

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Kalen DeBoer

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning. We begin today with the University of Alabama head coach, Kalen DeBoer.

KALEN DeBOER: Good morning. It is great to be here. First of all, in regards to Greg Sankey, I appreciate his leadership. Year two, you understand a little bit more of what everyone does and how well they do it. Man, what Greg Sankey does for the SEC, for college athletics, it's on an extremely high level. Thank you for everything you do here for us at the SEC, as well.

Yeah, I want to thank you all, too, as the media. Just the coverage of college football, coverage of our conference, coverage of our teams at Alabama in particular, and all the great stories, the journeys that our guys are on, you guys documenting them and sharing them with the rest of the country, the rest of the of the world. Appreciate you all being here today.

I brought three players with me. Haven't had a chance to see them this morning. Both been different directions and busy already. Three talented guys that I want to brag on a little bit here before I kind of move on to some things about the team.

Offensively, brought Kadyn Proctor. He's our third-year offensive tackle. He's originally from Iowa. Couple things. You look at the guy and he's massive. Man, just does everything on a high level when it comes to his training.

The thing I'm going to tell you about this guy that's impressive, by the end of this season, in December, he will have his degree. If you do the math on that, three years getting your degree. Even has a semester in there where he transferred. That gets harder to do when you do that.

He'll have not just his degree, but right now he has a 3.7 GPA. Taking 16 credits this summer so he can be on track to be able to accomplish and walk across that stage, have his degree.



I know he's excited to represent not just the team, but also representing the offensive line, our offensive side of the football. He has a lot of great pride in what they're accomplishing and the work they're putting in.

Tim Keenan. Fifth-year defensive lineman. I think the thing with Tim, he's a home-grown boy from Alabama. I think when I look at Tim, the team just looks at him as that big brother. He's a mentor to not just the young guys, but even the old guys. They know they can count on him to be doing the work.

He embodies what a student-athlete is all about. I think those that really know Tim and follow what he does, he's got a passion for giving back to the community. He's one of our guys that just is at the forefront spiritually leading our team, then also just from a community service standpoint, he's out there. He's a Big Brother to kids in our community.

Man, him understanding the platform he has is so impressive to me. It's been a pleasure to coach him. One more crack at it with him. Appreciate his leadership.

Then Deontae Lawson, fifth-year linebacker. Captain. Really our only returning captain from last year's team. That should say enough about how our team views him.

His journey. Again, everyone has something a little bit different. Probably thought a year ago at this time he'd be wearing an NFL jersey. Circumstances as they may be, just coming back from an injury, seeing him attack it, seeing him and his mindset, him understanding the circumstances he can't control and what he can. Man, it's just amazing seeing him take over not just the defense, but be a leader on our football team.

I walked into a meeting, looking for a coach actually. I walked in. It was him holding a meeting with the linebackers I guess yesterday morning. Listened for about 30 seconds. I knew that meeting was in a good position. Coaching it like a coach. When you have guys on the field that are like him, that understand the depth, the details, you know you're headed in the right direction and have a chance.

Those are our three guys. Super proud of them, their



journeys. I think the common theme with all of them is they're high-character guys, extremely driven. Again, they represent a lot of what our team is all about. They're leaders on the team, but also leaders in the community.

Before I move on to our team, one person I want to thank is our athletic director, Greg Byrne, for his leadership. Much like Greg Sankey, the world of college athletics, it's ever changing, you have to have those people at the top that are working through it, coming up with solutions. I can't thank Greg enough the way he communicates with me on the direction we need to be going and what might lie ahead.

I think his foresight is critical going back to when I first got here, a year ago, on what it might look like with it evolving on the evolution of what college athletics looks like today.

Second season. 'Familiarity' has been a word that's been used a lot already this morning with different interviews. That's great. It helps you feel good about where your family is living, what those routines are. That's important to me and our success. You have to have that piece in place.

Continuity. Starts with our coaching staff. Really one change on the defensive side of the ball, then the addition of Ryan Grubb on the offensive side. Everyone else, not just the position coaches, but quality control coaches, graduate assistants, recruiting staff, strength and conditioning, academics, training room, we really had no turnover in all those areas. That's exciting to me because I think that says a lot about the belief and the excitement of what lies ahead, that you have the right people.

You talk about getting the right people on the bus, in your program, inside the building. I feel like we certainly have that. Continuity is a huge piece of what year two is all about right now.

