

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

Thursday, December 28, 2023  
Pasadena, California, USA

## Alabama Crimson Tide

### JC Latham

#### Press Conference

#### Q. How is it going?

JC LATHAM: Pretty good. Pretty good. How you all doing?

#### Q. When did you realize this kid might be pretty good?

JC LATHAM: He made a second business it to 'Bama, I forget when, but seeing a guy with that mentality, just find his way home coming to 'Bama, he came in the summer and then he made a second trip down here, and seeing that, I realized that, yeah, he had the potential to be really good. Because his mindset is this is what he want to be at, and his potential is limitless. Just being around guys like that, being in a system like this and being coached by Coach Saban would definitely propel his future forward.

#### Q. In terms of his physical skill set, have you seen his body evolve over the course of this first year?

JC LATHAM: I mean, yes and no. He came in as a physical specimen already. It was hard to evolve what was already top-notch but he's definitely cut back on some fat and increased muscle mass. He's definitely gotten stronger, more explosive, and yeah, he's gotten bigger. But he already came in a freak of nature.

#### Q. How do you think he's improved in terms of his ability to handle speed rush?

JC LATHAM: Greatly. That was something he obviously struggled with the beginning part of the year and being consistent, being understanding of what he has to do to continuously get better and continue to try to strain through it, he's definitely done a great job of that.

#### Q. What are things for him to get better at, like more muscle, but what has he do that's helped him against faster guys?



JC LATHAM: He shadowed guys like me and Book just to understand the game, so we understand how to be successful and how to be great. And then on a consistent basis understanding that yeah, you can win, one, two, three reps but doesn't matter if you get the quarterback sacked eventually. He understands that he has to be consistent and strained throughout practice.

So holding himself to a higher standard and being able to try to do better every single day is a way that he find to get better.

#### Q. A couple Michigan players were talking about how they feel you guys are favorites coming into the game regardless of the ranking. How do you guys have that mindset of how perception has changed over the last couple months?

JC LATHAM: I feel like we've been underdogs no matter who we play, whether it's the regular season, conference championship playoffs, no matter who we play, guys always tend to favor the other team. Our success is short-lived, and people say that it was kind of a one-off, kind of a one-time thing.

So yeah, I mean, I find that to just be a little funny but I don't think too many people are saying that we're the favorites going in. I think no matter what we do against any team, we always say we are the underdog because of the team.

#### Q. They have a Michigan versus everybody rallying cry for their shirts. What can that do for a team to have that kind of one phrase?

JC LATHAM: It brings everybody together. You really sit down and look at the guys who are on the field, the coaches and the fans, and that's really all you have. I mean, you know, a lot of other teams have a whole bunch of different communities supporting them, and you look at us and we just got each other. So just bringing all of us together to understand, like this is all we got and this is all we need, is what we've been saying all year long. That's really what creates that bond that once you have that bond and that chemistry with your team, you become pretty hard



to beat.

**Q. Do you remember how Jalen and Terrion approached you guys with LANK. What was your reaction when you first heard that?**

JC LATHAM: I remember he said in the spring. He said in the spring. At first I was like -- he doesn't say what it meant. I was like, what y'all talking about? And.

Then one of my teammates, Ferguson was saying, oh, LANK means this. I was like, okay, I can get behind that. I respect it. And especially coming from Terrion, I think he's always had a pretty bright future but Jalen, a lot of guys, kind of wrote him off especially after the A&M game and the situation that he was in with the quarterback brought up through the spring and the summer and then being benched, for him to have that motto and spread it through the team kind of means a lot. He never is a guy that you never hear him, oh, I don't want to be here, oh, this and that. It's LANK and he's been saying that through all of the adversity he's been saying, he's been persistent. That definitely played a big part in like just the rally for the team.

**Q. At what point do you think everyone was on board with it and knew what it was?**

JC LATHAM: Everybody probably found out all at different times. So it just depends on -- I found out in the spring. I know some guys didn't find out until the summer. It wasn't like he was going around telling. But when it came to the situation, he's like, team, I'm good-on-good, he'll be like, all right, LANK and guys will be around asking what it meant. It slowly but surely came around. When fall camp came and we had our Saturday scrimmages, that's when everybody really started to understand what it really is, and we went into the season, everybody was on the same page.

**Q. Were there a couple other ones that lost out?**

JC LATHAM: Everybody was bought in. I mean, because it's the motto that all naysayers know. So when you hear that, you can't think, no, I don't want to do that. This is Alabama. We all came to 'Bama to prove we are the best and to be the best and chase that standard and raise the standard.

So that motto fits perfect to the 'Bama standard, and we all here because we want to be in that standard so we all believe in the motto as well.

**Q. Talking to Bobby from IMG about how you and Tyler, he was able to see your relationship grow from there. How has that been able to help you guys and**

**develop this group?**

JC LATHAM: It meant a lot. Like I said, I've known him for seven years, since he was a freshman in high school and I was a sophomore and we played D-Line at the time.

So just seeing the transition. He was one of the few guys to transition with me to O-line from D-Line, and just seeing us grow exponentially from sophomore year all the way to now, a junior in college, just means a lot, when we going through the same things.

It wasn't like he played O-Line for two extra years and it wasn't like I played for two extra years. We started off at level zero and we just climbed the starts and I kept trying to get better. We all faced the same adversity together and we all faced the same trials and tribulations. It's been a great seven years.

