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Alabama Crimson Tide

Kalen DeBoer

Press Conference

KALEN DeBOER: Good morning. It's great to see all of you and be here at SEC Media Days. Thank you, Commissioner, for the introduction. Appreciate all your leadership.

That's probably the first thing I would say is just in six quick months, I've had a chance to get a taste of the SEC, and whether it's Commissioner Sankey or all the coaches that are a part of our great football conference, it's been awesome seeing the leadership, being a part of a bunch of people that want to change and continue to evolve the great game of football as well as college athletics.

I want to thank all of you for being here. Appreciate all the support and all the coverage you give our programs, not just mine, but college football in general. It's a great sport. Thanks for all the stories. We've got so many great players. I've got some here today that have amazing journeys that I know we want those stories out there and be told.

Speaking of, I've got three great gentlemen, Jalen Milroe, our quarterback, Malachi Moore, our safety, and Tyler Booker, who I know you'll see throughout the day. These guys have just been special from the beginning. Probably three of the guys that when I really look at it and all the craziness with the transition and coming into the program myself, three of the guys that just never wavered from the beginning.

They just really believed in themselves. They believed in the program. They believed in our coaching staff as we continue to present and make the hires. But they just really have stayed steady, and because of their leadership, I feel the culture has continued to grow.

We had a great winter, great spring, and really looking forward to the season that lies ahead.

It's been six months in Tuscaloosa. It's been extremely welcoming to come into the community. Of course they



love their football and athletics as a whole. Just being welcomed, my family and I, it's been special. It's made the transition easy for myself.

Then also I just want to say that in the transition, I can't thank our president, Dr. Bell, as well as our AD Greg Byrne, enough for their support and everything that they've done to help acclimate me and our staff and just do the things that we need to do to hit the ground running.

It takes a village, and Greg did a great job hiring an athletic department full of staff, whether it's administrative or other head coaches who have just been a pleasure to come to the department and bring the energy.

I was fortunate enough to pretty much show up and within a month or so get a chance to support Nate Oats and our basketball team making a Final Four run, and not long after that, our softball team making a trip to the Women's College World Series, other great teams and the department as a whole is in such a great place because of Greg's leadership.

When it comes to just our staff, I couldn't be more proud of just how far we've come just in a short amount of time. The belief and trust in our team starts with these guys, and it's not just the on-the-field staff, it's the off-the-field staff. Meshing staff where we retained many that were super critical. Whether it's strength and conditioning with David Ballou, our training staff with Jeff Allen, and other departments, as well, the meshing of our staff with those that we retained and those that I brought in with me, it's just been awesome feeling the energy, feeling the excitement.

Every day I walk in the building and it's such a pleasure to go to work with these people. They're beyond motivated. They're driven to be great, driven to uphold the great standard of Alabama football.

We have a lot of work ahead, and I know when it comes to our team, we had a great spring. I think they felt that, as well. We were able to retain pretty much the entire roster. We did lose two guys to the portal. But overall between the winter and the spring, we've picked up 14 guys that I



think don't just add depth to our program, they come in and they make a difference and they add to the guys that have continued to develop and grow within our program.

Looking forward to hitting the field two weeks from today at this very time, we'll be in practice, which is exciting. I love being on the grass with the guys, love being out there working with them. It's what it's all about. It's why we do what we do as coaches, and really looking forward to that.

They understand that there was a gap that needed to be closed early on, and I say that because anytime you institute and you're incorporating new strategies, whether it's offensively, defensively, special teams, along with just getting to know and building new relationships, there's a gap that you have to close because the programs that are continuing to hit the ground running, continuing to kind of add to what they've done in the past because of their familiarity, they're in a place, and now I think we've closed that gap, and now the whole thing is focusing on separating ourselves.

This summer just the focus, the commitment. I think if you asked our guys what they appreciate about each other right now, they come in with a competitive mindset every single day. I can see it. They have high goals and aspirations, but the actions support those goals that they each have.

They do it on the field. They do it off the field. I think they're just a well-rounded team, a group of guys, academically even in the spring, a 3.2 GPA. We had 85 of the 123 guys on our team have a 3.0 or better. It just goes to show the focus and what type of people and players we have in our program.

