

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

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Grapevine, Texas, USA

## Alabama Crimson Tide

## Nick Saban

### CFP Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're now pleased to be joined by Alabama head coach Nick Saban.

Coach, when you're ready, if you would give us a quick statement, then we'll take questions.

NICK SABAN: Well, it was an extraordinary year. I think we made adaptations every day. I think the players respond to that, the coaching staff responded to it in a way that allowed us, even in the game last night when we had to make adaptations in the game, Smitty going down, Metchie going down, the next guys came in and played well. Really didn't skip a beat.

I think the game was actually sort of a reflection of the year in terms of the extraordinary circumstances that we had and the extraordinary job our players and coaching staff, everybody did making adaptations to those things, which is ability to adapt is probably a real key to being successful, especially in times like these.

Just couldn't be prouder of a group of young men and a coaching staff that did a phenomenal job.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

**Q. This has led to talk of expansion in the future. How do you feel about that? Can you imagine at this point having to play another game right now?**

NICK SABAN: I have mixed emotions about expansion. I always said way back when when we started this whole Playoff thing, even when we started just having a two-team national championship game, that this would reflect poorly on players' interest in playing in bowl games. I think that's come to fruition with the number of guys that opt out and don't play.

One of the great things about college football is a lot of players got rewarded, got a lot of positive self-gratification for having a good season by being able to go to a bowl



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game. There was a lot of interest in all those games, there were some great matchups. We have some great bowl partners in college football.

Now that we have a Playoff, even though it's four teams, all the attention goes to the Playoff, and the importance of bowl games has been minimized with fans, players.

I don't know if that's good or bad. If we expand, that's going to further diminish the importance of bowl games. Maybe those two things can't coexist. If they can't coexist, then having a bigger Playoff would probably be a good thing.

**Q. In the moment you're celebrating, but how long does it take your mind, whether it's to-do list, what you got to do to get back, to contend again? How quickly do you turn to that mentally?**

NICK SABAN: The to-do list started after the game last night, meetings with players, continue to have meetings with players, whether it's draft status or one of the other unusual things. The seniors can even come back if they want to come back next year. Talking to some of those guys.

We got juniors that have to make decisions about the draft. Those things are pretty immediate, and we started on them last night right after the game.

It's an ongoing process, building a team. I don't think you can fall asleep at the switch for a minute if you want to try to do it the right way for your players and your program.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about what the experience for John Metchie this year was and how you see him growing next year as a defending champion and a starter on this offense.**

NICK SABAN: Well, John Metchie played outstanding football for us all year. He's got a lot of grit and toughness because he's had a bad ankle for about the last half of the season. It was very difficult for him to practice.

He actually didn't practice one play for all the practices that we had for this last game other than walk-throughs and



doing a little bit of individual, then goes out and plays extremely well in the game. He didn't make it through the game, but I think it shows a lot of competitive toughness on his part, a lot of grit, a lot of determination, a lot of mental toughness to be able to go through and do what he did.

I think all those things are going to serve him well in the future in terms of his continued growth as a player and his production and performance I think will sort of verify that next year because the guy is a very talented guy, he's a hard worker, and it's important to him.

**Q. I know moving forward you will have a new offensive coordinator. Are you expecting any other coaches to find a new job? How close are you to hiring a new offensive coordinator?**

NICK SABAN: We always let you know those things when they happen. I can't make any predictions about our staff. I think we have a wonderful staff. I like the chemistry on our staff. We're happy for Sark. I don't know what other opportunities will be out there for our coaches. We'll just have to wait and see. I can't answer that.

It's an ongoing process for us to find the right offensive coordinator. We're certainly in the process of doing that.

**Q. In your opinion, how much did Mac Jones improve this season and what do you think his future holds?**

NICK SABAN: I think Mac Jones had a phenomenal season. I mean, the completion percentage that he had, the accuracy, the command of the offense, the understanding of coverage and getting the ball to right guys, consistency in performance, a guy that's played awesome. He's a very bright guy.

I think it's a lesson for a lot of people out there to look at how important it is to emphasize your development because each year Mac was here, he actually said to me on the stage last night when we were getting the championship trophy, he said, Can you believe this, from a scout team quarterback to winning a national championship?

But I think sometimes people aren't willing to make the kind of sacrifices that you have to make to go through that kind of development to eventually become the kind of player Mac has become. I think he has a very bright future. We'll actually talk about that sometime here in the next day or two. He has already graduated. He already has a master's degree. He certainly had a great year.

**Q. Can you share personally the year for yourself in terms of managing your program, you missing a game**

**because of COVID. How has it been for you mentally? Where does this season rank for you?**

NICK SABAN: Well, just like the players, we told the players that they would have to adapt or die in terms of all the things that would happen this year. We also told them in the beginning, whoever manages these circumstances and situations and disruptions is going to be the team that had the best chance to be successful. None of the things that happened affected our team. First false positive I had, missed three days before the Georgia game. Players just didn't skip a beat. But that was their mindset all year. Missing the Auburn game, didn't skip a beat.

