

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

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Mac Jones

Alabama Crimson Tide

THE MODERATOR: We're here with quarterback Mac Jones.

Q. What have you seen from this Notre Dame secondary, specifically their cornerbacks, how they try to take care of an elite receiver like, somebody like DeVonta?

MAC JONES: I think they do a good job. Coach Lea, with their scheme, four down fronts mostly and they try and play quarters on the back end and do a bunch of different things, too.

But I think the big thing is that those guys in the back end, they know where their weaknesses are, and they're always in the right spot. When you play a defense like that you've got to understand that they know where they're supposed to be, and you just have to find the right holes in the defense.

And obviously they're really well coached and they play really hard. Whenever someone is getting tackled there's nine, 10, 11 guys on the ball. It just shows that they play together and they play really hard. And they're one of the top defenses in the country.

Q. Looking back, when you first started at Alabama, you were just a backup quarterback for Jalen Hurts and Tua Tagovailoa. Now fast forward to 2020, you're currently a Heisman candidate. Did you ever think in a million years you'd be in the position you're in right now?

MAC JONES: I try not to worry about future events and things like that. But really just I did create a bunch of goals for myself, and my teammates obviously have a bunch of goals as well. We kind of come in as a freshman group and we had a great class.



Yes, I did learn a lot from Jalen and Tua, and I definitely set goals to try to become a better player to help the team. And I try to work really hard. And obviously a lot of my guys in my recruiting class did the same.

It's really showing but at the same time we have a lot left to write in our story and that's going to be important this next game.

Q. You've gone through a lot, flipping from Kentucky to Alabama, and then having to sit behind Tua and Jalen, as just mentioned. But how gratifying is it to play in the Rose Bowl and how are you preparing mentally for this big game?

MAC JONES: It's definitely a blessing. I mean any college football player would want to say they want to play in a game like the Rose Bowl and a College Football Playoff. We're just happy to be here, but at the same time you've got to ask yourself are you satisfied with just being there or really take advantage of the opportunity.

I think all our teammates and our coaches have decided we just want to take advantage of where we're at. We're finally where we want to be. Like I said, it's a great blessing. And we're just looking forward to the opportunity.

Q. I was wondering if you could say something about Joe Dickinson and the role that he's had in this season for you and kind of helping you reach this point?

MAC JONES: Talking about Coach D?

Q. Yes.

MAC JONES: Coach D is a guy that I've been around for a long time, probably since I was like 8 or 9 years old. We talk almost every day on the phone. We're texting and he's just a guy that he can always help me out if I need something with my mechanics or anything with the scheme that we're doing, just because he's been around football for a long time. And he's seen a lot of good players and a lot of good coaching.

So, just really happy to have him there kind of helping me



out. At the same time we've got great coaches here that have helped me along the way, starting with my freshman year to all the way to now. Just getting kind of that third-party outside source I can have as like a family member type person, and Coach D has been really cool.

Q. Kyle Hamilton on Notre Dame's defense, what kind of matchup problems he can create. As a quarterback how important is it to identify him before every snap and maybe even like make sure you make eye contact with him to potentially move him around?

MAC JONES: Got it. He's all over the tape. You see him everywhere. He's blitzing, he's in the back end, hiding pressures then coming or, you know, covering people.

So he's a real lengthy guy. I think he's like 6'4". You can see it on the tape. He understands football. You can tell he really studies his part and he knows exactly what to do.

I'm just looking forward to getting a chance to go against someone like that. It's almost like an Ed Reed-type person where you have to find him every play. You've got to know where he is, because he can really, like, ruin a play for you if you're not finding that player.

Q. How much has John Metchie III grown as a receiver this year? Can you describe what he's like as a teammate off the field?

MAC JONES: Metchie is a great guy. He wakes up early. He comes to work. He's just one of those guys that's a grinder. He's been doing that since he got here, and really this summer I was just really happy to see him -- we're obviously in different cities, but when we were in Tuscaloosa working together, he'd wake up 6:00 in the morning and come throw, or whenever we wanted to throw.

It just shows that he's grown a lot too. He's got a lot of opportunities this year, and he's done a great job and he's a great team player. One of my favorite plays is that play last game where he kind of got the fumble back. That just shows you what type of player and competitor he is.

He didn't even get the ball on that play, ends up flipping a turnover and we score on the next play. It's things like that, sometimes people don't notice. And it happens all the time with a lot of players on our team. But I'm just really happy to have John there helping us out and making plays.

Q. When you think back to about a year ago and you had a couple of juniors who decided to go to the NFL, but a couple who stayed as well, with DeVonta and Najee, just how much were you involved in campaigning for them to come back, and what has it

meant to have them this season for you?