We return -- I guess it depends on how you look at it -- five starters on offense, five starters on defense, a couple specialists, and those guys are going to certainly be counted on.

I think we've brought in some players to help add to, again, not just the depth but also to build and have an elite level of starters on the football field for us when August 31st comes around.

I think their mindset of just going 1-0 and winning the day is something that I preach to them, and they've taken on that challenge. They show up, they put in the extra work, they try to -- they understand that everyone is doing the same things, you've just got to do it better and do it more often than those that we're going to be competing against throughout the season.

Before I open it up for questions, I do just want to say -- I

know I haven't seen Coach around here, but I do want to first of all congratulate Coach. I thought it was really cool winning the ESPY the other night and got a chance to -- it seemed like every time I got a chance to see the speech, it was just a little blurb. Finally got to see the whole thing, and there's always something that we've taken from those speeches.

Well deserved with that honor, and then personally and from I think on behalf of everyone with Alabama football and the University of Alabama, we appreciate everything Coach has done to make this foundation strong to where we can continue to build on it, continue to help make those that are supportive of our program proud, and just appreciate all those years and hard work that's been put into this.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Throughout this week, other SEC quarterbacks have had a chance to talk about your quarterback in Jalen Milroe, and the consensus has been he's just a great guy on and off the field and he has a great smile. For you, how does that impact you coaching this offense and this team, to have someone that translates so well in the locker room?

KALEN DeBOER: Well, I think that's something that you see with Jalen, what he is, and I can just look back last week, a moment with our team, not to get into the details, but him standing up and speaking out. Positive but also accountability, that mix of everything that great leaders do. Building up their teammates but also just reminding them of what it's going to take for us to reach the goals that we have. He does a great job of balancing that. I think he's grown in a lot of ways when it comes to that area.

But then we've got to talk about what he does on the football field. He's got a skill set that is special. With his arm, he can make you pay and he can make the throws, and I think he's continued to grow in that area, building confidence in himself, just tirelessly working with the receiving corps, actually all the skill players, just to be on the same page.

I think he's continued to expand on his game with the different throws he can make. Down the field he's been strong. A year ago he was one of the best in the country with down-the-field throws. I think he's continued to work on those higher percentage throws that you need to move the chains and all of that.

But he just dives into it. There's no one that's going to beat him into the football facility from the players' vantage point. He's there 4:30, 5:00 for sure every single day, and I know

there's guys that have tried to beat him into the facility, and they can't.

But when he's there, it isn't just punching in the clock. He's done a great job being efficient, doing everything he can, whether it's mentally, physically, to be ready for this fall.

Q. You brought a player here in Malachi Moore who has been kind of through everything since being on campus since 2020. How do you benefit from having this group of leaders that have been at Alabama, and how do you integrate some of the guys, for example, that you brought from Washington who know what you do?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, guys like Malachi, Jalen, Book, these guys are all guys that of course you're going to hear today. But Malachi, since you specifically brought up him, they understand what it takes. It isn't just what it looks like and needs to be done in the fall. This is the time where you build your team. That work that they're putting in each and every day, a guy like Malachi is front and center.

I guess just think about Malachi and very similar to Jalen, they love the game. They love the work that is associated with the game. He brings a smile to it. He's determined. He's a beast on the football field, and he hits you with everything he's got. He's helping grow a secondary around him that's got some youth, and he's taking that and putting it on his shoulders. I think he's excited about that.

He knows he's one of the faces of the program and takes that responsibility in a strong way.

But I think when you look at just people in general and how it all comes together with different transfers coming from different places, yeah, obviously you look at the talent, but we have great kids -- I shouldn't call them kids. Great young men that have come into our program.

You alluded to the Washington players, the four of them that have come in. These are just standouts, not just on the football field, but just high-end character guys. They knew that they had to adapt to the things that Alabama represents and the football program, and I think I couldn't be more -- because I did have a relationship with them obviously before coming here. I couldn't be more proud of the way they've approached everything, now stepping up as leaders themselves.

Q. You talked about Malachi Moore, but for Deontae Lawson, other guys that are in-state players from the state of Alabama, what did they teach you and show you when you first arrived about the standard and what it means to play to that and even coach to it?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I actually took notes, and I still am taking notes. These guys have been here longer than I have. Sometimes, there's a saying you don't know what you don't know, and I'm just trying to take it all in.

