

# Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Georgia vs Alabama

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

**Alabama Crimson Tide**

**Nick Saban**

**Bryce Young**

**Jordan Battle**

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama - 41, Georgia - 24

**THE MODERATOR:** We're joined by the head coach of the Alabama Crimson Tide, the 2021 SEC champions, Nick Saban. We'll go ahead and ask Coach Saban for an opening comment, and then we'll take questions.

**NICK SABAN:** I'm extremely proud of our coaching staff, our players, the entire organization. We've probably had to overcome more adversity than this team has had to endure and have more resiliency from a competitive standpoint than probably most of the teams we've ever had. I'm really proud of them for that.

Also, the competitive character that they have. Last week at Auburn to come back and win the game, to come into this game that nobody thought we had a chance to win and really go out there and perform well in the game against a really good team.

Georgia should be congratulated on the great season that they had. To go undefeated is really something of significance.

SEC Championship Game is always a tough game. You look back through the years, we played 1 and 2 a couple times, 1 and 3 a couple times. So it's not easy, and I think that our players really prepared well for this game and executed extremely well, fixed a lot of problems that we had.

So just a tremendous victory, team victory. Defense got a couple of turnovers, couple of fourth-down stops that were



very important. Offensive line did a really good job of blocking their pressures. Gave Bryce the opportunity to operate, which he did a magnificent job of all night. So great team win for us.

**Q. After the loss to Texas A&M, you said your team was no longer viewed as elite. What did tonight do in terms of regaining respect?**

**NICK SABAN:** Well, I think it gave us an opportunity to have a two-game season. We have a two-game season now, I hope. That's what we're going to work for. That's what we want to do.

These players have worked hard all year long. I think they deserved a lot of respect for what they've been able to accomplish and what they've been able to do. But at the same time, how are you going to look forward? I'm sure Georgia will get in the playoffs again still, and they deserve it. They're a very good team.

So it's how do we move forward? We've created an opportunity for ourselves where we have a chance to play in the College Football Playoff. How are we going to prepare? How are we going to be committed to do the things we need to do? Obviously, we've lost a lot of really good football players this year on our team. John Metchie is probably going to be out now, and we have a couple other guys that may be injured. It creates a lot of opportunity for a lot of other players. Hopefully, we'll be able to get them to step up.

So really, really pleased and proud of this team creating an opportunity to be in the playoff, to play in the playoffs. This is always kind of our goal. So I was really, really pleased and happy for the players to see them be able to accomplish that goal, especially the way they played tonight.

**THE MODERATOR:** We're now joined by quarterback Bryce Young, who's the MVP tonight, also Jordan Battle. Gentleman, we'll start with Bryce. If you can give an opening comment. Your reaction to tonight's game. Bryce?

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, it was obviously a huge win for us. I'm super, super excited. Super happy for the team. Kind of what Coach is saying, just creating that opportunity for us. We know there's a long road ahead. We're hoping to get into that two-team season. We've got that two-game season to prepare for. It's a good one. We've got the 24-hour rule, and we get back at it.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan, your thoughts on tonight's game?

JORDAN BATTLE: I feel like it was a great game. I feel like we mentally prepared all throughout the week. We had some great practices, and it carried over to the game.

The main thing right now is just staying humble, not getting too big headed. We want to be the No. 1 team, but we've got to stay on track and prepare for this hopefully two-game season.

**Q. Nick and Bryce, what changed in that second quarter offensively where things were struggling a little bit in the first, but you exploded in the second?**

BRYCE YOUNG: I think it was just as a whole, obviously wanting to get off to a better start than we did. I think we all stepped up, and we all answered the bell. We all understood what was at stake. We all understood that we needed to step up. So I'm blessed to have the teammates I do, that when our back's kind of against the wall, we understand we need to have the type of situation, and we kind of got our spark and started moving.

I'm happy we started getting going when we did.

NICK SABAN: I actually think I agree 100 percent with what Bryce said, but I think sometimes when you start a game, the speed of the game gets you a little bit. The speed of their defense, maybe a couple times their backs got outside of us because it probably happened a little faster than what we practiced and what we're used to.

I think once you sort of get used to the speed of the game, like their pass rush and all that, I think you start operating a little bit better. Our efficiency got much better on the offensive line as well as on defense.

**Q. Coach Saban, you talked about giving Bryce a lot of time to operate today. What are some things that got the pass protection better this week from the Iron Bowl to today?**

NICK SABAN: I think the offensive line really answered the challenge that we put to them in terms of them being more physical in this game. They probably prepared a little

better than I've ever seen them all season long in terms of studying the guys they had to block and the things they had to do.

I think we did a little bit better job in terms of having some protection multiples that maybe we didn't always get as many guys out in the pass routes, but we also gave the quarterback time to operate.

Sometimes those multiples can affect how you pressure on defense, and I think all those things probably contribute to us getting in a little better rhythm as the game wore on.