That trickles down to the players. Leadership from the staff is there, but really the culture we want to try to exude, try to have, it comes to life through our players. They are making that happen. It's the day to day.

As we speak right now, they're on the field in a nice, warm morning in Tuscaloosa getting after it. I can't tell you how impressed I've been with them just focusing on the main thing, and that's the work. Not getting ahead of themselves, not worried about practice number one, game number one, or even further down the road in the season. I know they'll get asked questions about it, have to answer some of those today.

When it comes down to what we're focused on, it's the day-to-day work that these guys are really honed in on,

making sure they take care of to give themselves a chance to be successful this fall.

They're a coachable group, compete with each other, a lot of competitions within. Just the competition against themselves to be the best they can be. They've really bought in to that.

When it comes to who we lost, really eight seniors last year, three on defense, two on offense, three specialists, which got asked that question the first time in a long time, talking about our specialists. It's one of the positions, one of the areas you always kind of look past.

As much as we played young guys, we played I think the most freshmen on special teams snaps in the entire league, I think it really wasn't even close. There were also three specialists - punter, kicker and long snapper - that were mainstays in the program for quite some time or had a lot of experience playing at a high level.

We replaced all of those guys. That will probably be something we really got to work through. Got confidence and belief in the guys in our program that they'll step up.

We're right at about 17 seniors, that's double what we had a year ago. We did lose the three guys to early outset in the NFL with Jalen Milroe, Tyler Booker and Jihaad Campbell. Deservedly so, those guys getting their opportunity to make the most of it at the next level.

When it comes down to where you want to improve, where you need to get better, it's reps. All of us get better at our jobs by taking more reps. Myself as a head coach at this place here at Alabama, you guys in your roles, our players. Then it's reps together. Again, familiarity, continuity, repetitions.

We got to be better in the big moments. We lost some close games last year. We had chances maybe not even in the fourth quarter, but early in the game to separate ourselves or make a play here or there.

Whether it was the belief or whether it was the confidence, a lot of that just comes through repetitions. We really had a great off-season understanding where we fell short, why we fell short. Not just the what and the how but the why.

I'm excited about our guys taking those next steps, understanding when we get in those moments this year, those critical times, how to come through and make the play that's necessary to go win football games.

We were undefeated at home, but we also struggled on the road. We start this year on the road. We go to Florida



State. We know that they're going to have something to prove, as well. That's going to be a great environment to get tested early on.

We don't need to look anything beyond that as far as our preparation or what might lie because none of it matters unless we take care of business and do what we're doing, being our best in that week one game against Florida State.

Being on the road, playing better on the road, certainly has to be a point that happens this year in our football program.

Defensively a lot of returners coming back. We excelled when it came to taking the football away. I think we're in the top four or five in the country there. Really the most takeaways. I think 28 was the number in the program, going back seven, eight years ago. When it came to yard per play and all that, it's all great stuff, but the key for our defense is get off the football field.

As the season went along, we did a better job of that. Early on there are times where we could have been better. Those led to games that came close, games we maybe fell short offensively.

I think it's just consistency, it's consistency in all areas. We want to have the ability to be balanced. That doesn't mean that the statistics look equal when the game is over, the season is done, the ability to run the football (indiscernible) and vice versa.

I think more and more pieces coming together, the development of players at all positions, I'm excited about what we have there.

The offensive line is where it really starts, really six guys that are strongly in the rotation with a lot of others that are up-and-coming, developing quickly, that I can see competing for spots as the season goes along as well.

When it comes to just overall as a program, physicality is the name of the game when it comes to playing football. You wear pads for a reason, right? Physicality comes through the work to build your body, but that also comes through toughness mentally as well.

I love, again, the work that we're focused on right now, the main thing, keeping it that. I love the mindset. Doesn't guarantee anything, but gives you a great chance.

Excited about two weeks from today. At this very moment I think we'll be on the football field practicing, practice one. It's come on fast. Media days usually indicates that type of kickoff, signifies that we're here. I'm excited to get the ball

rolling.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Two decades the SEC dominated, built a great brand winning national titles. The Big Ten has won two in a row. How important is it for the SEC, maybe Alabama, somebody else, to stop that streak?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think individually in our own programs, that's our responsibility, to be at the top, right? That's the expectation. I know at Alabama, but also the expectation for the SEC as a whole.

