

CFP Semifinal at the Rose Bowl Game presented by Capital One: Alabama vs Notre Dame

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Defensive Coordinator Pete Golding

Alabama Crimson Tide

THE MODERATOR: Coach Pete Golding, opening comments.

COACH GOLDING: Hope you all had a merry Christmas. I know we're excited to play in the Rose Bowl, one of the best bowls in the country. And thank Capital One and the Rose Bowl committee for selecting us putting on a great show.

As far as practice, we got to practice versus Notre Dame a couple days before Christmas, and came back and had three practices since. They're a really good offensive football team. I think obviously start up front. Probably one of the best offensive lines from tackle to tackle that we've seen all year. Do a great job communicating. They're all on the same page. They're physical. They do a really good job of protection.

Obviously Ian Book, the quarterback, I think kind of makes them tick. Really good football player. Competitive, he's tough. I think he does a great job extending plays, but keeps his eyes downfield. When you break down their explosive reel, a lot of their explosive plays come because he extends the play, moves out of the pocket. And obviously do a really nice job in the scramble.

And from a running back standpoint, they played three guys. I think 23 is a really good player. They do a really good job in the run game with a lot of different personnel groupings. Play several different tight ends, create extra gaps in the C area.

Schematically they do a lot of different things that create a lot of problems. I think they've got some good players that they look for some matchup issues, getting them off safeties and linebackers. Obviously we've got our work cut out for us. They're a really good football team. We're



excited to play them.

Q. Talk about the tight ends there for Notre Dame. What sort of challenges do they pose? And just generally what about the tight end position has given this defense trouble this year between Pitts and Wydermyer and Yeboah as well?

COACH GOLDING: I think it's what obviously people are doing with them now. It used to be back in the day the tight end was always in the C area. And there's certain plays and patterns they ran out with them. But I think everybody is doing a really nice job of aligning these guys all over the place.

They'll be at number one to the field or they'll go three by one, and he's the X receiver to the boundary. They create some matchup problems. That's what these guys do.

You know, they'll both be in the C area, whether it's 87, 89 or 24. They're going to flex out, be the outside receivers, they'll be isolated in the boundary corner. If you leave a corner over there, if you worry about the size, then obviously you're going to try to match him up with a safety. They look for isolation route.

I think the multiplicity that people are doing with the tight ends, obviously from a coverage standpoint, you know, they make you dictate what you're going to play.

And so whether you're playing man or zone, they're going to know based on who is lined up on these guys. That's why they do it. So they get the pre-snap picture and know the coverage you're in -- here's the two I beater; here's the man beater. And then at that point, if their guy ends up going up and being better than yours and making the play, it's predetermined for the quarterback what they're in, because there's only so many things you can do once you put those guys at certain spots.

What I've been most impressed with these guys is is how well they block in the C area. They move them around, a lot of sliders with them. Obviously they're a gap team as well. They do a good job in the kickout. And they're still effective in the pass game.



I'm not saying they're the same as what we saw in Pitts. I think he's a little different athlete. Obviously he has receiver speed. But, again, they do a really nice job formationally of moving these guys around, creating extra gaps in the run game and then complement it with the pass game.

Obviously we'll have our work cut out for us. Obviously we've got to change the picture for the quarterback. Gotta have different ways to be able to bracket these guys and take them away and be able to get these guys some help.

Q. I just asked Brent Venables this. There's a reason teams don't run the wishbone anymore or don't run the veer anymore. Is there ever going to be a magic bullet out there for coordinators to stop the spread or slow it down in any meaningful way?

COACH GOLDING: I mean, I think what's unique now about the spread is most of this is triple option. You know, I mean, it's the run-pass option, but now it's vertical. It used to be, hey, read and ride our pitch. Well, he just caught it seven yards behind the football. So you had time to rally guys and he had to built his speed up and all that.

I think what offenses have gone to is making you count for all 11. Once you start trying to take away matchups because there's a really good player that we need to double, because we probably can't cover him one-on-one, well, now you're down a guy. You haven't accounted for the quarterback.

I thought that's what Florida did a nice job of too. They're going to get in empty. All right, what's the picture? What are they in? All right, now they're doubling so-and-so, 84 or 1. Now they have nobody for the quarterback. If you're not gaming the front and somebody doesn't win up front, well, you're a gap short.

I think that's the big thing. They make you cover the width of the field horizontally and vertically, and then they make you account for the quarterback in the run game, which is tough to do. There's only so many coverages you can play and be sound versus all those.