**Q. Nick, you had mentioned before the game you weren't sure how players would respond to being underdogs in this game. Just how do you think they responded, and how much was that used as motivation?**

NICK SABAN: I think what these guys really wanted to gain was more respect. Not just the fact that they were underdogs because I think we had a tremendous amount of respect for Georgia, their team, and what they accomplished. But you guys gave us a lot of really positive rat poison. The rat poison that you usually give us is usually fatal, but the rat poison that you put out there this week was yummy (Laughter).

**Q. I don't know how to follow that. Bryce, how much -- usually the offensive line only gets attention from us when they give up seven sacks or something, but how much did those guys impact this game against that defensive front?**

BRYCE YOUNG: That was everything. Obviously, that's a great front, a great defense, and we knew that coming in. I think they just kept hearing it and hearing it. Like Coach said, they accepted the challenge, and they really stepped up to the plate in the biggest moment in the season.

All the success that we have offensively, it always starts up front. So I'm glad that you said that. You only hear about -- people try to only say negative things about offensive lines in general and about our O-line, but you don't understand that every time there's a positive play, whether it's the run game, the pass game, whatever it is, nothing starts without our O-line. They did an amazing job today. They stepped up to the plate. And I'm happy to have the guys that I do.

**Q. Nick and Bryce, why were you guys able to have so much success against Georgia's defense today and make them do things they haven't seen them do much this season?**

BRYCE YOUNG: Yeah, I think, again, that was a really good defense. It had really good players, great coaching. I think it was just about how we prepared. We kind of wanted all as an offense take that challenge.

Like Coach is saying, you hear the rat poison, and it was kind of against us this week. We took preparation very seriously, and we all understood the magnitude of the moment, and we all stepped up. So it was everybody, all 11. It was the coaches doing a great job calling plays, managing situations.

So it was a team effort, and we know it was a great win, and we have to keep on improving.

NICK SABAN: I still think that it started up front. Their front has been so dominant in terms of pressuring people, kind of taking them out of their game. You could never, ever really get the ball out very successfully on a very consistent basis, which is a tribute to them, their scheme, their players are very good.

It still goes back to the offensive line did a very, very good job of allowing us to get the ball down the field and our receivers to be able to work in the passing game, which we knew was going to be something that was going to be really important in this game. So it really started up front.

**Q. Coach Saban, you had mentioned earlier in the season this team was young and maybe a little inexperienced and immature at times, and you kind of had some choice words for them on some of your radio shows earlier. I'm curious if you could speak to the growth you've seen now. What specific areas have you seen this team change the most over the course of the season to this point?**

NICK SABAN: Well, I think this team has shown tremendous resiliency, which I talked about before, to overcome adversity. We've had a lot of -- we were young, and we actually got younger because we lost players. That gave opportunities to other players. And all those guys have stepped up very nicely for us.

But the big thing I like about these guys is they responded the right way when they got beat. Nobody ever really thinks when I say sometimes it's not a bad thing to get beat. Jordan mentioned the word humility. Having respect for winning and what it takes to win and what it takes to prepare to win are all things that are really important. Sometimes when you win 19 games in a row, you lose a little respect for that.

That's why I think from the Texas A&M game on, we've been able to grow as a team. We haven't always been the

most consistent, but at times when we played well like we're capable of playing, we've been very, very good, and we're just trying to get that on a little more consistent basis. I think the players understand that.

These guys, you can coach guys, but they don't have to take coaching, and these guys have all done a marvelous job, in my opinion, of doing what the coaches ask them to do, trusting and believing in the system, trusting and believing in each other. And I think that's probably where we've made sort of the greatest strides in becoming a team.

**Q. This is for Jordan: After the Arkansas game, you all were taking a lot of heat, especially in the secondary. You and DeMarcco specifically, the last two weeks in the Iron Bowl against Auburn and then again today, communication-wise, you guys seemed to be on the same page, and you guys made some big plays in this game tonight. Can you speak to your relationship with him? And just you guys as a unit back in the secondary and how you've really grown the last few weeks.**

JORDAN BATTLE: I think we did a great job communicating and being on the same page. Like I said this week in practice, that was the main thing, preparing mentally because physically we've got all the intangibles, all the everything.

So just being on the same page every play is a big key factor in the game because, when you give up big plays, that's on us. I think we did a great job focusing on having one mind today. Actually, we talked about that in chapel before the game, having one mind.

I want to give a big shoutout to Jeremiah Castille, former player at Alabama. Thank you.

**Q. Nick, you talked about this past week in the Auburn game on that drive, the final drive that Bryce, some of the biggest plays he made were when he just got rid of the ball to extend it. The touchdowns were easy to spot in this game, but what plays stood out to you the most that he made tonight that helped you guys get this win?**

NICK SABAN: Well, there was a lot of big plays in the game, which was something that we wanted to -- I think that the Jameson Williams long touchdown in the beginning of the game, they came down and played two trap. The safety was supposed to trap him. We got through him. I think that changed the momentum of the game a little bit for us, so that was really important.