I still feel that the SEC top to bottom is as strong as you'll find. We experienced that last year. We had games where you showed what you're ceiling was, but you also had to back it up and play the next week. It showed every team could win on any given Saturday.

Yeah, we want to prove ourselves as a program, but also as a league, as well.

Q. On Monday Greg Sankey talked about eight- or nine-game conference schedule. What is your perspective on future SEC schedules?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, right now, that's above me. I know there's questions that get asked the coaches, kind of as you work with your athletic directors. That's beyond me right now.

I know there's a lot of pros when it comes to strength of schedule. I'm all for that. You look at our schedule this year, again, that was built out years back as well, but we're playing Florida State, Wisconsin, one away, one at home. We're all about playing as many high-end games that you can possibly play. Certainly adding another SEC game to the schedule would accomplish that.

Q. Did your year one live up to the 'Bama standard?

KALEN DeBOER: In which way? To me personally?

Q. What you evaluate to be the 'Bama standard.

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I mean, if you internally ask us, no. We fell short of making the Playoffs. It's as simple as that, right? Giving yourself a chance to go compete for a championship.

I think there's a lot of things that I'm super proud of that have happened within the program that are part of the progression. Yeah, we want it right now, too.



Yeah, we fell short. Our guys, again, I'm proud of them and the way they've responded to us not realizing the goals that we set out to have, getting back to work, focusing on the main thing.

I feel that's always been the case. Sometimes there's ups and downs that you have to go through unfortunately that we had to experience. But in the end, we're going to take advantage of the failures we've had and be better because of it.

Q. Last season Jihaad Campbell was a massive part of your pass-rush. Who are some players that have stood out to you on that side of the ball?

KALEN DeBOER: Jihaad, the versatility he brought, that's why he was a high-end draft pick. I think guys like LT Overton jump out with me. LT was there a lot last year. Those are the next steps you want to take. Not just he, but a lot of guys finishing the plays. LT has it in him, the seal set. He has those instincts. Continues to hone in on taking it to the next level.

Qua Russaw is another guy. Some underclassmen that are coming up that are doing a nice job, too. Looking forward to the progress they've made physically to be able to put themselves in a chance to let their work happen on the football field on Saturdays.

Q. Could you discuss the quarterback room and maybe handicap things for us a little bit.

KALEN DeBOER: You bet.

Really got three guys that have taken all the snaps, not a majority. Ty Simpson, Austin Mack and Keelon Russell. That's really by age and years of experience is kind of where it starts.

We did make it known at the end of spring if we played a game at that point, wouldn't have changed at this point because there's nothing that's happened as far as practicing, Ty Simpson would be the guy that would take the first snaps and be our starter.

Challenged all of them at that time that they have to continue to take the strides, they got to continue in their own ways to improve. They've really worked hard to do that. Excited to see that progress two weeks from today.

But they have the tools. Ty throws a catchable ball. He's smart. He's been in college football now going into year four. He's seen the ups and downs. He's got great relationships with the team. He's a leader that way. He's really owned things on another level.

Austin Mack, if you walked in here, the guy is 6'6", 230, 235. He has a presence about him. That carries over to how he throws the football. Just really took his most meaningful snaps in college this spring working with the ones and twos.

Keelon Russell, you never would have guessed, a lot of guys graduated from high school a month ago, really a high school senior, early enrollee, that came in and learned the system of college football, taking these huge strides in the course of the spring. Now again, getting that install over and over again in the summer, going into the fall. I'm confident he's going to make big jumps as well.

Those are the three. Kind of told you if we played today where would be. But all three of them have a potential to do big things in our offense. I think it a lot of it has to do with what is around them, as well.

Q. Last year kind of unexpectedly Ryan Grubb joined Seattle after you were expecting him to be offensive coordinator here at Alabama. What was the adjustment last year without him? What are you looking forward to to having him back here?

KALEN DeBOER: That's one of the things. We had four guys on offense from a staff standpoint that were coming down. It ended up being two with Ryan Grubb. Scott Huff was also taken there up at Seattle.

Man, when a guy puts in as much time giving it everything he has, it was one of those moments that was bittersweet, right? You want him here with you, I'm talking about Ryan Grubb, here at Alabama, but also someone you've coached with for 12, 13 years, known for even longer. What an opportunity to be a coordinator in the NFL. I thought he had a great year, did an amazing job. He was certainly ready and prepared for it.

