

Southeastern Conference Football Championship Game: Alabama vs Georgia

Saturday, December 2, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide
Coach Nick Saban
Jalen Milroe
Dallas Turner

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama 27, Georgia 24

THE MODERATOR: We'll take an opening statement.

NICK SABAN: I think I couldn't be prouder of a bunch of guys on a team that has come so far from where we were second, third game of the season. I think this is a great example for a lot of people who want to be successful in terms of the perseverance that these guys showed, the character they had to overcome adversity, the resiliency that they played with.

They're truly a team. Everybody's together. Everybody trusts and respects the principles and values of the organization and program and buy into them. They're all responsible for their own self-determination, which means they can go do their job.

So I couldn't be prouder of a bunch of guys, the progress that they made, the way we compete.

Georgia has an outstanding team - outstanding team. I think our team wanted to prove all year. There was a lot of naysayers early in the year. We wanted to show people what we could accomplish and what we could do. There wasn't a better stage to do it, to play the No. 1 team in the country who had won 29 games in a row.

That's the end point that says you really got where you wanted to go, you were able to go out there and compete in a game, play for 60 minutes, which it took all 60 minutes, and to win the SEC championship, which is in my opinion really, really significant.



It means a lot to me. This is a tough conference. I mean, we have, like, five teams that are ranked in the top 15. We got to play each other. I think we played four out of the five.

I know you're going to ask me, so I might as well just get to it. Having anticipation is something that's important to being a good coach. Not that I think I'm a good coach (smiling).

But the message that I would send is, we won the SEC. We beat the No. 1 team in the country, which everybody thought on the committee was the No. 1 team in the country. They won 29 straight games.

If we needed to do something to pass the eye test, I guess that probably contributed to it significantly. If you really want the four best teams to compete, the four most deserving teams that have progressed throughout the season. We're not the same team we were when we played Texas. We're not the same team when we played South Florida.

I don't think we should be considered as that team right now. I think people should look at the whole body of work in terms of what the team was able to accomplish and what they were able to do. I think this team is one of the four best teams, one of the teams that's deserving to be in the Playoff.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You obviously made your case for the Playoff. What would your response be if the committee disagrees?

NICK SABAN: I disagreed with them before. I disagreed last year. So I'll respect 'em. I know they have a tough job. I know there's a lot of good teams.

But I'm just speaking up for our guys on our team who have busted their butt all year long to accomplish what they've accomplished. I think that needs to be recognized.

Q. Jalen, Coach has been very complimentary of your



season and progression. What can you say about his coaching job?

JALEN MILROE: The biggest thing as players that we can do best is be coachable. Coach Saban, the biggest thing I want to do is be a sponge for all information because end of the day all of our coaches are pushing us to be successful.

To speak about our coaching staff, man, they push us every single day. We set short-term and long-term goals before the season started. We have to be coachable, be receptive to all coaches. Find ways to improve and get 1% better each and every day.

NICK SABAN: I think our coaches did a fantastic job with these players. Fantastic job of helping guys develop and improve. I really appreciate our staff of people who contributed to the success of this team. It's not about me. It's about everybody on the team who contributed to the success of this team: players and coaches alike.

Q. Jalen, you guys get the ball back, they cut it 20-17, all the momentum was on Georgia's side, what is going through your mind? How do you stay calm to engineer the drive?

JALEN MILROE: Singular focus. That's the biggest motto we had going into the game, singular focus and doing our job.

It's all about response. The biggest thing that we have on this team that contributes to any success is the FAMILY acronym: Forget about me, I love you. I think we do a really good job about that. It was about singular focus each and every drive.

Q. Dallas, what has it meant for you to have Coach Steele as a defensive coordinator? What has he brought to this team from start to finish?

DALLAS TURNER: The main thing that Coach Steele has instilled in us is holding us accountable every day in practice, having the right practice habits, going in practice how you play. Everything that we do before the games, everything, it's just all a display of what we do in practice. You just practice how you play.

