

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Sunday, December 3, 2023

Pasadena, California, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Nick Saban

Press Conference

NICK SABAN: We're very excited about being able to play in the College Football Playoff. Very excited about playing in the Rose Bowl. My experience in the Big Ten, we always referred to it as the granddaddy of them all. We played there in 2009 and it was a great experience, a lot of great people, first class organization in every way.

Our team is very excited about having the opportunity to play the No. 1 team in the country in the University of Michigan. They've had a very, very successful season, Big Ten champs. I'd like to congratulate them on that. We're going to look forward to the challenge that we have ahead in terms of what we have to do to prepare and be the best that we can be to play against the No. 1 team in the country.

Q. The finalists for the Heisman Trophy will be announced tomorrow and obviously Jalen is in that mix. What would you say about his candidacy and his performance this season?

NICK SABAN: Jalen has done a fantastic job for us. His transition and improvement as a player has certainly been a huge factor on the success of our team. I don't get the opportunity to watch all these other guys on a consistent basis, so it's not fair for me to make a comparison. But from our team's standpoint, he's certainly a Heisman candidate in terms of what he's done to help our team be successful.

Q. I was wondering about the last 24 hours. We saw you last night in Atlanta. I know some other coaches said they didn't sleep last night. What was your 24 hours like? You kind of had to sell your team. Now when you found out, what was that feeling like?

NICK SABAN: Well, there was a lot of concern about -- I felt like our team deserved the right to be in the playoffs. They earned the right to be there. I was just very anxious and hopeful that they would get the opportunity to do that.



So it made a bit of a sleepless night in a lot of ways.

We were trying to prepare for the opportunity, if we got it, but also concerned about what opportunities we'd have if it didn't work out.

But we're excited about the fact that it did, and I know our players were excited about it, and we're going into finals week here in the next couple weeks. So they've got to focus on academics and get ready to play in this game.

Q. I'm wondering in what ways is Michigan similar to some of the teams you have -- any of the teams you have played this year, and in what ways might they present some unique challenges with what they do?

NICK SABAN: Well, I haven't had the opportunity to watch them yet and I don't get to see very many college football games throughout the course of the season, but the little that I have seen is they've got a great defensive team. I know they're one of the best defensive teams in the country. They do a great job of attacking the ball and getting turnovers. They're very productive on offense. Quarterback is a good player, good runner, great balance.

I haven't been able to see them, and it wouldn't be fair to compare them to someone else that we play, but certainly have a tremendous amount of respect for what they've been able to accomplish all year long.

Q. What can you say about the situation this year, that game against Texas, and then the committee looking at your season, one loss, theirs, as well, and seeing what you did against Georgia as well as Texas's play against you, just the importance of your team as well as Texas getting in with those match-ups being of high value to the committee.

NICK SABAN: Yeah, well, we won 10 of 11 games in a row and beat the No. 1 team in the country. We're not the same team that we were when we played Texas earlier in the season. We were kind of in transition at the quarterback position. It was unsettling. I think it affected our team. Although Texas has a great team, and I think they deserve every opportunity in terms of their résumé



and getting in the game.

This is just one of those years where -- there's been other years like this, where somebody that may have been deserving got left out, and Florida State certainly going undefeated was -- did everything they could to get in the playoffs, and unfortunately, probably because of the injury to the quarterback, they're not going to have that opportunity.

Q. How much do you think the 6-1 record that you have in the semifinal round is a result of you figuring out the rhythm of how to prepare for these kind of games, and how much did you learn following that first loss to Ohio State in the 2014 CFP inaugural year?

NICK SABAN: Yeah, I think early on in preparation for these games when you have this long span of time, we probably practiced too much, and by the time we got to the game, our players were probably mentally and physically maybe not in peak performance.

So as we've transitioned through the years, we've kind of learned how much you need to practice and how you can psychologically get them in the right place at the right time.

But some of the teams that you play in the playoffs, none of them are not going to be really, really good teams. I think the way you prepare and compete for games like this is -- and the psychological disposition you have about how difficult it's going to be is very important to every team.

Hopefully our team has the right disposition because they're going to play a great Michigan team.

Q. I just wanted to ask about Terrion Arnold. He's become the emotional leader of this defense. How much do you think that's benefitted him on the field, becoming one of the top corners in college football?

NICK SABAN: I think Terrion is a very vocal guy. He's got a great personality. He's very well liked by his teammates. He's a hard worker. He's made a significant amount of improvement, and I think it's shown up in terms of the way he's played this season. He's made a lot of big plays for us, and hopefully he'll continue to have that right mindset to -- and he's done multiple things for us, played corner, played star. We've had to move him around some because of injuries and he's responded well to every challenge that we've given him. No reason to think he won't continue to do so.

Q. You had mentioned on ESPN earlier today some of the challenges right now with obviously preparing for the bowl game but also roster management with the

portal opening. What are your expectations as far as that this week, and is there any difference obviously making the playoff than not making the playoff as far as the portal goes?

NICK SABAN: Well, there's probably a lot of differences. I don't think players look at playing in a bowl game with the same significance they look at playing in the playoffs. So that in and of itself makes it a little bit different.

But I told our players today in a meeting that some of you have issues about transition in terms of your future, you don't have to do it in a vacuum. We're here to help you. Come talk to us about it. I'm going to stay in the office tomorrow, so that whether guys that are going to get ready for the draft, our seniors, leadership group on the team, guys in transition have the opportunity to visit about what they want to do in the future, and we're hopeful that all of our players will want to stay on our team and contribute to the preparation and success that we have the opportunity to have playing the best team in the country.

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