

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

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Arlington, Texas, USA

DeVonta Smith

Alabama Crimson Tide

Q. First, what does it mean to be the AP's College Football Player of the Year? And second, can you comment on the growth of your teammate John Metchie III this year and what he's meant to the team?

DEVONTA SMITH: Winning the award, it's a blessing, just being in that conversation and to win an award. And Metchie, he comes to work every day. He works hard, and it's paying off for him. He's in the film room every day. He's going out to practice, working hard, and he wants to get better every day.

Q. Wanted to ask you, what is the biggest thing you've noticed about your own growth and development on the field as well as off the field?

DEVONTA SMITH: Just my attention to detail, how precise I want to be with everything. Just wanting to do everything perfect, just getting it as perfect as I can with everything I do.

Q. First, I want to ask you about being asked to play defensive back some in spring practice when you're first getting to school there and what your reaction was to that. And secondly, when you really felt like you belonged and could play at the highest level there at Alabama?

DEVONTA SMITH: Playing DB, I kind of felt eventually it was going to come just with the depth and everything that we had going into the spring. I mean, I was willing to do whatever Coach Saban asked me to do. I was comfortable with it. And really, yeah, just do whatever he wanted me to do.

Q. Tell me a little bit about that nickname you have, the "Slim Reaper," and how do you plan on using that against Notre Dame?



DEVONTA SMITH: I first heard it from Coach Paul (phonetic), one of the strength and conditioning coaches. He called me it one game, and it just kind of stuck to me. And next thing everybody started doing it. And really constantly in the game just going out there doing my job executing the game plan.

Q. When you go back to last January and think back to your decision to come back for your last year, just how much debate was there in your mind and how much has this season and your success, the team's success validated that decision?

DEVONTA SMITH: Just knowing that I wanted to finish things the right way. I wanted to get my degree. I feel like I made the right decision, a great decision. And being around this team has opened my eyes to a lot of things and just made me very comfortable and glad that I made that decision.

Q. When Jaylen was injured against Tennessee, did that affect you in any way in terms of stepping up either as a leader off the field, or did it affect your play on the field?

DEVONTA SMITH: When he went down, he just made me want to set the role to do more, just feeling that it's a big player that we lost, and I just wanted to do more for the team, do whatever I can for the team.

Q. Could you talk about also being a semifinal finalist for the Heisman Trophy, and really also about Jaylen, how much he's helped you maybe since his injury this year?

DEVONTA SMITH: He's helped me a lot, just with the things that he sees when he's at the game. He talks to me about things that he see. He's still on the sideline helping us with the offensive things like that, and just being here in the film room, just on the things that he sees. So he helps me and the other players a lot.

Q. AP Player of the Year, and you've been lighting it up at Alabama, but you might not be here without a barbershop you went to as a kid. What is that



barbershop, and what did they do to help propel you to stardom?

DEVONTA SMITH: He kept me going with everything that's been going on, times when I was down and I didn't want to play no more, he kept me going. Always kept me on the right track, took me places to get these opportunities to play football at the highest level.

Q. You've had your two best seasons under Steve Sarkisian. What has he done to maybe help your game out a little bit and give you the opportunity to shine like you have?

DEVONTA SMITH: He does a lot with his offense. A lot of movement. A lot of shifts, a lot of motions putting people in different places, helping everybody be successful.

Q. When this 2017 group came together, when did you all first realize we got something really special here, the 2017 offensive unit?

DEVONTA SMITH: A lot of us we went to a lot of camps together. We talked to each other. Some of us kind of knew where others were leaning to and some of us were already kind of committed here.

And it was just everybody just recruiting each other just building the relationship. And I feel like that's what made us so close, is just before we even got here the relationships that we had.

Q. Can you talk about the challenges that Notre Dame defense presents to your offense?

DEVONTA SMITH: They fly to the ball. They're very physical. They send all kinds of blitzes and things like that. They're technically sound, don't make a lot of mistakes.

Q. Could you compare the Notre Dame defense to any defenses that you guys have played this season?

DEVONTA SMITH: Really similar to a lot of defenses we played, everybody gets to the ball. Everybody try to get the ball out.

Q. You could have gone to a lot of different schools, but what was the determining factor for you to come to Alabama?

DEVONTA SMITH: A place where it was home away from home.

Q. When you watch Notre Dame's secondary, specifically Kyle Hamilton, what does he do on the

field that is tricky, and what makes him so successful back there as a safety?

DEVONTA SMITH: They throw in a lot of different looks. They play a lot of their coverages different ways. So it's a lot of the same coverages. They look different with people in different places. They do a good job of disguising everything.

Q. Back to that 2017 recruiting class, when it all came together, when you guys were going through spring practice and even workouts together, when did you realize how good it was, from offensive tackles to the wideouts to Dylan Moses, just a lot of talent in that class?

DEVONTA SMITH: Just how close everybody was and everybody's dedication to this team, just everybody wanting to come in, put in the work (indiscernible).

Q. I haven't heard you say this before. Are there a few receivers that you've patterned your game after, college players, maybe somebody in your neck of the woods, pro players, anybody you look and emulated your game after, watched and take parts of it?

DEVONTA SMITH: Keenan Allen and Davante Adams.

Q. You mentioned your barber friend who kept you going when you didn't want to play anymore. When was it that you didn't want to play and why?

DEVONTA SMITH: My sophomore year in high school. Broke my clavicle at a practice. And I always wanted to play basketball, and I was just really just frustrated with everything. And I just didn't want to play no more.

Q. For most of us here out here, we look at that catch at LSU as kind of your highlight moment of the season. Was that your favorite part of the year? If not, what was your maybe favorite moment of 2020 so far?

DEVONTA SMITH: My favorite moment has been games where it's been a tough game, we've been in a dogfight, and this team just kept coming together and we kept believing in each other, offense believed in the defense, defense believed in the offense. And we just kept fighting as a team. So no moment of me specifically, just moments of this team being one.

Q. What is it about Keenan Allen's game that you admire so much and try to pattern your game after?

DEVONTA SMITH: Just the details, everything from his releases to his routes, just the small details in everything



that he do.

Q. I wonder who first called you Smitty, and how did you get that -- obviously it's your last name, but who was the first person who called you that?

DEVONTA SMITH: Coach Napier, when I was getting recruited, he always called me Smitty.

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