

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Nick Saban

Press Conference



NICK SABAN: That was quite a fanfare, I appreciate that. Great to see everyone. Hope you've had a wonderful summer. We've certainly had our share of good times, family times, this summer. SEC Media Day is one of my favorites because this means we are closer to football season. This is kind of the unofficial kickoff for football season from my standpoint and maybe from yours as well. This is the first time we've been in Nashville, and I think this is a great place and certainly in the heart of SEC country and a great venue for all of us.

I think you all know that we went on vacation to Italy, just to clear that up, that was our 50th wedding anniversary gift to Ms. Terry from some of our friends, which I successfully got out of for two years. Failed to be able to get out of it this year. Didn't really want to go.

But it was a fabulous time. Fabulous. And I would recommend anybody do it, lots of good culture, great architecture, art, a lot of good things to see.

And I thought nobody would know us anywhere that we went, and we got 'Roll Tided' everywhere we went.

Even in the Ferrari plant, we had a tour of the Ferrari plant and these cats don't even speak English and we're getting Roll Tide. I guess we must have a pretty decent brand, I'm talking about the University of Alabama now, but it was an enjoyable trip and I'd recommend it to anyone.

We've had a very good off-season with our team. Good off-season program. Good spring practice. Very good summer. The team is taking shape. We are still evolving as a team. Lots of new players, some experienced players to go with some of the good, young players that we have in the program. New coaches evolving into the system, and trying to get the young players on our team to be able to develop in the system and so far the players are very enthusiastic and very committed to developing the talent that we have on our team.

I think that that's a critical piece of sort of growing your team and developing your team is that you can take the talent that you have and create the right mindset to go with that talent because talent alone is not going to help them be successful because they are heading someplace in the SEC as well as in the NFL if they have the opportunity to get there, where everybody has talent.

So if you don't have the right mindset to go with it, then you're never going to bring that talent to fruition, nor will you be able to create the kind of competitive spirit that you need and we are talking about having resiliency and perseverance and ability to overcome adversity, and discipline to pay attention to detail and do the little things right.

One thing that kind of goes with all that is humility. When you have humility, you always think there's a better way. So you are always searching. You're always listening. You're always trying to learn. There for you very well very good relationships with teachers, parents and coaches and people who are trying to help you and you have gratitude and you appreciate that, and that creates for great relationships on your team. And if you just think you're really, really good and you're better than everybody else, sometimes you don't take those and develop those relationships with the same amount of gratitude and you don't have the same kind of team chemistry that goes with players and coaches alike.

So we want to stay focused on the process of what we need to do to play winning football at every position. And I'm not here to create expectations for our team. Lots of people will do that. But expectations in some way are a premeditated way to create disappointment. I think you can look at it in your life and that's why I say we need to say process-oriented, not focused on the outcome, but focused on the things that we need to do to get the outcome that we want, and you know, if you have high expectations for what you want to accomplish and it doesn't work out, it makes you focus on the outcome and it doesn't work out and you're very disappointed.

So we would rather stay focused on what we need to do to get the outcome to be the best we can be as a team at



every position and with every player. We've had really good success in a lot of areas in our program but one that I'd like to mention is academics. You know, you're really going to college to prepare yourself for the day you can't play football. That's what we always tell our players. So we want our players to have the personal development that's going to help them create the right mindset to be successful in whatever they choose to do, and we also want them to develop a career off the field, which I think is very important to long-term success because NFL stands for Not for Long. There's only a three-and-a-half, four-year life expectancy in that league.

So it's important for players to develop a career off the field, and we've had a tremendous amount of success, I think we are in the Top-5 in the country in APR at 995. Our team for the second time in the history of University of Alabama has over a 3.0 grade point average and we have like 650 players that have already earned degrees since 2007 and we have been there.

So this is one of the challenges, I think, to have a program that creates tremendous value for players on and off the field. The three players that we have here today, JC Latham, Kool-Aid McKinstry, Dallas Turner, all are on track to graduate. You know, they are all really good players at their position. They have been great ambassadors for the University of Alabama in terms of the class and the character that they have and we are very, very proud of who they are as people, students and players.

The NFL Draft was pretty good to us again this year. We had ten players drafted, three first-round guys. We've had 123 players drafted in our time at Alabama and 44 first round draft picks, and this is part of what we want to do, too: Help players develop a career on the field and that's really important to us.

We have some new coaches that I've been asked about, two new coordinators, which it's always the most difficult to replace people on your staff that are in positions of leadership. But Tommy Rees is a bright young guy who has done a really, really good job, players relate well to him. He relates well to them. He's a good presenter. He's very bright and understands the game conceptually very, very well and has done a really good job of implementing our offense and adding to it things that I think will benefit us in the future.