MAC JONES: At the end of the day, that's their personal decision, but obviously, when you're becoming a new quarterback at Alabama, you want to have good playmakers around you. We have that.

But at the same time, those guys came back and kind of put the "we" before "me," and they wanted to win a National Championship. We're where we want to be. At the same time, I'm happy they've kind of increased their stock, or whatever you want to call it, as the season's gone on. And they've just proved that you can come back and work for something and be where you want to be.

We've got a little bit of ways to go, but I'm really proud of those guys. And I'm just super thankful they actually did come back and I got a chance to play with them for a full year.

Q. Wanted to get your thoughts on where have you seen your progression and your growth over this season and what have you learned from Coach Sarkisian that's helped you along the way?

MAC JONES: I think the season has obviously been pretty wild, being the starting quarterback and stuff, there's a lot of pressures and things like that. But at the same time you've got to learn how to manage it and just be a good teammate and try and be the best quarterback you can be.

And each week there's a different challenge. You just have to first, like, understand what the challenge is and then figure out how you can beat that challenge.

And obviously Coach Sark, you can see it on the field, he calls great players, great at developing players. All the players love him. We're all behind Coach Sark 100 percent.

And he's an aggressive player caller, and it shows on the field. And we love how he adjusts to what we're saying and telling him, too. Some offensive coordinators probably don't listen to their players as much, but he definitely takes in what we tell him and what we see on the field, and we kind of combine to come up with a game plan and even in-game adjustments.

Q. Could you dissect some other Notre Dame defensive players, Owusu-Koramoah and some of the other players that you've seen on film?

MAC JONES: Jeremiah, No. 6, does a great job. The guy obviously won the Butkus Award. You see him on film, he can cover people, he's all over the field, creates turnovers,

causes fumbles, interceptions, all sorts of things.

But I think he's like the pivotal piece in the defense. But at the same time they've got great players all around. They create a lot of movement in the defensive line, play a lot of different guys.

Linebackers are bigger, run-stopper-type guys. But at the same time they're all over the field as well. And with the four guys on the back end, we already talked about 14 and he's kind of the leader back there.

All those guys played a lot of football. It's nine seniors, something like that. We've just got to be ready. They're the top defense in the country, and obviously really good on third down, too. So we're just looking forward to the opportunity.

Q. Going back to your recruitment in that class of 2017, obviously it's easy to look back now. There's so many guys in the NFL from that class. There's going to be even more going into the NFL. As you're going through your recruitment, you're meeting the guys, even when you get to campus, what was the first moment you realized that class was special?

MAC JONES: I knew they were all special, even before we got here at camps and stuff, all those guys -- Smitty, Ruggs, Jeudy -- throwing to them at camps, really cool opportunity.

Obviously you can look at that class be, like, wow. Right now there's a few guys in the NFL, a few guys that will be in the NFL probably next year. And it's really cool to be part of that class. I was kind of the second quarterback. And obviously, like we talked about earlier, I've learned from Tua and obviously learned from everybody in that class. It's been really cool to be a part of that growth.

Q. Could you give us an idea what the offense has faced defensively? What lengths defenses go to try to stop you guys, maybe the number of defenses you have seen as defenses try to catch up?

MAC JONES: Early in the year I think people tried to play us how they wanted to play their defense against us. And you kind of saw the transition as the year went on. Some people dropped eight. Some people played more coverage. Some people will try and pressure.

But we kind of had answers for a little bit of everything. And it really goes back to throwing against Coach Saban's defense and his philosophy. He's very multiple in his scheme. And Coach Pete and all them. They do a good job in practice giving us different looks.

It definitely changes as time went on. There was one game when the team literally dropped eight the whole time and you've just got to take what they give you. And it is what it is. And it's good to go against different types of defenses like that because you get good learning experiences on tape and obviously when you're out there on the field.

Q. I know losing Landon was huge in the Florida game. Speak to the level of your confidence with Chris Owens. What have you seen from him in practice the last few days?

MAC JONES: Losing Landon is definitely a tough gig, but we have to bounce back. Landon would want nothing more than us to just keep doing what we're doing, and that starts with Chris.

Chris has been here for many years. And he's also one of my close buddies, that, you know, he does a good job. He's played tackle, guard, center. We've been -- we go way back years and years. We kind of have that same communication level. We've been working on it this week.

I've been really proud of him and the opportunity that he's gotten. I mean, that's a great experience just to be able to say, hey, I'm starting the College Football Playoff game and I've been here a while. We have that same similar late-bloom. So I'm just really excited for Chris. We're on the same page and we're ready to roll.

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