I think there was a resiliency that we all developed because of the constant changes. We knew that everybody was going to have to be able to adapt if we were going to be able to survive as a team. Everybody sort of adopted that, accepted that, didn't let these things bother them.

I'm focused on what I need to do to help our program continue to be successful. We've had a lot of support. Every year is a new year. Every year is a new challenge.

You like to enjoy this game for a minute, but we also know there's a lot of challenges in the future.

**Q. Do you foresee a whole different type of team to start out next season when you're playing Miami? I was wondering about the process to begin for next season, when does that begin for a coach?**

NICK SABAN: I really don't know much about Miami at all. Obviously we had a big game last night, had a big game last week, had a big game before that in the SEC Championship game.

Look, the first thing we do is talk to the players about the future. Next week we'll talk to every player on the team about strength, weaknesses, things they need to do to work on in the off-season to get better, whether it's from a personal standpoint, whether it's an academic standpoint, a behavioral standpoint, or a football standpoint. The process of trying to get our players to improve.

Then managing the team that we have. I think in this day and age the way your roster can move, you don't know for sure exactly how that's going to be right now. Guys going out for the draft, some players transferring. We'll just have to take it one day at a time.

But that process begins immediately. We'll go through off-season program the best we can. We'll go through spring practice, if we have spring practice. We'll continue



to try to recruit the best we can. Hopefully we get back to normal here sometime soon.

**Q. It's one thing for you to historically give these coaches jobs or a second chance in your program, but how do you explain their success? What has happened within the program that has allowed them to succeed?**

NICK SABAN: Well, I think first of all, all those guys made a significant contribution to the success of the program. In most cases, they were in a leadership role. Even Butch was a special assistant to me and was very helpful to me. The other guys were all coordinators. They did a wonderful job as coordinators, were very productive, showed that they had leadership ability, the command of a system offensively that could help a program be successful. They all had head coaching experience and backgrounds.

I think the process that they use at Alabama, even though we've been fortunate to have a lot of good players and a lot of good coaches, is something that sometimes people would like to know more about. Sometimes they're interested in people who have had experience in that.

I'm happy for all those guys, that they were able to get jobs, they were able to improve professionally because of the great job they did for us.

**Q. I've heard you in the past talk about team identity. Really now that you've come to the finish line of this team with the pause in November to ultimately getting to this national championship and winning, what are you going to remember most about this team this year?**

NICK SABAN: I think this team showed great perseverance, great resiliency. Probably the team togetherness on this team, this was kind of the ultimate team. These guys were like a high school team in terms of how they got along together, how they supported each other, how they played together, how they overcame adversity.

We've had teams here that have had probably more talent overall. I know we're a very talented offensive team, but I'm saying overall, lots of players, lots of places, that never accomplished what this team accomplished.

Very difficult to go undefeated. It's very difficult to deal with success. But whatever the challenge was for this team, they were able to do it.

I think what I'll remember most is never had any issues at

all, not any complaining at all. Everybody bought in to what we asked them to do on a daily basis. Never any complaining about anything.

This is just the most together, committed group I think we've ever had the opportunity to be associated with. I think that's special. I think all these guys on this team will remember being part of this team for the rest of their life because it's a really, really exceptionally special experience to bring a group of people together, have them all buy into the principles and values that it takes to be successful, and make the sacrifices, have the work ethic, especially in a year like this where you had to overcome so much adversity, and then accomplish what they were able to accomplish. It's really special.

I'm going to remember this as a very special group.

**Q. What did it mean to have Jaylen Waddle on the field? How did his level of participation or effectiveness compare to his own expectations going into this game?**

NICK SABAN: I don't think there's any question about the fact that Jaylen was not 100% in the game. I think he was 100% fast exploding, straight line. Had a difficult time cutting off of that foot and slowing down. Those are the two things, that decelerating and cutting off of that foot, were the two issues for him.

We just had a limited plan for him. We really had, like, plays that he could run where he could run in a straight line and didn't have to do a lot of cutting, didn't have to do a lot of route running and changing direction, doing some of the things he's so good at, which is going in motion, running bubbles, orbits, all that kind of stuff.

As we lost receivers in the game, Smitty and Metchie went down, that group showed tremendous resiliency in this game to keep the next player coming in and doing a good job. So he probably played a little bit more there in the third quarter than what we anticipated. We wanted 10 or 12 plays. He was medically cleared to play. We knew he wasn't 100%. He knows he's not 100%. But he thought he could contribute to the team. I think he did in a very positive way. He had three catches in the game, and they were all sort of critical type things.

My hat's off to him. I had the same injury, so I know the difficulties coming back from that. You're healed but your ankle is so stiff, it's difficult to sort of get the flexibility and the flexion back so you can explode like you want to, especially when you drop your weight on that foot, which comes when you're slowing down, trying to make a cut.

I have a lot of respect for Jaylen Waddle, his mental toughness and his ability to be able to come back.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for being with us today. Again, congratulations on the national title.

NICK SABAN: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

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