Q. Coach Saban, when Georgia played Georgia Tech last week, Tech got a couple of touchdowns on a fake toss with the quarterback cutting it up the middle, just like the play Jalen ran at the end to kill the clock. Anything from that game scouting-wise leading you to believe that play would be successful?

NICK SABAN: I can't say it exactly came from that game. We watch almost every game the team plays the whole season. You're always looking for things that people had success against 'em, things that created issues for them.

That's something that I think our offensive staff did a really good job of. To have some of those plays in the bag when we needed to take the air out of it at the end of the game and not give them the ball back.

Q. A year from now the likes of Georgia and Alabama, even Texas, will be playing for seeding probably in this type of game, maybe even for a bye. Can this moment ever be like this where it's so intense, so much on the line? The SEC championship is important, but we're kind of at the end of an era tonight.

NICK SABAN: Yeah, I've been through a few of these eras where we didn't have a national championship game, where two teams played, now four teams play, now 12 teams are going to play.

But I think when we have 12 teams, you all still will make a case for 12 more. That's kind of your job (smiling). Just like the basketball tournament. I mean, how many teams they put in, 68? Then you have a two-hour show on who else should have got in or who got in that shouldn't. That's always going to be. That's part of it. That's what you do to create interest, which I appreciate.

There's one other thing I want to mention I appreciate. We had two hellacious drives in this game, all right, that this guy contributed to, and some receivers made some great catches, too. Right before the half, scoring right before the half, when they got 20-17, which you already mentioned, that was a great drive, a necessary drive no doubt, but a great drive. A lot of plays made in those two drives.

Q. Coach Saban, what can you tell us about the status of Kool-Aid and assess the play of the secondary today.

NICK SABAN: Other than the one big play that we gave up, we didn't play well early. The first drive, we were sort of out of sorts. We settled down and played pretty well. We gave up the one big play over on their sidelines, which led to a field goal. Then we got really bad field position on the punt return. It wasn't a very good punt. Guy did a good job. Put two returners back so they could get the ball fielded. They hit us.

I thought they did a pretty good job. I think Georgia has a really good quarterback and really good skill guys. I thought they did a pretty good job of limiting their big plays.

Q. And Kool-Aid?

NICK SABAN: Kool-Aid has a concussion. He goes in concussion protocol. We'll figure out how bad it is, how long it takes, when he'll be clear. All the testing mechanisms that we have right now I think are really beneficial to players not getting multiple concussions.

Hopefully we'll do our -- our medical staff has always done a really good job of protecting the players when these things occur.

Q. A couple of weeks ago you said this team has been taking years off of your life. The last couple weeks, have they done anything to help you find the fountain of youth, especially with tonight's win?

NICK SABAN: You know how tired I am right now (laughter)? I mean, I'm happy as hell we won. My speech in the locker room after the game was one word: celebrate. I had just enough left in me to do the dance, just enough (smiling).

Q. Jalen, this team has been talked about today as improved so much in the season. You felt like people kicked you to the curb. Now that you won the SEC title, do you have like some of that doubt it still out there?

JALEN MILROE: The biggest thing about this team is we know there's unfinished business. We want to improve and get 1% better each and every day.

We have to acknowledge the journey we've been on. I can only be just complimentary of the guys in the locker room because end of the day when people doubted us, we continued to work hard. We just trusted in the coaching staff to continue to push us each and every day. We have a good leader like Dallas here right next to me that pushes the offense as we compete on the practice field.

There's a lot of elements that allows our team to keep pushing towards the final step. But we're nowhere near the finish line. We're constantly trying to get better.

Q. Coach and Jalen, Isaiah Bond had four of his five catches on that last touchdown drive. Talk about the way he's been so clutch this entire year, specifically against Auburn and tonight.

NICK SABAN: Go ahead.

JALEN MILROE: Contribute it to practice habits. When you practice well at practice, we implement different things you can do in the game. I think that's the biggest thing that

correlates to the game, is how well he practices.