Kevin Steele was a long-time defensive coordinator in this league and has coached with us a couple times before, and he knows the system. He knows what's expected. And Rob Bala is a new inside linebackers coach.

Our team has worked really hard. I'm encouraged by the

progress that the team has made. I think every team has to create its own identity by what they do in terms of how they come together as a team, how people buy into the principles and values of the organization, respect and trust those things, respect and trust each other, have positive energy about how they go about their work and how they impact and affect other people, and everybody has got to learn to be responsible for their own self-determination. You know, football is a great game, and it takes responsibility to do my job but you also have a responsibility to the other ten guys to do your job because they are all depending on you. So we are all depending on each other. Football is one of the most inter-dependent games of any game played where everybody has to do their job for things to work out like you want it to work out.

So I think we've got some good, young talent on our team. I think we have got some experience on our team. I think we have a pretty good mindset on our team. Our team seems to be pretty hungry this year and motivated, like all teams, we probably have some issues that are created by graduations and people leaving the program. Obviously the No. 1 that people are most interested in is the quarterback. We had a great quarterback, won a Heisman trophy. Bryce did a fantastic job for us.

So we have three guys that are competing for that position right now. All of those players are getting better, and it's important for us that all those players get better. I don't think anybody has actually separated themselves yet to this with the and I don't think it's something that we are trying to rush.

I used the analogy earlier, Grandma Saban used to bake the best cakes in the world, and I used to stand by the oven when I was a kid and say, "When is this cake going to be done? When is this cake going to be done?"

She said, "If I don't let it go through and take it out of the oven too soon, it will turn to mush and it won't be a really good cake."

So I think we have to sort of let this develop and make sure we let the cake bake until somebody separates themselves and all the players are working hard. They all have a good attitude. They are all competing well.

At other positions on offense, we probably, I think, are improved. The receivers are same guys, older, more experienced. We have got good runners, offensive line, doesn't have a lot of experience returning but we have some really good young players who have developed nicely. Tight end, we have a transfer that can help us there and some young guys that are developing.



Defensively, we have got six starters back, all five guys that left got drafted, so challenging to replace all those guys, but again, I'm pleased with the young people that we have in the program that can develop, even though they may lack some experience. I think there are properly guys that can do a good job for us. We do have both specialists back. Special teams has been an asset for us, and certainly we want to continue to be able to affect games and impact games with how we play on special teams, and having two good specialists certainly is a good start toward that.

With that, I'll allow you to ask questions.

Q. By one preseason magazine metric, you have one of the least-experienced returning teams in the country, senior starters percentage of yards coming back. Are you aware of that? Does it matter? Should it matter?

NICK SABAN: Can you repeat the question for me?

Q. You've got one of least-experienced teams returning, just based on starters, returning yards, stuff like that, by one preseason magazine, in the country. Does that matter?

NICK SABAN: Well, I think experience matters, I really do, but I also think that when you have young players who are hungry and have great energy and enthusiasm, that's helpful to the team chemistry as well.

When you have as many people that go out for the Draft early and I'm not complaining about that. I love it when we have players that are good enough to go out for the Draft. You're going to sort of always have a young team because you have four or five starters who would be coming back that all of a sudden are not back.

I think one of the things that I tell all of our coaches and the players, our entire team, it's really important that we develop the young players on our team because we are always going to have a young team and those guys need to be able to contribute early on.

So their development is critical to us having a successful team, and we do have some good, young players. I think the challenge is for us as coaches to be able to help those guys develop to where they can play winning football.

Q. First of all, I want to congratulate you with your 16th appearance representing Alabama at SEC media days. You now have the record for one coach at a single institution in SEC Media Day's history. When you think about your tenure at Alabama, what are you

most proud of and what is the recipe for future success while avoiding complacency?

NICK SABAN: Well, the thing that I would be most proud of is the fact that we have a program that has helped players have a chance to be more successful in life because they were involved in a program. That's the No. 1 thing, because that's the No. 1 goal, right, that we have in our program and that I personally have for the players in our program. We are going to continue to do that.

To answer the second part of your question is, every season is a new challenge. It's like you took a new job. You have returning players that need to develop new roles on the team, whether it's leadership or play a new position. And you have a lot of young players who are coming in that you need to develop to help them be able to play at a certain level so that you can accomplish some of the goals and aspirations that the team has for themselves in terms of what they want to accomplish, individually and collectively.

And I never look back at the past. It's always about the future. Most of the things that I remember about the past are the games we didn't win, the National Championship games that we lost, the games that we lost a year ago on the last play of the game, and how that impacted our chances to have a successful season and accomplish the goals that the players wanted to accomplish and how we could have impacted that in a more positive way.

