

# CFP National Championship

Sunday, January 12, 2020

## Ed Orgeron

## Dabo Swinney

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, and welcome to today's College Football Playoff National Championship head coaches' news conference. We are joined by LSU Head Coach Ed Orgeron and Clemson Head Coach Dabo Swinney. Coach Orgeron, we'll start with opening remarks from you.

ED ORGERON: What a great experience we've had. What a great journey for this football team. I want to congratulate Coach Swinney and his outstanding achievements so far that he's done as a coaching career. I think he's a model of other coaches that have been interim coaches and had success. He's a friend of mine. I have a lot of respect for him, a lot of respect for his football team. I want to thank the playoff system for having us here at the championship game. New Orleans has been great. It'll be a great game.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Swinney?

DABO SWINNEY: Yes, appreciate all y'all being here this morning, and it's been a wonderful experience for our guys, super proud of our team, and just appreciative of all the hard work that's gone in to making this a great experience for our players, and New Orleans has been great. Looking forward to an awesome game tomorrow. Really amazing season that LSU has had. Coach O and the job that he's done, his staff, just incredible.

This is the way it should be. Two great, great teams that have worked extremely hard to get to this point, and to be able to have it culminate tomorrow night in front of the whole country and probably a lot of people across the world, to watch a great college football game, it's just an awesome thing, a blessing to be a part of.

**Q. Coach Orgeron, your team throughout the year, no matter the quote-unquote, big game, there never seems to be any nerves or nervousness. When you go into a game like this, how are you approaching the psychology -- it's easy to say it's another game but you're in the National Championship.**



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ED ORGERON: Yeah, you know, we didn't talk about going to play for the National Championship. We talked about we have to prepare to beat Clemson, one game at a time, just like we've done. We have trusted the process. Today is focus Friday. The guys are getting excited. They are getting antsy. I can feel it. I'm getting antsy, too. But I think we have to continue to work up through game time. They are going to make plays. We're going to make plays. We have to work for 60 minutes and focus on winning the game and not worry about all the other stuff, block out all the noise just like we did all year.

**Q. Dabo, you've been asked a lot about the last decade of Clemson football. If there was one word you could use to describe it, what would it be and why?**

DABO SWINNEY: The last decade? Transformative. Is that a word? We've transformed Clemson, and the next decade is the Roaring '20s, so I'm excited about -- I heard those were great. Hopefully we can relive those.

**Q. Dabo, possibly winning 30 straight games, that's only happened six times since the '50s, three out of four championships only happened three times, I think, back-to-back National Championships undefeated hasn't happened since Nebraska in the '90s. Do you give any of this information to your team to sort of say, hey, listen, you have a chance to not just be champions but to be all-time great champions?**

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I mean, this is 2020. I don't have to give them anything. They just get woken up in the middle of the night with breaking alerts. I mean, the information is overloaded into their world today. So I don't have to give them anything. They see it. They hear it. It's a constant -- they know.

Certainly we reinforce from time to time what their opportunity is, but it's not like we're giving them anything they don't know. They know. They're very well aware of what they've been able to achieve. And listen, regardless of what happens in the game tomorrow night, it's really been a historic run. To win two out of the last three National Championships is amazing. I'm just super proud of all of our teams that have worked so hard to just be the best they can be, and that's really our goal. That's it. Sometimes you get beat, and our goal is to be the best we can be every single year.

Winning a National Championship is a byproduct of that commitment. So just thankful for all of our teams, and they're well aware of all the opportunity and all that stuff, but that's really not the focus. I think when you focus on that, you're focusing on the magnitude of the moment and you lose the joy of the moment. That's all we try to focus on is just being great where our feet are and just have some fun doing what we do to get ready.

**Q. To both of you, similar question. Coach O, you've had a lot of reaction to your accent over the years. I know some of the players have impersonations and things like that. How important is the accent to you and what it represents? And Coach Swinney, I know you present a certain way publicly. Your players say you're the exact same guy to them. How important is that authenticity to you?**

ED ORGERON: You know, being Cajun, I'm very proud of being Cajun. My grandparents didn't speak English, and my mother and father spoke Cajun French at the table and then when they wanted to talk about me they spoke Cajun French, so I learned Cajun French. So I'm excited to be at LSU at home where we're proud of our Cajun heritage. We're proud to be from Louisiana. I'm just feel at home here. People that made fun of my accent before, I thank them. That gave me internal motivation to do better, so I thank them to be motivators of my career.

DABO SWINNEY: Well, I mean, it's ironic, I obviously grew up in Alabama and sometimes you meet people along the way and they'd say, where do you get a name like Dabo, so sometimes I just didn't want to tell, so I'd say, well, I'm Cajun, D-A-B-E-A-U-X, Dabeaux, and I just go about my business. I kind of feel at home here, too.