I think a lot of times now you've got to win on one-on-one. I think that's what defense has come to. The way they're spreading it out and the options that they have, if you don't win your one-on-one -- because somebody is going to be in a one-on-one, that best-case scenario, because a lot of times you're down a guy, depending upon the quarterback run game.

So if you can't win that one-on-one and you can't change

the picture and obviously confuse a guy, dictate the read, knowing, hey, he's the read-and-ride player, we're going to show this, pop back out, influence the play like you used to do in triple, then you're going to struggle.

Q. Your defense has 32 sacks, but 21 of them have come in the last four games. Wonder what you've noticed during that time period? And, secondly, what sort of progress you've seen from Will Anderson from the start of the season to today?

COACH GOLDING: Obviously I think Will has progressed very well. That's just his makeup. That's who he is. I think from day one, when he came in here, he had a completely different mindset than any freshman that I've been around.

He came in and attacked us, been in the playbook, is in the film rooms with Coach Sal all the time. But he practices that way. I think that's the one thing to me where he's come on late because it's starting to build. Week in, week out he's practiced the same as all out. That's all he knows. That's how he plays.

I think all those reps are starting to accumulate and he's getting to where he needs to be.

But it's never been a lack of effort. I think he's feeling more comfortable, obviously in the front, in the call that we make. I think he's gotten better from a technique standpoint and when we're running games of selling the one-on-one because he is so good at that before we work the games.

So I think a lot of it has come from a technique standpoint of his understanding of what we're asking him to do, right, from a pass rush standpoint.

But I think he's definitely progressed really well. Super talented, but he's a great kid.

Q. How has your defense evolved and improved during the season? I know you're coming off a rough game statistically, but you're also facing some really good offenses in Florida, Ole Miss, those guys, how have they improved?

COACH GOLDING: I think obviously the big thing for us in that stretch where I thought we were playing pretty good defenses, I thought we attacked the line of scrimmage up front, did a good job controlling blocks. I thought we were better in our gap integrity of fitting runs which has been an issue in the past.

But I think the biggest thing, we tackled better. I think early, obviously, in the year, you look at the Ole Miss game, they had 250 yards after contact. You can't play

good football teams and not eliminate obviously the yards after contact.

And then on top of that, whether it was that game or whether it was Florida, if you don't get off the field on third down versus good football teams and you give them another set of downs, it's going to be tough to stop these guys. They've got too many weapons. They do too many good things offensively.

I thought in that stretch, I thought we tackled really well in space. I thought we dominated up front. I thought we controlled the pocket. We didn't let the quarterback get out. And I thought we made contested plays on third down.

I thought the difference to me in Florida, in that five-week stretch we had, is when we had the opportunity to make a play we did it. And what I mean by that when the ball was on the ground in those other games we scoop and scored it or we fell on it.

We had three opportunities in the Florida game. It's right there. We don't get it. It's third and 17. And we're in an eight-drop zone. They get it. So I think good teams, when you keep allowing them to be able to move the chains, when you have an opportunity to get off the field, you're going to kill yourself.

And I think that's what happened in that game. We're 28 percent on third down. You can't give those guys with those weapons and the quarterback that they had and the scheme they've got more opportunities for explosive plays. I thought that was the biggest difference when we play well we eliminate the explosive plays obviously by being great communicators, but more importantly not allowing them yards after contact.

We're going to give them some things by coverages that we call -- there's a weakness and strength to all of them -- but we've got to be able to minimize the game. I thought when we played good defense we did that. We tackled well in space all on the same page in the back end. When we had the opportunity to get the football and take it away we did it. I think that's something we'll have to do in this game.

Q. To follow up on your point on tackling, that was something you talked about preseason, replicating drills for them in practice to put them in positions to work on the tackles that they had missed last year. When did you think those really kind of took effect and started to produce the results that y'all are producing later on in the season from a tackling perspective?

COACH GOLDING: Obviously I think after the Ole Miss game I think it was a come to Jesus because we put a lot of things on tape and a lot of things that weren't good. But I think it was good from our kids' standpoint that they could see it.

What we tried to do was we paired it. Here's the missed tackle. Here's the situation, here's the call. It's a 2-on-1 situation which we call a vice tackle. Right behind it we start with starts every damn day, which is a tackle, takeaway circuit versus our offense. And we put that exact drill, right, in that exact same situation right behind him.

And it's like, look, man, you'll either come out every day allow and rely on your technique and get better and improve because we're putting you in this situation and it's going to carry over on Saturday. Or you're going to think it's not important, you're going to BS it, your pad level is not right, your eyes aren't right, you don't run through contact. And now this is the result.

But I think with a lot of young kids these days, until it happens to them and then you can show them, hey, this is why we're doing it, hey, here's the situation, I think some of them just don't get it.