So I'm always looking for a better way, and always looking at what can we do to be better and that's what we continue to try to focus on in the future and that's a challenge that we have with every team and this team will be no different.

Q. You've of course replaced coordinators before. What are the particular processes and challenges that go into giving these players and coaches to mesh in time for this season?

NICK SABAN: I think the most important thing is probably relationships. When you're a coordinator, you're in a leadership position for the players on that side of the ball. So to have good relationships in terms of how you present, how you motivate, and the players trusting and respecting in the things that you're trying to implement in the things that we do; that they trust and believe that that's going to help them be successful, so that's No. 1.

No. 2, we have tried to mitigate the changes that a new coordinator would create for players by trying to keep the same system, and that's a little challenging, sometimes when you have new coaches because they have to learn a certain amount to be able to implement the system so it

doesn't change completely for the players.

But I'm really pleased with the two new coordinators that we have. Kevin Steele obviously has been with us before, so he understands the program and the expectation.

Tommy Rees is one of the brightest young guys that I've seen in a long time in this business and he's been a great addition and brought a lot of positives to the offensive side of the ball in terms of his ideas and how he relates to players, how he presents to players, his energy and enthusiasm on the field has been contagious. I think I see a great trust in our players with Tommy and what he tries to do from a leadership standpoint on offense.

Q. You've been adamant about player accountability as it pertains to their actions both on and off the field. You've had a high-profile suspension in Tony Mitchell, and it appears he's been able to earn reinstatement. Can you talk about what players can do to regain the trust of the staff after these incidents off the field?

NICK SABAN: I think there's probably some occasion where most of us in this room, including myself, did something in our life that probably wasn't a great choice and a great decision. And we always want to try to create a path for players who have made a mistake to get a second chance, but also to help educate them on what they can learn from the poor decision or judgment that they actually made. And hopefully, those things don't affect other people. I think it's much more serious when those things affect other people.

And so hopefully the penalties and the time missed and the education received are all going to be beneficial to the learning experience of this young man so that he has an opportunity to get an education, become a better person that has a better chance to be successful in life and also can contribute to the team.

So there's a process that we try to go through when we can give players a second chance. If players continue to make mistakes over and over and over and over and don't seem to learn and make progress, they will lose the respect of their teammates. And I think that when that occurs, then maybe it would be better if a guy was not involved in the program and would take the opportunity someplace else. But that hasn't happened with Tony Mitchell.

Q. I wanted to ask what is your relationship with Hugh Freeze, especially now that he's on the other side of the Iron Bowl from you?

NICK SABAN: Well, I've always had a tremendous amount of respect for Hugh Freeze. He's a good friend. I thought

he did a great job when he was at Ole Miss. He obviously did a really good job at Liberty, and I'm sure he'll do a very good job at Auburn.

So I have a tremendous amount of respect for him as a coach, and I think his history as a coach sort of speaks for itself. He's a good recruiter. They had really good players at Ole Miss when he was there, and I'm sure they will do the same thing in his current position.

So look, I'm friends with a lot of guys. There's a lot of guys out there that work for me and did a great job, but that doesn't mean that you can't respect them but you do have to compete against them and that's part of it. When I play golf, I play with some of my best friends, but they want to beat me and I want to beat them and that's okay.

But when the game is over, you're still friends and that's the way it will be probably with this. It's a great rivalry, the iron Bowl, and being successful in that game usually happens some significant impact on the SEC and the West Division.

So it's a game that's really, really important to us to try to continue to be able to do the things that we need to do to be able to have success, and when we play down there, it's always been challenging.

Q. You talk about losing players to the draft, having young teams. How much can that transfer portal be of assistance, especially as we hear across all levels of college sports allegations of tampering and things like that? So what's your take on the portal and how helpful can it be to get some experience when you've got a young team thanks to the players you're losing to the draft?

NICK SABAN: All right, well, we've continued to try to build our team through recruiting quality high school talent and we use the portal sort of as you would use free agency in the NFL.

When we feel like we have a need at a position, we look and see if anybody is available in the portal that would help us at that particular position, and I think this year, we brought five guys in from the portal to complement. I think we had like 28 freshmen maybe to go with that.

But I do agree with you that having experienced players, if they are the right kind of guys and they are the right kind of people, and they understand the culture of what you're trying to accomplish can be very beneficial to your team.

But I think those players need to play if they are in the transfer portal and we should there for need them to play.

There should be some need at their position so they have an opportunity to be able to contribute, and I think that's the case in most positions where we took guys this year out of the portal. Jahmyr Gibbs was a great example of a guy out of the portal who made a significant contribution to our team a year ago.

But the team has to be willing to embrace those players, which our team has always done a really good job of, and they have done the same this year.

Q. Do you have any specific impressions from your last encounter with Texas and could you evaluate their readiness to play in this league?