Anyway, I just think that you've just got to be who you are. Somebody asked me a question yesterday, they said, and they were talking about Coach O and myself, about I guess how we handle ourselves or something, and I just -- I don't know how to do -- I don't know how to be somebody else. All I know how to do is be myself, and if that's not good enough, it's not good enough. So I'm not really trying to be someone else.

I just think you have to just be genuine and be transparent. If you just speak the truth, you don't have to remember what you say, and speak from the heart, and sometimes people don't like that, but at least you know it's the truth to you, so that's all that matters. And I think, again, just being genuine in everything that you do, and man, that's what I love about Coach O, and have for a long time, not just since he's been at LSU. He's one of the most genuine, passionate people that

you see in this business, and it resonates with his players. That's why he's been so successful.

**Q. I want to ask you two questions. First, what's the status of Nyles Pinckney, and then second, I also want to ask you about Brad yesterday; what were you doing? Were you watching the game, and what did you say to Coach Brownell after their game yesterday?**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, Nyles, we're hopeful, but if he plays, he'll be limited. He's still battling an ankle. And then -- but Brad, I actually got to see the overtime part. So I didn't see anything up until that, so it was -- I saw the best part, and it was awesome. It was amazing. That's been a -- that's an amazing streak.

And then I was with Dan Radakovich shortly after that, so it was pretty cool. But really just happy for Brad and his whole team. I texted Aamir Simms right away and texted back and forth with him last night. Just super proud of those guys, to be able to accomplish something that nobody has done, you talk about 59 years, man, that's -- you'd think sooner or later somewhere along the way you'd win one.

But it was pretty amazing. A long time coming, obviously, over 90 years, I guess, so a special moment for Coach B and his team and for Clemson.

**Q. Coach, I understand that you had to move practice to the Hilton ballroom yesterday because of the weather, while LSU was in the palatial Saints indoor facility. How did that affect your preparation and will you have a walk-through today?**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, we might have had the best practice we had all year. We had the same opportunity to go to the palatial Saints facility. It's just crazy how people put these narratives out there right away. We had the same exact opportunity to go there, but we were going to have to change our schedule and just didn't want to do that, and obviously the weather was nasty, so it was great. I mean, it's massive, and this was -- it was a Thursday practice for us, and our Thursday practices are kind of jog-through anyway, and this was practice nine, day 10 in a row that we've been together, so it was even lighter than that, it was a lot of fun, it was great energy.

I mean, listen, both these teams are ready to play. You can only practice so much.

It was a great practice. It was a great day. Thankful that we had a really good facility, and again, we could have done the exact same thing. I just chose not to change our schedule up and stay on course, and it's great.

**Q. We've marveled a lot about Joe's preparation**

**and his thoroughness in that preparation. Have you ever been around a college player who really doesn't want to partake in any of the college scene? And has that rubbed off on the guys that have been around him?**

ED ORGERON: I've never been around a player like Joe, and obviously he's very talented and he's a leader, but day in and day out, he's the same guy. Very focused, focused on the task at hand. It's about execution and winning and being great. Last game he threw, what, eight touchdowns, and he wasn't satisfied. I mean, that's him. And you go out to practice, and I'll ask him, how's it going? I'll go to pass rush and I'll come to 7-on-7, how's it going, Joe? And rarely does he tell me everything is fine. The guy is a perfectionist. It does rub off on our football team. He's an outstanding leader.

**Q. A lot of these kids obviously on your team wanted to play in the Superdome in high school but even Grant Delpit talked about how he moved away after Katrina. Do you find the players are taking this game more personally because of the city it's in?**

ED ORGERON: I do believe that. There's a lot of things you can look at this game for motivation, and the only motivation we've used is to finish strong and focus on winning the game. But those external motivations are there. These guys have always wanted to play in the Dome. Grant is from New Orleans. His family was displaced from Katrina. All his family will be there. It will mean more to our guys that we're playing here in New Orleans for the championship, no question.

**Q. Ed, two questions. Would you update us on where Damien Lewis is at for you guys, and last night at the Eddie Robinson, your mentor mentioned him. What kind of moment did you have in the things he might have said to you?**

ED ORGERON: Well, Damien is ready to play. Jack Marucci and Tommy Moffitt, those guys, Shelby, everybody down there, they do a tremendous job. I've never been around a training staff that gets guys back so fast. Last night I accepted an award on behalf of our staff that's very prestigious. I want to thank the Eddie Robinson family. I think it was really held in a first-class manner. What an honor to meet all these people, to meet his family. Brian Kenny was a mentor of mine in Los Angeles, California, I think for two years straight I called him at 6:00 every morning and he answered the phone every morning. He helped me out in my personal life. So I wanted him to be here yesterday for that event, and he's a lifelong friend.

