

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Alabama

Monday, November 29, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide Henry To'oTo'o

Workout Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Henry, while we wait on questions, please give us your thoughts on the upcoming game against Georgia.

HENRY TO'OTO'O: Really excited to be in the position to be in the SEC Championship. Huge goal for our team. We get to play the No. 1 team in the country. It's going to be a huge challenge for us, and we're looking forward to it.

Q. What are the unique characteristics about the Georgia running backs when they run the football and catching the passes out of the backfield?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: They got a lot of them. They got depth at the running back position. They can do everything either out of the backfield or running the rock. They do a great job of going downhill, making space, trying to make you miss in the open field and breaking tackles.

It's going to be a huge task for us as a defense to be able to get them on the ground, and we're looking forward to it.

Q. I was just wondering if there was a moment that stood out to you in the Auburn game, something that a coach said, maybe a teammate said, where things really started to change to give you guys a chance.

HENRY TO'OTO'O: It was definitely the team as a whole going into halftime. We just had the mentality of having each other's back. Coach Saban told us to have fun. So that kind of just let the relief off of everybody and just put everybody's mindset to be able to go out there and have fun.

It's a game, and we can't have any anxiety because that makes us play slower. Obviously, having Coach letting us loose and telling us to have fun was huge.

Q. I've got to ask because Will used some of those same words throughout the season. You got rid of anxiety. Tables turned when you started having fun. For us in the media, we don't necessarily think of Nick Saban as life of the party, barrel of laughs. What does it look like when the Crimson Tide is having fun in the middle of the season?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: It's just a different vibe. Obviously, we're still going to work hard. We're still going to do our job. We're going to be mentally sound in what we have to do. But celebrating with each other, being around each other, smiling, not really stressing about what happened in the last play but focusing on the next play, and just playing the next play, that's kind of the mentality we have.

Obviously stacking those, everybody ends up having fun and getting the result that we want.

Q. Given that you guys had a loss against Texas A&M earlier in the season, what was the desperation level there in the final minutes of the Auburn game and going in and trying to pull it out in overtime knowing that the playoffs were maybe on the line?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: We didn't even think about the playoffs. We were thinking about beating Auburn. It was a huge game, the Iron Bowl, huge for the state. We don't even look forward. Just play the game that we're in and worry about the assignment we're focused on and the moment that we're in.

Q. George Pickens came back last week for Georgia. When you look at their offense and knowing what he brought in the past, what do you think that means for them to have another guy like him on the outside?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: Definitely a huge piece of the offense. He's been a great player for them. Obviously, I wish the best for him with his injury, but that's going to be a key piece for them. He's a great player.

Q. Henry, when you made the decision to transfer to Alabama, how big of a factor was it to potentially play in the game on this sort of stage?



HENRY TO'OTO'O: Obviously, when you come to Alabama, you're going to be able to compete with championships. For me, it was more being developed, being around guys that have the same common goal as me, striving for excellence every single day. That's what I was looking forward to when I came to Alabama, being around a group of guys that want to be the best, that want to compete for those championships and have the same mindset of excellence.

Q. When you're watching film, do you ever kind of just shake your head at watching how much offenses focus on Will Anderson and the fact that he still makes so many plays in spite of that?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: I mean, definitely. You've got to focus on Will. Will's a monster, and he's going to get back and cause havoc every single play no matter how many guys are blocking him. That's just the nature of Will and the dedication and hard work that he's put in throughout the season and his entire life.

Q. Do you feel like the Iron Bowl was the best performance for the defense so far this year? Do you feel like you're playing the best at this time of the year?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: I definitely think that we probably played our best game on defense. We've seen spreads of it throughout the season. We'd put a quarter together, a half together, but we still didn't play a full 60 minutes. I think we were able to do that last game.

Moving on forward, I think it's just important that we carry that on in practice, how we practiced last week, and just carry it on from here on out to the game.

Q. Henry, what does it feel like going into this game as an underdog? Georgia's favored by a touchdown. That doesn't happen a lot at Alabama. What does that seem like to you?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: You go in, it's a football game. We're there to play a full 60 minutes and however much longer that we need to if necessary. We don't really look at that. We're here to play a full 60-minute game.

Q. Another question about your decision to transfer. When you go back to your decision, I'm sure you kind of had to envision what it could be like. How has it been? Has it been everything you thought it would be? Has there been anything maybe different than what you might have expected on the front end?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: No, it's definitely been everything I expected. It's honestly been a blessing to be here, being around the best of the best -- the best players, the best coaches. There's honestly no more that I could ask of coming here and being in the position that I'm in right now surrounded by these guys and the coaches.

I've loved it ever since I got here, and it's been an honor and a blessing to be able to wear the A.

Q. I talked to you early in the season on Zoom, and you said that you were still keeping in touch with a lot of your former Tennessee teammates. They wound up having a better year than a lot of folks expected given all the people that left through the portal. How much did you follow them, and were you surprised that they had the season they had?

HENRY TO'OTO'O: Definitely proud of the guys. I wasn't really watching them this year. I was kind of focused on what we had to do, but when I had a chance to sit back -- whenever we had an early game, to see them play, proud of their performance, and I'm just happy for them.

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