He plays with a lot of speed. Also, he does well with the game plan. So Coach Rees just game plans very well with I.B. He continues to work hard. He's a great resource for our offense to keep us going.

NICK SABAN: He's been great all year. I think the one word that I would say is he's very consistent in practice as well as the game. If you're a quarterback, you want to be able to trust your guys, that they're going to run the right route at the right depth at the right time and show up at the right place. He does a great job of that. He's got great speed, so that's always helpful.

Q. Dallas and Jalen, what would be your message to the committee about why you deserve to be in the Playoff, or do you let what you did on the field do the talking?

DALLAS TURNER: Honestly, I don't even like to talk too much. I just like to perform on the field. Clearly we had a very good game tonight, a very big win. We just let our playing do the talks for ourselves.

JALEN MILROE: I've got something to say. Georgia No. 1, right? You beat the No. 1 team, what do you consider us? What does that consider us?

At the end of the day, that's out of our reach. Biggest thing we got to do is trust the process, keep getting better. But we beat the best team in the nation considerably, so what do I consider us?

Q. Can we see the dance, one? Two, the play of Trey Amos, the opportunity that he had?

NICK SABAN: He's been playing for us all year. Trey has been playing in dime all year long. We consider him a starter. When we moved Terry on the star and play him on third down, he's done a really good job. He did a really good job tonight.

He's been playing for us all year, but we have a lot of confidence in him. He did a really good job tonight.

I can't remember two questions at a time.

Q. Can we see the dance?

NICK SABAN: Oh, no (smiling). Bad... It's bad. I mean, ask them. It's bad.

Q. We sat in here two years ago and talked about yummy rat poison. How does it taste this year? Has



there been a value of external factors getting into the team?

NICK SABAN: I think that's an interesting point that you bring up because one of the motivating factors for this team all year long is they wanted to prove who they were because of the criticism that they got.

Now, this validates. Winning the SEC, beating Georgia, the No. 1 team, kind of validates who they are.

The next challenge is how do you deal with success, how do you deal with success? That will be the next challenge for this team because I think, I agree with Jalen, that we should acknowledge the fact and celebrate the fact that we won the SEC championship. That's significant.

But now, if we have an opportunity to do something else, what's going to be our internal motivation to want to continue to be successful?

Q. Coach, you discussed the value of the tight end in that matchup. What did you do today to minimize No. 19, Brock Bowers, of Georgia?

NICK SABAN: After the first drive, we played almost all split safeties. The one McConkey caught to the one-yard line, we were in the middle-of-the-field coverage. Middle-of-the-field coverage didn't do us much good today. That's where we played in that first drive, so we played split safeties the whole time.

When you do that, you get more guys, somebody under him, somebody over him, somebody banging on them, and you're not covering them one on one.

But to do that, you got to be able to stop the run. Our guys did a really good job with all that split safety stuff of stopping the run today so we could play it.

We went into the game thinking we couldn't play it. But after the first drive, I said, Can't get any worse, let's just start playing it, because that was the plan. That was the plan that we wanted to take 'em away. The guys did a good job of executing it.

Q. Could you speak a little bit about the progression of Emmanuel Henderson as a player over this year.

NICK SABAN: Emmanuel has really developed nicely as a receiver. He's got great speed. He really didn't play that position in high school, so sometimes it takes those guys a little longer to develop the confidence, the skill set. But he has done a phenomenal job.

He's been a good special teams player for us. He got hurt early in the season so he missed some time or he would have been a much more significant -- would have made a much more significant impact I think this year. But he's been very valuable for us all year long.

THE MODERATOR: Coach and players, congratulations. Thank you for attending and appreciate everybody being here.

NICK SABAN: Thank you. I do appreciate what you all do. You create a lot of interest. I know sometimes I get criticized for being a guy that doesn't like the press, but I really do like you. I like what you do.

You do a lot to give our players a lot of positive self-gratification, and you also create a lot of interest in our game. I think that's important. So thank you for that.

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