**Q. How do you define a dynasty in college football, and what's the earliest one that you guys remember?**

DABO SWINNEY: A dynasty? I guess a team that wins

a lot. That's the only thing I can think of. The first one? Shoot. Dynasty? For me personally, I think about Coach Bryant. I can't help but think about Coach Bryant. I grew up growing up in Alabama, and what he did in the '60s and the '70s, winning numerous National Championships, and there's some debate, probably could have won some more. Back in those days I guess you just kind of voted on them. I think some of those years you even voted on them before the bowl games.

Anyway, certainly Alabama, and then what Coach Saban has done, and I guess the definition is just doing something over and over and over with an unbelievable consistency.

You think about John Wooden. I know that's not football, but didn't he win 10 championships in a row? I think about the Bulls. I don't know about all the football dynasties. I don't think there's been many. It's just so hard to win consistently for a long period of time.

Bobby Bowden at Florida State, I think they had 14 10-plus win seasons in a row. I think Oklahoma probably had a run there. They were pretty unstoppable. That's kind of what pops into my head.

ED ORGERON: Yeah, you know, those are things for you guys to write about. My mind can't even think about that right now. I have been a football fan, but I'm going to focus Friday. That's all I know.

**Q. Coach O, one could argue and say that your offense hasn't faced a team as dominant as Clemson presents. What part in the past success has made you guys ready for this exact moment of tomorrow?**

ED ORGERON: Well, first of all, Brent Venables, I have a lot of respect for him. You watch their tape, they're in the right place at the right time. He knows how to attack protections. They use that No. 11 in great spots. We've got to know where he's at all the time. But you know the team that we played, we played some really good defenses, and our guys have done a good job.

Obviously with our offense, we have seen new defenses that we haven't practiced against sometimes. Sometimes we've seen the same defense. I think this game is going to come down to adjustments made during the game. Obviously Clemson has had a lot of time to practice, we've had a lot of time to practice. Sometimes people put in something new, sometimes they don't. They may run the same stuff. We've watched every play they've run, they've watched every play we run, so we are going to be prepared.

But I think when it comes down to coaches making the proper calls, I think what we have an advantage of with



this year more than any other team I've been with, that Joe can execute those plays, and we put playmakers in space and let them play.

**Q. Dabo, this is the last drive for Tony Elliott and Jeff Scott as co-OCs. What have they meant to you up until now?**

DABO SWINNEY: Oh, they're great. I've been at Clemson 17 years, so they've been with me really the whole way. Tony played for me, was a GA for me -- not a GA but a captain for me. Jeff, when I came to Clemson, it was his senior year. He had just finished, and then so I kind of tutored and mentored him his first few years as he was getting into the business, and then he became a GA, and then when he was a GA when I was named interim, and so I promoted him right away, and that was just really based on my experience that I had had with him working with me in camps, all the -- when I was an assistant I ran the camps and clinics and coaching -- whatever went on within the program from a logistics standpoint, and I would use all the GAs and stuff, and Jeff was just always an above-and-beyond guy, and always knew if I ever got a job that he would be one of the first guys I hired. Just kind of worked out. So those guys have been with me from day one, and not just them, Brad Scott. Brad was the offensive coordinator when I came to Clemson. I'm not at Clemson if it wasn't for Brad. Obviously Tommy brought me in to interview me, but Brad had to sign off as the OC, and I've been with Brad for 17 years every step of the way.

So those guys have been great, but Tony and Jeff, it's been fun to watch them grow and develop, and then back in 2014 when we had an opening, I was able to just promote the two of them. They both deserved it, and so that's why I made them co-OCs, and they've done an amazing job, obviously, since that time.

I'm excited for Tony to be able to take it over just himself, and it will be awesome for him. And also a little bit more responsibility for Streeter, and then obviously Jeff getting this great opportunity at South Florida. Really happy for him.

**Q. Coach Swinney, when you played LSU in the Chick-Fil-a Bowl back in 2012, Brent Venables your defensive coordinator joked that a trick play for LSU was a play-action pass. Can you talk about how much LSU has changed offensively since then?**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, well, if I remember correctly, they threw two passes on that last series, so they came out of the gate, 1st down, completed it, and then they had back-to-back play actions, incomplete on one and we batted one down. That gave us a chance to -- because I was able to save time-outs and that gave us

a chance to get the ball back and go win the game.

Ironic that you bring that up.

But listen, what I remember about that team is that's as talented a team, especially defensively, that I've ever been around. I mean, I've never -- I think the entire two deep and maybe even into the three deep went to the NFL. We were very fortunate to win that game. I mean, we just made just enough plays. Our best player got hurt in the second game. But what they're doing offensively now is obviously way, way, way different. But they were a physical football team, and they still are, but yet now they're distributing the ball to so many different guys. I mean, everybody touches the ball, and it's made them fun. It's made them exciting. You can see they play with great confidence and energy, and then this quarterback is special.