We want to do things -- of course I want to do things the way I've done them in some aspects, but embracing what is important to this program, the traditions that have happened over many years.

But I think just when it really comes down to this team, it's about the work that we're doing right now, and listening to them and hearing them out, I think that's the best thing you can do when you come in as a new coach is kind of meet them in the middle. We've worked together, and they understand that I want this team to be a team that ultimately is player led.

Now, what does that mean? We've talked a lot about that. I'm going to provide the framework and the parameters, and a lot of the organization that I feel has worked for me over many years, but I also want them to have that buy-in and understand the why, not just what.

Q. I'm wondering how many coaches, friends, family told you it wasn't smart to follow a legend, and how much did that enter into your thinking before you accepted?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, you know, I get it. I totally get it. I understand there's only one Coach Saban. There will only ever be one Coach Saban. This program is special, and I guess I just take it as a great honor to be the one that gets to do everything we can to carry on the great tradition.

So much blood, sweat and tears, whether it's the players and the alumni that have been in this program or coaches, and obviously referring to Coach Saban, so much is put into this place. We all have alma maters. We all have places that we have great pride in, and you always want that to be home. We always want to make those people proud of their alma mater and the work that's been put in to set this program up for success.

But for me personally, it was just more about just understanding that coaching football is coaching football to some aspect, and you've got to try to simplify it down, as difficult and as complicated as you can make it. I've done this for enough years and seen what good culture looks like and maybe even what a culture that needs to improve on looks like, and it's been just an awesome blessing to be a part of this program, to continue to have that expectation on us.

The alternative is to be at places where there aren't expectations. At some point there's been places where maybe a little bit of that has happened throughout my career, and this is a great place to be. I'm very blessed, very honored, and certainly acknowledge what you said, but we're just going to focus on this team and being the best we can be and continue to build on the great tradition of Alabama football.

Q. I think when you first got hired, one of the first questions was how well will he be able to recruit in the Southeast. I think we've gotten a pretty immediate answer on that one. I'm curious what your thought processes are on how you define a great recruiter, and what your general thought processes are on player acquisition as a whole.

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I knew the intensity level that existed here in the SEC, and I think across college football it's just so competitive. I understand that it certainly is different.

I knew it was important for me to put the right people around me. As much as I can preach relationships and getting to know guys and feel like there's a way that I can get guys to feel that this is a program they want to be a part of, I understand that there's got to be familiarity with a region.

There's got to be some familiarity with coaches to be able to get started and get off to a fast jump there, especially in these early months, because you're behind when you come in and it's the middle of January and you haven't even put a staff together, and all of a sudden it's the end of January and you've got a week or two to hit the road. This is the last time you can be on the road other than a little time in May, and by that time the official visits are all set up for June. We were behind.

So I had to have a staff that would work well together. I think it's all hands on deck with our staff. Those within the building would feel that, just kind of sharing, that it's a team effort. But we also certainly have some guys and staff on the field and off the field that just work relentlessly every single day, just to build those relationships, to help us get guys to campus.

I think that's when we're at our best because the culture of our team as we have that energy within the building when prospects do come onto campus, they see this is something they want to be a part of.

All that together has led to a lot of success here early on. Obviously it's an everyday thing. So it never stops. But we certainly understand that having the right guys in our

program is all going to make us better coaches in a lot of ways.

Q. Now that analysts can coach on the field in practice and in games, how big of an addition is it for Chuck Morrell to be part of the staff who helped you have a lot of on the field success at Washington?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, no question. Yeah, Chuck Morrell and I go back. We were actually teammates together and spent 10 years together at the University of Sioux Falls. He was the defensive coordinator, I was the offensive coordinator starting out. Our relationship, when it comes to just how close we are, just the trust we have in each other, he's a guy that's just as loyal as it gets.

He did a great job for us at Washington the last two years, and coming in, he and Kane Wommack have really worked so well together. I know the role has been as an analyst and a coordinator. We have other members that are on the on-field staff that are critical to our scheme and development and growth of our defensive side of the ball.

But just another great voice, a guy that knows ball inside and out, and I'll put him up there as one of the best -- if he was a coordinator, when he was a coordinator last year, the best in the country.

