

CFP Semifinal presented by Capital One: Alabama vs Notre Dame

Sunday, December 20, 2020
Arlington, Texas, USA

Coach Nick Saban

Alabama Crimson Tide

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Alabama head coach Nick Saban. Coach, an opening remark about playing in the semifinal game.

COACH SABAN: I'm really proud of our team for the opportunity they created for themselves. They handled a lot of adversity and disruptions during the course of the season to sort of get to this point.

It's an honor for us to be in the College Football Playoff playing against an outstanding Notre Dame team, who I'd like to congratulate on the great season that they had. Got some really, really good players. And they've played well as a team all year long.

And, you know, when you play this time of the year you always expect to play against really good opponents. And we've been in the playoffs before. And we're certainly honored to be back there again this year.

Q. Just wondering if you had a preference on which semifinal Alabama played in? And were you surprised at all that you were going to be playing in the Rose Bowl?

COACH SABAN: We had no preference. We're just happy to be in the game. We knew that we'd be playing against a very good team wherever. I think both venues are outstanding venues and it will be a great experience for our players. So, we had no preference at all.

Q. I heard you talking on ESPN earlier and I thought it was interesting. This holiday season you are kind of preparing like it's a bye week. Talk about that a little bit, how important it is to kind of prepare because usually you guys have more time to prepare for a playoff game.

COACH SABAN: Well, I think this whole season has been a little bit unique and abnormal in a lot of different ways. So we know exactly what the circumstance is. So we try to



plan the best we can to get our players prepared the best we can so that they can play up to their capabilities in this game and there's an adequate amount of time to do that.

We don't have the long break like we usually do, which obviously helps you get healthy with some of the players that have issues at this time of the season, which football players always do. But we're going to try to use this week to get those guys ready to go and use this week as a little bit of preparation, give our players a few days, three days off, and come back and have a pretty normal week.

So, in some ways the rhythm of the season is more connected this year than it is when you have that three- or four-week break, which is a hard management as well.

Q. I know this game is just another business trip. And the focus is making it to the National Championship. With the game being in Arlington at AT&T Stadium with more fans, does that mean anything for you or the players to be able to have more family and fans in the stadium versus playing at a venue that had fewer seats?

COACH SABAN: Well, I don't think there's any question about the fact that it is an advantage for our fans. It's an advantage for the families of our team that they have the opportunity to go see the game. And this is a great venue we're playing in, and we're certainly pleased and happy that we're involved. And we're happy for our fans that they're going to have a chance or at least some opportunity to see the game.

Q. Where do things stand with Landon after his scans this morning? And what did you see out of Chris Owens when he was in the game yesterday, as well as in previous games as well?

COACH SABAN: Well, Chris Owens has played a lot of football for us. He's an experienced player. We have a lot of confidence in him. He's played multiple positions. He's always been the backup center as well as playing right tackle, left tackle, filling in for whoever has not been in there.

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Landon is a hard guy to replace because of his leadership, his personality. He's very inspirational in a lot of ways to all of his teammates. So I don't know that you replace a guy like that, but we have a lot of confidence in Chris Owens.

Q. Congratulations on the win yesterday and getting back to the college playoff. Najee Harris and a lot of your guys, they had awesome games last night. What do you contribute that to and how will you think that will carry over into the playoffs?

COACH SABAN: Well, those guys have been outstanding players for us all year long. I think Mac played really well in the game. Najee had a record-setting game of sorts. And so did Smitty. All those guys have been a critical piece of the success of our offense. But I also think that everybody on offense contributes in a positive way so that those guys can make plays. And I think they would be the first one to tell you how important that togetherness and that teamwork is on offense.

So these guys have played well all year long. And it's going to be important that they make a significant contribution in the game that we have coming up in Dallas.

Q. Notre Dame fans remember the 2012 game well and they know that Alabama's been a pretty elite program since then. But how -- with football changing so much -- how has your program changed since 2012? What kind of has been your emphasis that's changed with your teams and how you build them?

COACH SABAN: I think the basic fundamental culture we try to create in our program has not really changed that much in terms of helping players be more successful in life or having been in a program, whether it's personal development, academic support, career development, development as football players.

But how we play on the field, we've probably changed as the game has changed. Play a little different style on offense. We were more run the ball, play-action pass, NFL-type offense back in the 2012 days than we are right now. More sort of NFL style but also incorporated a lot of the spread concepts of RPOs and those types of things. So we've kind of evolved a little bit as the game has evolved on the field. But the culture of the program really hasn't changed.

Q. Your guys' offense this year has scored more than 50 points six times this season. You've got three guys on the offense who are potential Heisman candidates. When you look at this team, how does the offense compare to years past and what is your level of confidence in this offense?

COACH SABAN: Well, we're confident in our players. And we've certainly been very productive on offense. And I don't like to make comparisons. We've had some good offensive teams here in the past. Last year's team had similar numbers. The year before that, similar numbers. So, you know, this has been an unusual year for a lot of teams. So maybe that contributes to it to some degree.

But I also think that our players have contributed to their consistency and performance by staying focused on the right things amid a lot of, you know, abnormal things. So gotta give them a lot of credit for their resiliency and their ability to overcome adversity and maintain consistency in what has been, you know, a year full of disruptions.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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