**Q. Coach O, I've heard Clemson's answers about the long delay until you play. I was just curious, I hadn't heard your thoughts. Is this the right amount of time for this game? Do you feel the preparation was needed?**

ED ORGERON: You know, for us, we needed the rest. We gave our guys ample rest. We practiced four days, we gave them three days off, and then we went through a regular game week of planning. So I think it's been good.

It seems like right now everybody is getting a little antsy to play. Those things, sometimes you've got to adjust to whatever they tell you to do, so we don't blink. They tell us it's 16 days, it's 16, they tell us it's seven, it's seven. We just go.

**Q. Coach O, can you touch on the importance of Michael Divinity's return to the defense? And also Myles Brennan's status for the ballgame?**

ED ORGERON: Yeah, you know, Mike is going to help us, especially in pass rush situations. Now, there's some times, a certain situation he could be on the field on 1st down. It all depends what personnel grouping we get, but Mike is a very good player, a very good pass rusher. He brings energy to the football team. I want to give Mike credit for sticking with it. He had to take a couple of games off. He had the opportunity, he could have left to get ready for the NFL. He didn't. He practiced with the team every day. He did the thing he was supposed to, and now he's playing in the championship game.

Myles Brennan is fine, ready to go.

**Q. Kristian Fulton rarely gets talked about this season, a lot of focus on Derek Stingley. Is that in some ways a compliment to the way Kristian has**

**played this season?**

ED ORGERON: Yes, I do believe. They watch film, they look at tape, they have great receivers, man, those receivers are going to be a challenge. Obviously we feel Derek is a phenomenal player, so is Kristian. Kristian is a great story. Kristian is a great story. His family is right here from New Orleans. He competed, he was suspended, could not play. They fought the suspension, he came to practice every day. The suspension was let go, and he could play, and what a great story. Now he's playing right there from Rummel High School right here in New Orleans. So great story with Kristian. Outstanding player.

**Q. Ed, could you reflect on Michael Divinity's decision to come back, specifically knowing that he may never play another game for LSU unless you made it this far? And I would also welcome Coach Swinney's comments on a player's decision to do something like that.**

ED ORGERON: Well, first of all, for players playing throughout the year, regardless, it's your team, you play for your football team, one team, one heartbeat, that's my opinion, and my opinion only. I know the special circumstances to opt out to go to the NFL, and again, that's their personal decision. But me personally, I think I'm a team man; you stay with your team. Michael did that. Michael had a chance to go out early last year. He wanted to come back. He wanted to finish his career at LSU. He had a bump in the road. He paid his penalty, and he came back. So it tells you a lot about his character, tells you a lot about his grit and who he is.

DABO SWINNEY: I didn't hear the question. What did you say again?

**Q. On student-athletes bypassing bowl season.**

DABO SWINNEY: Yeah, ditto. I mean, I grew up in college football. I've been in college football since 1988, and I know there's a different world and everybody makes their own decisions. That doesn't mean somebody is right or wrong. But I agree. I think that me personally, I think it's team; you finish.

**Q. Coach O, I don't remember when you started the block-out-the-noise mantra, but you've had some personal hurdles and obstacles to overcome in your life. I've heard you reference your faith and Kelly's faith getting you through those. Did the block-out-the-noise mantra even leak into your personal life?**

ED ORGERON: No, I think at the beginning of my career I had to block out the negative noise. There was a lot of negative noise. I couldn't let it affect me, and there was no way I would. And I know the team would listen to stuff like that, but it was about blocking out the noise.

And then early in my career at LSU we faced some adversity, some strong adversity, and it was time to block out the noise. We can see through the adversity it made us stronger. I do believe the loss to Troy was a turning point in our program. It helped us realize what we had to get done, what we had to do as a coaching staff, as players. We could never let our hands down. We always have our hands up and ready to prepare for every game.

I think that -- so now the noise is good. Look, they're going to be on that Twitter machine. I know they will. You can't stop them, know what I'm saying? But we don't talk about individual awards. We don't talk about anything except the task at hand, and we keep everything team, and I think that helps us out.

**Q. Coach O, I wonder over the last few weeks or few months if you have reflected on when you were at Mandeville High School and your sabbatical, watching your son practice, and then all of a sudden you're here right now, kind of what that's --**

ED ORGERON: Well, now that you mention it, I haven't. I really have been focused in on the game plan and the monumental task we have tomorrow night and giving everything to the football team. But you know what, it was a good time. I didn't get the job at USC. I realize now it was for a reason. It was to come home. I got to spend a whole year. I had never seen my kids play. I went to every practice, every game. Cooked a lot of food in the backyard. Had a blast. And then was very fortunate that Coach Miles hired me. I wanted to come back to Louisiana. I wanted to be at LSU, and Coach Miles hired me, and for that I'm forever grateful.