But things happen for a reason. Him getting the chance to come here and just add to our staff at the level you're talking about with an elite, elite offensive mind. Our familiarity with each other, the efficiency we have when it comes to the day-to-day work off season, in season, it certainly helps us gain even more momentum going into this fall.

But the rest of the staff has been awesome in how they embrace Ryan Grubb coming in. The players have, as well. Then Ryan's hit the ground running and added some things on the things he's learned.

When you go through your career, every year you're going to get better if you have the right mindset. There's no

place you're going to get better and be put in tough spots than in the NFL.

So love what he's brought on top of what our system has always been and how we've evolved to make us even better this fall.

Q. No matter who is the starter at quarterback, there's going to be a level of inexperience. Are you confident in whoever is named the starter, their ability to run your offense, to be that leader with the level of inexperience they have?

KALEN DeBOER: I think that's a valid question, right?

Experience is a big deal. Trying not to do too much when you don't have to, taking what they give you, trying to prove yourself to your teammates, everyone watching. Just trying to work through that.

Again, that's where consistency, continuity, them being comfortable with Ryan Grubb, Nick Sheridan, Mitch Dahlen, senior analyst on our staff, myself. Them knowing that we believe in you. Just be you, go out there and don't try to do too much. Just go execute what you're supposed to.

They got the tools. Now you're just trying to put them in those moments as much as possible where the lack of experience, maybe from a game situational standpoint, is able to come out in practice, help them feel prepared.

I'll say this. Going through a quarterback competition, that's pressure alone. These guys are going through pressure every throw. Whether it was a competition or not, we would analyze it, break it down, chart it. Every throw and drive that these guys are a part of, it's critical to them winning the job.

I think sometimes going through a competition prepares you for the pressures that are going to come within a season. I've seen that over and over throughout the years when I've had other competitions, as well.

Q. Talking about Washington, you played against Texas and Steve Sarkisian twice, come out 2-0 in those games. What do you remember about those games?

KALEN DeBOER: I mean, your players made plays, right? They made plays when you needed it most. It might be scoring, it might be knocking a ball down, might be getting the big stop. Coach Sark is an elite football mind, elite football coach. He's been doing it as a coordinator, head coach on a high level.

Going into those games, had nothing but the most respect. Walking out of it, that didn't change. It showed just even in his transition to the SEC last year that he evolved and made those adjustments and did the things he had to do to put himself in a spot to not just be playing for a championship, but also in the Playoffs.

Q. You're 15-3 against top-25 teams. 10 of your 13 losses have come against unranked teams, games you were favored in. How do you find ways to be more consistent and win the games you're 'supposed to win'?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, I think it's learning from those mistakes. A lot of those losses happened in year one at different places. So you want year two to be moments of growth, where you can polish and clean things up. Areas where you installed offense, defense, special teams schemes that are just now your foundation.

You never are taking it for granted. You're starting over from scratch every season. Now you build on tangents which you have that help you win more football games.

A lot of it comes down to those big moments, building a culture where you keep fighting till the very end. There's going to be a lot of close games. A lot of those wins you're talking about came down to the very end, moments where it looked bleak at times. You fight, execute, find a way to win. That's what we've got to do here going into year two at Alabama, as well.

Q. You've talked a lot about the staff. I want to ask you about Nick Sheridan. How huge was it getting him back from a staff continuity perspective, but all the players he's worked with?

KALEN DeBOER: Yeah, know Nick going back to 2019. The guy is unbelievable when it comes to just his offensive mind, football mind. Not just offensive mind, his organization, the way he teaches, the way he recruits. I mean, he's recruited at a high level. His involvement with our team going back to, he had to throw a staff together, help me put that together in a short amount of time there in February last year before spring ball started in March.

There was different styles of things that we did offensively last year relative to what we had done. We were finding our own last year, as well. You're going to always do that based on the personnel you have.

He and Ryan Grubb, their relationship is amazing. Again, it goes back to two strong years that they had together putting together elite offenses there at Washington, too.

Seeing these guys come together, pick each other's brains.

Nick has been able to share along with the rest of the staff, JaMarcus Shephard, with Coach Grubb, Ryan Grubb, what they felt, why they did things. Myself as well.

It's helped us take those next steps, be more efficient.

He's got deep relationships with our players because that's just the type of guy he is. He's high character through and through.

Man, I mean, it's awesome having him a part of our football staff.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

KALEN DeBOER: Thank you. Roll Tide.

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