To have that luxury now with so many great coaches in our program, it's an awesome thing.

Q. Related to the recruiting question, the only hole in your resume is you've never coached south of Carbondale, Illinois. What's it been like adjusting to the culture change, or maybe there's not a culture change, maybe it's Sioux Falls south, I don't know, but what have you had to do to adjust to a new region of the country, new culture, football culture, southern culture, all those things?

KALEN DeBOER: I sweat a lot more. It's hot.

I think first of all, and foremost, people are always what make places. I've lived in a lot of different places around the country, from the Northwest to over by Detroit and the Midwest and South Dakota to Fresno, California, and obviously Carbondale and now here in Tuscaloosa. I think people are always what make the place.

There are just so many great people in Tuscaloosa, and obviously they're passionate about their football. It's really made this transition smooth and enjoyable.

It probably is close to being the place that reminds me the most of honestly being back in South Dakota, just the

people. Somewhat, I guess, the geography. There's no coastline, I guess, up in South Dakota, but there's a lot of great things that are similar to what feels like home.

Q. What has surprised you about going to Alabama and Tuscaloosa, and anything that you didn't anticipate that you've seen since you've been down there?

KALEN DeBOER: You know, I think I should never be surprised at the things that great programs do and have and the culture that exists. But what really has been awesome to see, and again, this isn't necessarily a surprise, but it's been awesome just to see our guys be completely 100 percent focused on the main things. Their chemistry and their trust and belief is one thing, but I think -- and the accountability, as well. But I think that the way they respect each other, you can see it in spring ball.

As much as I try to do a great job of laying out the tempos of practice and how we need to be aggressive and play the game the way it needs to be played, but also we've got to protect each other. We need each other. I know I needed to say those things and I wanted to say those things and it's important to me, but I think they understood that.

Again, that's a credit to Coach Saban and everyone that's coached in the program before and the culture that existed even before I got here.

These guys, they know they need each other to reach the goals that we have as a program. Then I think they also really respect the goals that they have each individually, whether it's being the greatest college football player you can be or moving on and putting yourself in a good spot to move on to the NFL.

Again, not a surprise, but something that just I have a lot of appreciation for. It was an awesome spring, and I think that all 15 practices, we've maximized and got the most out of all 15 of those from start to finish.

Q. We've hunted for years in Chamberlain and Iroquois and Kimball, South Dakota. Every one of those people up there knew the SEC very well. They loved college football. How much is your background in D-II, D-III driving the bus and doing everything from the ground up? The guy you're replacing Nick Saban talks to fondly about the work ethic he learned up in Monongah, West Virginia, with his dad. Talk about who you are and how that made you what you are.

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I love how the stories get better and better of all the responsibilities I had. I did not drive the bus. But that's what the stories and the legends will be

down the road.

I know this: I would not trade my journey for anything. It gives me an appreciation for where I'm at. It gives me an appreciation for the people I have around me and all the jobs that they have because there was a time where you weren't driving -- I wasn't driving the bus, but I was working with equipment and doing things in the locker room, pretty much a GA, an offensive coordinator and a head coach all at the same time.

I think there's, again, just an appreciation I have for everyone, when you have the support systems that you have at this level, and I understand their roles and how important and valuable they are and making them feel a part of it.

It allows me to really focus on the things that I really love to do, and that's build these relationships with these guys and dive into the football and coach these guys up and help them be the best they can be. There's just a little bit more in those areas that I get to focus on.

Yeah, it's a work ethic-related thing, as well, but it's an appreciation piece as much as anything.

Q. I think it's pretty well-documented how different you and Nick are, but what's the area that you think that you two are the most similar?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, I think -- I've heard it from our guys. I know Coach Saban just poured into these guys. He loved them. He believed in them. He pushed them to be their best.

I think you always look at -- I mean, every coach is different. We all have different personalities. We all have our styles, especially when you've been doing it for a while in this profession you kind of have the things that you really like to do and favor.

But in the end, the most important things, I think a lot of those are probably pretty similar more than they're different. Pouring into the guys and helping them and pushing them to be at their best, holding them accountable and expecting a high level of discipline while also trying to build a brotherhood and a family that exists through great team chemistry to be great on the football field when it matters most.

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