

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

Friday, January 1, 2021  
Arlington, Texas, USA

## Coach Nick Saban Alabama Crimson Tide

Alabama 31, Notre Dame 14

THE MODERATOR: Good evening and welcome to this 2021 College Football Playoff Semifinal at the Rose Bowl Game Presented by Capital One news conference with Nick Saban, head coach of the Alabama Crimson Tide.

We will start with an opening statement from Coach Saban and then start with questions.

NICK SABAN: First of all, I'd like to thank all the people at the Rose Bowl. This has always been a first-class venue to be a part of. The people here, the Capital One, Dallas, to make this transition to where it was pretty seamless for the players. I'd like to congratulate Notre Dame's team on an outstanding year. A tough game for us.

Then I'd like to also congratulate our team, who they played really well all year long. They've earned the right to be here. It's always an honor to say you won a Playoff game and won a Rose Bowl, which has great tradition. Our players are excited about that. They've earned the right now to play in the National Championship Game.

It will be kind of up to them to see how we manage that, how we get ready to go down to Miami and play in that game. But I'm really proud of the way our players have handled disruptions all year long. I know this has been a difficult season for fans, players, coaches managing their team. But I think this is good for everyone when we have these games, people have something to be interested in, and players have the opportunity to compete.

We're excited about it. This was a great win for us. We knew this would be a tough game, and it certainly was. We'll learn what we need to learn from it so we have a chance to improve and get better.

But I was really excited for Patrick and Smitty to be



honored as Players of the Game, but at both guys said, not everybody gets honored but everybody contributes to the success of the team. It's that way in life sometimes. You do great things, but you don't get recognized. So it's part of it. We had a lot of great players do a lot of great things to get here and also have success today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

We will now go to questions.

**Q. The last few times you guys have played, the defenders have chosen to drop a lot of guys into coverage. Is there a comfortability knowing that you guys can play sort of any style you need to to win?**

NICK SABAN: I think you have to be able to play every style. I think that if people get a bead on you in terms of what is successful against you, you don't have answers for it, then everybody's going to do it and they're going to take a lot of things away.

I think the thing that was a little tough for us in the second half is we didn't run the ball very effectively in the second half. We wanted to try to take the air out of it at the end of the game. Didn't have much success. They had the ball for almost the entire last eight minutes of the game.

But we have to be able to finish a little bit better, regardless of what style of defense anybody is going to try to play against us. I'm sure we'll learn from it and hopefully do better the next time.

**Q. One of the guys that stepped up was DeMarcco Hellams. What have you seen from him in the secondary this season, especially in the games where he's really come on?**

NICK SABAN: DeMarcco has played well for us all year long. He just hadn't had a lot of opportunities. DeMarcco is a smart guy. He understands the system and the scheme. He's a good tackler. He's physical. We knew that they were going to be a physical team, so we chose to play him today a little bit more. He did a really good job.

But he's done a really good job in practice, and I think that's the key to the drill. He deserved the opportunity to play. I think he did a pretty good job for us today.

**Q. Smitty had another dominant performance tonight. Do you think this cements his Heisman Trophy chances?**

NICK SABAN: We love it when our players get recognized. Smitty has done as much for our team as any player could do for any team. So we were so happy he was recognized as the College Football Player of the Year.

I don't get the opportunity to see all players play, really know exactly what they've done for their team. I'd love to see another one of our players win the Heisman Trophy. Smitty has done as much for our team as any other player who did win the Heisman Trophy, and they did a great job, too.

I just don't like to make predictions about things. I love it when our players get recognized. It would be a tremendous honor for him if that happened.

**Q. What was the explanation given to you for the unsportsmanlike conduct penalty at the end?**

NICK SABAN: I was out on the field about two steps because I was yelling at one of our linebackers who didn't drop in the right direction. I've done that pretty much all of my career. It wasn't during a live ball, so...

I guess technically you're not supposed to do that. I mean, look, I'm not criticizing anybody, I'm not complaining. I'm just saying I've been a head coach for 20-some years and I've never been called for that, but I got called today. I'll have to do better the next time.