So I think obviously making them see it on tape, here's the situation, this is the drill that we do for it. This is why. And then going back over with them, here's the technique piece of it. Here's the approach. Here's the arrival, here's the finish. I think the more we can do that, the more we can show them.

And I think it's big for kids to understand why you're doing things. And to me if it doesn't show up on tape and it doesn't show up on the game, then you shouldn't be doing it. And I think that's one thing Coach Saban has done a nice job of how we train tackling and train turnovers in our takeaway circuit on Saturdays and it's validation for the guys to see it, so when we go out and drill it and practice it on a daily basis, they've got a little more pride in it because they know it's going to help the performance on Saturday.

Q. What was that response like after that Ole Miss game? What was the feeling in that defensive room? And how do you think they responded overall to that moment of giving up as many yards and points as you did?

COACH GOLDING: Yeah, I think obviously anytime you give up that amount of points, that poor on third down, have the opportunity to make some plays and didn't, I think you reevaluate everything.

But I think the first thing is your preparation for the game --



how do you practice, how prepared were you for the game from a formation recognition standpoint, motion adjustments, FIB.

My thing with these guys is, look, man, we're going to see different things in the game than we prepared you for. They're going to game plan us, they're going to find a weakness, they're going to try to exploit it. We've got to let our rules apply and gotta get it fixed on the sideline.

What we've shown you all week, what we worked for all week and you know what's coming, when that comes up in the game, we've got to be able to execute that. We've got to have that as a negative yardage play or no play. That can't be an explosive. Obviously that extends the drive when we've done it all week and we worked it all week. Because we're going to see enough stuff in the game where you haven't seen because they ain't put it on tape. And it was for us specifically based on what we do.

So I thought that was the one thing coming out of that game, like, look, 70 percent of the game, this is exactly what we prepared for, we knew what was coming. Here's the clips from practice, we worked it.

We didn't get it done. Why? And I think we go back and look at it from a preparation standpoint, from a practice standpoint, right? Certain calls. Were they too hard? Were there too many checks and addendums to it to be able to simplify it let the guys play?

Obviously at the point either you can tackle or you can't. And we work it every day. There's a little part of that want-to obviously of getting better and understanding the significance of it. And if we're going to be a good defense we've got to be able to do that. I think it was a good thing.

Obviously looking back on it, you don't want to take it, a game like that. There's a good football team you could have easily lost that game, and we wouldn't be in the same situation we're in. We try to get guys to understand hey, this is what we'll try to teach you on a day-to-day basis so you don't put yourself in that same situation. I think for kids.

Q. There was a moment during the SEC Championship game where Saban got into it on the sideline --

COACH GOLDING: No way, no way.

Q. What's it like being in that? And just kind of give us some insight, if you would, on what that moment is like.

COACH GOLDING: Obviously, I think when you invest as

much Coach Saban invests into this program and into football and things like that, when something doesn't get executed, doesn't go the way it is supposed to go, you're frustrated. Like we all are. It's no different.

That's part of it. That's in any job, any boss, obviously, when you don't get the result you're expecting that you should get, obviously that's going to come down on whoever is responsible for that. As it should be.

So, I mean, that ain't nothing new. Whether it's my dad growing up, my mom, that's expected. When something doesn't go as it should, right, then obviously there's consequences for it.

I think it's just kind of a motivation speech at that time. Let's get them going, let's roll.

Q. Just the IQ of Malachi Moore as a freshman. Can you talk about that for a minute?

COACH GOLDING: Yeah, I think we've mentioned this before when we talked. I think the one positive to COVID, if there was, was the offseason and the summer. Once you went to Zoom, you know, and they took away from our standpoint and get these guys and slow the install down, you weren't getting ready for a practice, and now we're moving to the next practice and we're game planning these guys to where you could really build the foundation and then start with the technical standpoint after that.

So I thought, for these young guys that, like you said, have a high football IQ, right, and are smart kids, I think that was huge. When he came into camp, his knowledge of the overall defense was not an incoming freshman. And obviously he's athletic enough on the field to be able to make the plays he needs to; but more importantly, in this system, especially in the back end, if you know the foundation and know how it fits and know your responsibility, then you're a good enough athlete to play or you wouldn't be here. We wouldn't have signed you.

So I think the big piece of that is the mental standpoint, like you said, which I do think the Zooms, Coach Scott and Saban, throughout the spring and summer, the walk-throughs, just the preparation of it, having another month prior to game one, I think, was big as well to that.

Yes, he's got a high football IQ, loves football, studies his butt off, and he's a good football player for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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