NICK SABAN: Well, I can't evaluate their readiness to play in any game. I don't coach their team. I think Steve Sarkisian is a great coach and he'll have them ready.

But I think Texas has a lot of players back from last year's team. Obviously it was a really close, tough game last year when we played that game. I think they are doing an outstanding job of recruiting and developing the players on their team and it's going to be a real challenging game, no doubt, because they have a lot of starters back and they have a lot of experience coming back and an experienced quarterback.

So we expect them to have an outstanding team.

Q. You've got a player on the roster from Finland, and you've just recruited the No. 1 player in Germany. As the game grows outside of the U.S., how necessary and how realistic is it that your recruitment expands with that?

NICK SABAN: Well, I think things are obviously a little more global maybe than they have ever been. I think football is creating a little more of an international brand in terms of where they are playing, who is playing, how they are playing.

So we had the opportunity with both -- our punter is also from Australia. But we have had the opportunity to get to know these young men that we recruited from Europe, really, because they came and spent a significant amount of time with us, whether it was in camp or visiting or whatever, so that we could determine, do they have the right stuff to be able to compete at this level. It was pretty easy to see they had the talent to do it. But could they understand that this is a little more competitive, the quality of ball was going to be a little bit different, and how are you going to respond to that.

We were excited, and with the players that we have that

are international players on our team right now, and the ones that we have recruited in the past, they have all made a significant contribution. You know, Jessie Williams was one of the first from Australia, and defensive lineman who was an outstanding player who played for the Seahawks for four or five years.

We feel like these guys that we have recruited, Olaus is on our team now and developing nicely, and we had the young man from Germany in our camp this summer, and was very impressed with him.

So good additions to our team. Glad to have the opportunity.

Q. First, favorite cake. Want to know your favorite cake since you mentioned that in your opening statement. But I would like to you speak to your quarterback room and your expectations to that this fall.

NICK SABAN: Yeah, well, carrot cake, that's easy.

Look, I talked about expectations before and we are focusing on how do they develop the players that we have, and we want to develop all the players. You know, everybody wants to know who the starter is. What about the backup guy who has to go in and play, like Jalen Milroe did last year against Texas A&M, Howie finished the Arkansas game. It's important that all these guys continue to develop, and everybody at that position develops into where they can play winning football.

I use the cake analogy because it's not done yet. It's not -- there's not a decision that needs to be made at this point in time, nor are we ready to make that decision at this time until somebody separates themselves.

But expectations, we want somebody to play winning football at that position. Our quarterback is a unique position in that you distribute the ball on every play, whether you hand it off, whether you choose the play that we run, whether you hand it off or whether you throw an advantaged throw, making decisions in the passing game to throw it to the right guys at the right time and the right place and accurately.

So who can do that with the most consistency and be a leader on our team who has an impact on the other players is also important, because quarterback may be one of the most difficult positions to play if the people around you don't play well.

So I think that's a challenge for us, too, is to get the people around our quarterbacks to play well so that it's a little



easier for them to be able to have success at the position when they get the opportunity.

Q. I know it's one year away, but what impact do you think bringing Texas and Oklahoma is going to mean to the SEC?

NICK SABAN: Oh, I think it's a great addition to the SEC. You have two great programs that have great traditions that have great fan support. I think it just continues to sort of -- the map of the SEC, it is stronger than ever. I think the competition is going to be -- it's always been difficult. It's going to be even more challenging because you've got two really, really good programs who have consistently, if you look at the past, have been, you know, Top-10 programs for a lot of years, won national championships.

So they are going to add a lot to the competition. I think with the new scheduling that we'll have in the future, it's more good games for fans, more diversity in who you play. So there's a lot of positives about it. From a coaching standpoint, it's going to be much more challenging to be able to compete week-in and week-out. I think when you look at the SEC, the thing that separates it is not the top, but the depth, how many good teams there are.

There was one year where I think we played nine teams -- when we won the championship that we played nine teams that were in the Top 15 or something, I can't remember the year. A lot of that was playing good teams in the playoffs, we played a good team in the SEC Championship Game but you also played a whole bunch of good teams throughout the course of the season and that's one of the biggest challenges I think to be able to play with a level of consistency when you have six, seven or eight really difficult games, as opposed to two or three. Because consistency and performance and playing at a high level becomes a premium, which in all sports, that's always the challenge. You know, how are we going to play this day, and how are we going to accept this challenge and do it week-in and week-out.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank you all for what you do for college athletics. You create a lot of interest in the fan base, and a lot of positive self-gratification for the players who play the game, and I know that we all appreciate that. You create great brands for a lot of programs and you create a lot of interest in college football. So we thank you very much for that and we appreciate you more than you know. So thank you very much and Roll Tide. Thanks.

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