You know what I'm saying? You have haves, have not's. There always have been haves and have not's in football? Has there ever been true competitive balance in college football? There has always been the haves and have not's. This is affecting it in a different way. Those are things. As long as you've got unification, it should be fair.

**Q. Just with tight end being so important to your offense, tell us a little bit about the guys that you have there and how they have to grow up quickly?**

JIMBO FISHER: Max Wright, who we moved to tight end has done a really nice job. Very physical. Learning to become a better receiver, good hands, plays very consistent with what he's doing.

Blake Smith is a guy with really good ball skills, was a quarterback his whole life. Big body, athletic, very instinctive to play. Learning to be physical at the line of scrimmage, important. Garza is a very big body guy who was hurt in the spring. Very haven't seen as much of. Has talent.

Then we signed three guys, Jake Johnson who came in spring, 6'6", 240 pounds, Max's brother. Very talented. Great hands, great routes, great understanding. Didn't play in the spring game, got hurt right at the end, but

played very well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Then you have Theo Melin, who we went into wed Sweden, come over from Sweden, who I think is extremely talented. 6'5", 255 pounds, can really run, tremendous ball skills, double move guy, versatility.

Then Donovan Green came from where Jalen did. Great basketball player. 240 pounds, catches it so effortless. Now they've got to play in this league. Very talented. How quick they pick things up. Very excited with the group.

You got to remember, the first two years, Jalen was a guy that played as a freshman, our first tight end was a freshman, ju-co transfer that we put in one year. Hopefully we can get that same production out of them.

**Q. Speaking of fast talkers, what drew you to Steve Addazio?**

JIMBO FISHER: Coached against him when he was at Florida. Had tremendous offensive lines. Very physical. Then he took the head job at Temple and had great linemen. He took the head job at Boston College.

When I was at Florida State, man, our defensive fronts were gifted. We had a lot of first, second round draft picks. They blocked them as well as anybody. They had a couple of guys there that got drafted high, but a bunch of guys that were just blue-collar guys, their schemes, their toughness, their physicality.

Always had great respect for Steve. The way they blocked us, the way they got after us, the physicality they played with, the consistency they played with, our guys hated playing those guys. They knew how to do all -- they were so fundamentally sound but tough, and you give a guy a great talent like that.

He's off my tree as far as he's tough love. He loved to coach hard, be hard, be physical, but then he puts his hand around them and loves them hard when they're off the field. I think our personalities match. He has a great passion to be an offensive line coach, recruiting.

Just have great respect. I know how he thinks, you know what I mean, for many years. They battled us, did a great job with some guys. Didn't have as much talent as we had, but played great games and did a great job against us. Had respect for him.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this afternoon.

JIMBO FISHER: Thanks, y'all. Have a great day.

