

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

Thursday, December 31, 2020  
Arlington, Texas, USA

## Coach Nick Saban Alabama Crimson Tide

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach of Alabama, Nick Saban.

COACH SABAN: We're certainly excited. Our team is very excited about having the opportunity to play in the Rose Bowl sponsored by Capital One. It's kind of an honor for us to play against a very well-coached Notre Dame team. Brian Kelly's team has had an outstanding season. A very, very good team.

Our team has had a really good week of preparation, and we're kind of looking at this because of the sort of unusual season that we're having even for bowl games. Just going today as if this is a normal road trip for us, but certainly not a normal game for us and something our players are excited about and really fortunate to have the opportunity to play in the College Football Playoff.

**Q. You guys are 19 and a half point favorites coming into the game. Do you worry about your players reading this and taking Notre Dame too lightly? And how do you prevent this as a coach?**

COACH SABAN: Well, I think that we're always concerned. I always tell our players that they really shouldn't listen to what people say externally and really stay focused on what you have to do internally to be able to play your best football. I think this program is built on players being accountable to do their job at a high level and to be accountable to each other.

And really what other people think and say really doesn't have anything to do with the outcome of the game. So we want to stay focused on the things that we have to do to get the proper outcome for our team, but with great respect for the team that we have to play. And know that we're going to have to stay focused one play at a time and do a great job of executing to be able to have success anytime you play against a really good team.



So, we try to keep our players from all external sort of factors out there that really don't have any significance on the outcome of the game.

**Q. How are you doing this morning, Coach?**

COACH SABAN: I'm doing great. How are you?

**Q. Pretty good, Coach. Going over the season, you guys are 11-0 overall, 10-0 in the conference, on an 11-game winning game streak. I would say your closest game this year was against Missouri, the first game of the season, a 38-19 win. And after that you guys scored 40 points or more all the rest of your games. How do you keep your guys to stay focused at the task at hand and not think it's going to be easy or even should I say, a cake walk to the title game?**

COACH SABAN: Well, really when you play sports, you're really only as good as your last game. You're really only as good as your last play. So we try to keep our players looking forward at the next challenge, understand what they have to do to prepare to be able to execute and play well, create value for themselves. These guys have worked hard to put themselves in this position. So you certainly want to be able to finish correctly.

And what you've done in the past doesn't have anything to do with what's going to happen in the future. So if you can remember what you did to have success in the past and continue to do that, that's going to help you continue to have success.

Success is not a continuum; it's momentary. And it's always based on the next moment. So that's what we try to get our players to focus on.

**Q. I've heard former players say that you're really good at giving pregame speeches. Are those crafted mentally a couple days beforehand, or is that a spontaneous thing? And is a playoff pregame speech, does that carry maybe a little more intensity than one in the regular season?**



COACH SABAN: You know, every game is important. Every game is important to be able to get to this point. This is the next game. It's the most important game because it is the next game. So I like to be intense. I wouldn't like the players to say, well, Coach is not very intense today so this must not be a very important game.

I think every game is important. Every game has significance. And we try to -- basically to answer the first part of your question I usually speak to the team the day before the game, and what I say to them in the locker room before we go out is really a small summarization of the points that we try to make in terms of what's important for us to be successful in this particular game, whether it's mindset or what we need to do to execute or critical points that will affect the outcome of the game. So I guess I do that a day in advance and I prepare it a day in advance.

**Q. When you look at the secondary, as a sophomore, how have you seen Jordan Battle progress as a communicator and play caller on that back end?**

COACH SABAN: I think he's done a really good job this year having limited experience going into the year in the entire secondary as well as with Jordan Battle specifically. He's a bright guy. He really understands the concepts of what we're trying to do. Has become a much better leader and communicator in the secondary, which I think helps the other guys play better, which is always something that you like for your safeties to be able to do.

But he's done it extremely well. And I think as he's gotten more knowledge and experience throughout the year, it's helped his confidence, which also helps his ability to communicate.

**Q. You had several players who went home for Christmas, obviously, and came back. How is the testing protocol gone for players and staff? And do you expect everybody on the flight today?**

COACH SABAN: We haven't had any problems to this point. I always knock on wood when I say that. So everybody that we expected to be on the trip will be on the trip.

**Q. As the season progresses through a set of circumstances and maturity someone emerges as a key performer. When you looked at the Notre Dame team, have you seen that type of player, and on your own team as well, a few you might mention? And I also want to ask you about the two tight ends for Notre Dame, No. 24 Tremble and No. 87 Mayer.**

COACH SABAN: I think all three of their tight ends play a

significant role in their offense. They all play extremely well. They're very versatile players. I think their quarterback has played well. I think their offensive line has played well.

I think their defense plays great team defense. They understand the scheme. They play hard. They play with toughness.

So to single out one particular player that has emerged -- they have a thousand-yard rusher. I could kind of go on and on and on. They have a 60-reception receiver. They have a lot of good players. They're very well-coached and they're a very good team. And I think like most teams, every team sort of develops an identity as they go through the season. And I think this team has an identity. I think they're physical. They play with toughness. They play with great intangibles, discipline, give great effort. So I have a lot of respect for the way they compete in the game as a total team.

**Q. Has there been any change in the status with LaBryan Ray or Jaylen Waddle this week, and is there any other injuries entering the game?**

COACH SABAN: No, there hasn't been any changes with those two guys. And we always have guys that are a little nicked up that we kind of make a decision in pregame warm-up if they'll be able to go or not. But we're hopeful that all those guys will be fine.

**Q. You helped start Lance Taylor's coaching career. I wonder, back in 2007 when he was interviewing for that graduate assistant job, what you saw in him that you gave him that opportunity?**

COACH SABAN: Lance Taylor is a great coach, a fine young man. Obviously was a contributor here at Alabama as a player and certainly would have loved to have him be part of our staff. Things just didn't work out the right way at the right time for him or for us. And he's done an outstanding job with the players that he's responsible for at Notre Dame.

**Q. With the players that you have injured who may not play in the game, have the other guys been able to use that as motivation going into this Rose Bowl game to help them bring home the victory to Alabama and get to that National Championship game?**

COACH SABAN: I think anytime you have a team and players have respect for each other, they certainly have some emotion for guys that are going to be unable to play, knowing how important it is for those guys and for all of us to be accountable to each other. So I don't think there's



any question about the fact that players have feelings and want to be successful for their teammates, the ones that are playing and the ones that can't play.

So if you have good team chemistry, I think that's always going to be the case, and I think it's certainly the case with this team.

**Q. Your kicking game has been very solid this year from Will Reichard. Have you made a decision on the punter for this game? Is that a game-time decision, or is that something you're still considering?**

COACH SABAN: No, we like where we are. The consistency and direction, where we kick the ball, sometimes it's not as far as we'd like to be, but the hang time is good. We've been able to cover the kick. So there's no change that's going to be made in the punting.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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