But from a coach's perspective, to be able to manage the last drive when we needed to take the air out of the ball and not keep giving them the ball back, which our defense was really, really tired when we played a lot of plays in the third quarter, that was huge. A lot of those were four-yard gains, five-yard gains, eight-yard gains. So they weren't the big plays, but those are things that win games when you can take the air out of it at the end of the game and don't give the other team an opportunity to get back in the game.

**Q. This is for Coach Saban and Jordan: What did you guys do to really fluster Stetson Bennett tonight and obviously force him into a couple of huge mistakes?**

JORDAN BATTLE: I think the main thing in this game was our disguises. We put in a lot of disguises this week. That was the big thing. Just have his eyes wandering around before the play. I think we did a good job on the back end and linebackers stemming and disguising. So I think that was a big part of the game.

NICK SABAN: I think that you try to change the picture as much as you can and make the quarterback try to make decisions after he gets the ball in his hand. Stetson Bennett to me is very instinctive, very good player. If he knows what the picture is -- and I couple times tonight when he knew what the picture was, that's when he made plays, and several big plays.

So I think us changing the picture on him a little bit helped. We have to play the ball better in the deep part of the field. We've had a couple of those the last couple of weeks that are things that we need to do better, but all in all, I think that was probably the one thing that helped it the most.

Pass rush always helps you. If you get good pass rush. We affected him in the pocket. He scrambled some, which is -- you hate, but you're also affecting a guy when you do that because you're not throwing the ball on time.

**Q. You know how difficult it is to run the ball on Georgia. You guys seem to admit to it, and I know some of it was Bryce running, but you averaged about 4 1/2 yards a carry. What was the key to that tonight?**

NICK SABAN: I think Bryce's scrambles probably contribute to that as much as anything. B. Rob being able to play in the game and grind out some tough yards. I thought Trey did a good job. Again, it's got to go back to the offensive line, being a little more physical in this game against a very physical front, big, athletic guys, quick on the edges.

So we need to continue to try to develop a balanced attack

to that we don't put ourselves behind the eight ball down and distance-wise. I think that's when we're most effective.

**Q. For Nick or the players, could you foresee this coming? Was there any indication throughout this week that a performance like this maybe was coming this weekend?**

BRYCE YOUNG: I'd say we always have faith and confidence in each other. As a player, we always have faith and confidence in the coaching staff. So for us, I don't think we ever really blinked or wavered. We understood the work that was necessary during the week. We understood what we had to do to prepare.

But we always have confidence in each other. We always believe in each other and push each other. I think we were all confident going in.

NICK SABAN: I think from my perspective, when I think the players have the right mindset in terms of how they go through the week and how that leads up to the game, then their focus, their preparation are all things that created habits that are going to help them play better in the game. When we do that, I think we usually perform well.

Did I foresee this happening? Sometimes you do all that, and the other team makes some plays too. But I think we had the right mindset in this game in our preparation for the game.

**Q. Talk about the complementary guys. You talked about John Metchie being injured. In the second half, Slade Bolden, Traeshon Holden, and Ja'Corey Brooks took advantage of opportunities to help the offense win the game.**

NICK SABAN: I think we have some young guys that are going to get opportunities now. They certainly -- Ja'Corey Brooks did it last week and this week. And I think Slade prayed really well. But I also think that a lot of that comes from Bryce having trust and confidence in those guys as well because a good quarterback can make receivers look good, and those guys have to run good routes and do things the right way to get open.

But I think his faith, trust, and confidence in those guys have helped their development tremendously.

THE MODERATOR: Bryce, talk about the variety of guys who helped you on offense this year.

BRYCE YOUNG: There's a lot of guys who stepped up with people being down, with just having to have rotation. I think Coach spoke to it well with the confidence that I have



in them. That's confidence in seeing how they work throughout the week, seeing how they work in the off-season.

So for me, even when it is the next man up and it's not someone that might be particularly familiar to the field, I see how they work throughout the week, and the guys that stepped up, I had complete confidence, complete trust and faith in them. We kind of built that rapport through how hard they work.

For those guys to step up in a moment like we did, it was definitely big for us.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan, from a defensive side, your teammates?

JORDAN BATTLE: Yeah, it starts in practice. Good on good periods. You have the younger guys come in sometimes when guys go down in practice. They come in and give their 100 percent effort every time. Guys like Ja'Corey who played tonight, guys like Trey Sanders, they practice hard, and they come in the game, and it's easy or it's a good task or a well task for them. It's something they've seen before because they're going against a good defense in practice.

I think, when they come out in the game, they have confidence because of how hard we practiced this past week.

NICK SABAN: Thank you. I'd like to thank the media for all the interest that you create in college football and college football players. These guys work hard. I know I had a little rant a couple weeks ago about how hard these guys work and they're student-athletes and they have homework and have to go to class.

But what you do to bring attention to what they accomplish and what they do, I think is really appreciated. I want you to know we appreciate it more than you probably realize. Thank you.

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