**Q. I wanted to get your thoughts on just Patrick Surtain as far as what makes him so difficult, what makes him so swift as far as being in the secondary, being able to make those coverages?**

NICK SABAN: Patrick has got great size. He's got great speed, very instinctive, a great athlete, change of direction, great cover guy, really smart. He does a great job of preparing for the game, so he really knows what he has to do in a game to have success against whoever he has to corner. We've asked our corners to do a lot of bump-n-run, and he and Josh have done a pretty good job all year.

Patrick has played phenomenally well for us and great to see him get recognized tonight as the Defensive Player.

**Q. To go back to opposing defenses kind of sagging**

**back and playing a more conservative style of defense, what are some of the checks that Sarkisian has made to go against that and how have the players executed those?**

NICK SABAN: I think when people play us that way, you got to take what the defense gives. Mac threw a couple check-downs tonight, which become catch-and-run plays for you. They're not the big-time explosive plays we sometimes make. But they do keep the chains moving.

I think Najee had a couple catch and runs today. I think he dropped one. I don't really think there's anything from a style standpoint that is not something that we can attack, and that we'll have to attack it in the future. When people play zone, they sag off, you got to throw the ball and take what they give.

The key to the drill is, if you don't get long-yardage situations, they don't really have the opportunity to do that. You can't do that on third and four or you still make a first down. So to have more positive plays on first and second downs so you don't get in long-yardage situations, which we got in too many long-yardage situations today, especially in the second half, and we didn't convert.

But if we make those third down and four, five and six, it's hard to play that way and really stop them playing zone.

**Q. I was wondering how you teach Najee Harris how to jump over (indiscernible) football players?**

NICK SABAN: I actually try to teach him not to do it, and it didn't work (laughter).

Anyway, for a big guy, it's pretty amazing that he can do that. He's kind of got a great feel when a guy is going to try to cut him, which a lot of guys, smaller DBs, all try to cut tackle, bigger backs. When he sees that head go down, man, he'll go over top of them in a heartbeat. It's been very effective for him.

**Q. Any health update for injured players, Christian Harris, Malachi Moore wasn't out there. Any update on them?**

NICK SABAN: Malachi Moore is day-to-day. He injured himself a little bit in the Florida game. He was able to practice on and off. It's the type of injury that exercise aggravates it. He wasn't able to go today.

Really nothing else. Christian Harris we took out because we didn't want him to get hurt. He was getting a little sore, which the injury that he has will do that on occasion. But he played through it. He could have finished the game.



We just took him out.

**Q. You've obviously coached in the Rose Bowl before. What did you make of the setting?**

NICK SABAN: Well, we've played here, I think this was our fifth time that we've played here. We were actually supposed to play USC here this year, in AT&T Stadium, Cowboy Stadium. We've played here before. I think this is one of the finest venues in college football.

I don't think that there's anything quite like the Rose Bowl, the tradition, the setting, the mountains. It's just a phenomenal experience to play in the Rose Bowl.

I wish our players would have gotten that opportunity, but at the same time these people did a phenomenal job of the transition from the Rose Bowl to here. The Playoff folks, the Capital One folks, the people here in Dallas, as well as the Rose Bowl folks. It was pretty seamless for our players. They enjoyed the opportunity to be able to play in the Rose Bowl, even though they had to play here in Dallas, which is really a great experience for players as well.

**Q. Did you notice any surprises from Notre Dame on offense, defense or special teams? Did they have anything for you today?**

NICK SABAN: Well, they did a lot of shifting and motioning, shifting in and out of unbalanced formations, which I didn't think our players managed very well in the first half. They had a good plan against us. They do a great job. I think Brian Kelly is a great coach. His entire staff deserves a lot of credit for the plan they put together to play against us, as well as all the things they've done all season long to get here.

Their players really play hard. They play with great discipline. They did a good job of stopping the run in the second half. They plugged backers, did a really good job from that standpoint. But I think that when you play in games like this, you know that the other team practices, too. So they're going to do something different, try to take advantage of something that you maybe didn't do so well on at some point in time during the season. The players really have to be able to adjust in the game.

I tell our players that all the time. We certainly had to do some adjusting today. I think our players did a good job of it.

Then in the fourth quarter the game kind of changed a little bit, and they started throwing it all over, like two minute, which was a little different. Not different for what they've

done in the past, but something they're very effective as, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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