**Q. Have you enjoyed embracing the underdog role for Alabama? It's a different role for you guys.**

JC LATHAM: Yeah, just looking at my life when I was at Catholic Memorial before I went to IMG, my I appreciate man year, they had a really good team. I didn't play sophomore year, although guys left, and underdog role again, we ended up winning state. I get to IMG and meet guys like Book.

And that year, Evan, Trey Sanders, Noah Cain, Smith, all those guys just left, so they are saying the same thing. IMG is not going to be good; they are going to be X, Y and Z, and my senior year, we ended up winning the National Championship Game.

It's the same thing here. You get to Alabama game and you have guys like Anderson and Young and a whole bunch of other guys that are amazing players as well and they are saying the same thing, we are underdogs. I've been in this situation before and I know how to handle it before, and being in the situation with guys like Book as well, another leader on the team, we all know how to handle and be persistent and persevere through all the adversity that's going on.

**Q. What have the young guys been like? You had a couple early enrollees. How have you been breaking them in?**

JC LATHAM: I mean, I let them get their feet wet a little bit so they can understand that's what college is about. You're not really holding somebody's hand. I definitely let them know I'm here for them whenever they need me to be here for them. When I see them stuck on something I try to help them out but when it comes to the developmental

process of them doing it, I mean, the best teacher is experience. So sometimes you've got to let somebody just mess up for them to understand what they are really doing, so you can't hold their hand through everything. But I definitely try to let them know, like I'm here for you and if they are struggling, I'll walk them through how I did to get over that adversity when I was a young guy, too.

**Q. Have you learned any of their names yet?**

JC LATHAM: Yeah, Casey Poe -- I just forgot -- we only got three here right now. But I'm not that - Casey Poe and I can't remember, I think -- I want to say, Jonah or Joe. I can't remember the third guy. But yeah, I'm terrible with names, yeah. That's something I've got to work on. But all of those guys are pretty good guys, though.

**Q. Talking about how you guys have to watch film as a team together, watching individually, what was that about?**

JC LATHAM: Just understanding that we are just trying to increase the bond with one another. So I mean we all watch film together regardless but we are all locking in to make sure we understand the tendency and breaking down the scheme of what's going on.

**Q. It was explained to us it had something to do with Michigan's tendency.**

JC LATHAM: You just didn't want to take no chances. Really big game. I think we all got a really great film staff, guys who make sure our film is pretty secure. We are just taking another precaution to make sure we are all good.

**Q. An extra level of security?**

JC LATHAM: Yeah, basically.

**Q. Some people, you guys haven't have it on your individual iPads?**

JC LATHAM: Uh-huh.

**Q. What's the worry?**

JC LATHAM: You just want to be in a situation that might cost you down the line.

**Q. How has that affected you guys?**

JC LATHAM: It has not at all. If anything it's brought us together closer. Last night we got out of practice, I forget what time but guys wanted to go downtown and get some food and we all made sure we watched another game

before we left. We are all doing it together. We all watch film differently and in different ways, but if we are watching it at the same time, we go over, hey, I see this guy doing this, when they go here, they do this. So we are all on the same page now. So if anything, it's bringing us closer together.

**Q. Is there a game you've watched so far that you've played in that you think might be most comparable to what you're going to see with Michigan?**

JC LATHAM: No, I think Michigan has an amazing defense. I think they fly around to the ball. I think they are really physical. I think teams that we play has a little bit of that. A lot of teams in the SEC, almost every team in the SEC is physical no matter how good you are or how bad you are, they are all physical. But just seeing the way that Michigan makes plays, it's the reason why they are No. 1. So yeah, if we play a team like that, it doesn't really hold value to the No. 1 ranking.

**Q. A lot has been made on Michigan's side, the goal to contain Jalen Milroe. Every time you are asked about what he's able to do, they say we want to get to him and make sure he can't get out of the pocket. How do you break him free and get out?**

JC LATHAM: That's not really something that we can really do. We just have to get him time in the pocket to protect and keep the lanes open, take advantage of gap integrity when they get outside of their gaps and let Jalen make the plays.

**Q. When things weren't clicking so well for the offense early in the season, those couple games, what mental toughness it you see from Coach Rees?**

JC LATHAM: Extremely. He held himself accountable before anybody else. He told everyone it's his fault and he should do better and we as a player can rally behind somebody like that. We all know we can do better as well. When you watch the film intricately, you understand the things that we were messing up on wasn't like just like bad play calling. Like it will be open or the holes will be there but the one guy missed the block. I might miss a block or the receiver might run the route a little too deep or a little too shallow or whatever it may be. We all can find areas to improve in our game. Once we figured out how to do that, that's when the offense started clicking.

**Q. Did you see him change his approach during that time?**

JC LATHAM: To a certain way. He just kind of put a little collection of plays to where, you know, he showed us like,



say, Texas, for example, when we scored with Amare on the 40-yard touchdown and we got the holding call.

Like, I mean, it looks like we didn't score at all at the end of the game. Looks like we didn't put no points up but you look back at that, we had a holding call for a big play; that was a touchdown.

I remember we played Ole Miss and we had counter and I was supposed to get the backer and the backer slipped under me and I never got slipped under, it's usually over the top. So he slipped under and he ended up making the play. You look at film it looks like, oh, it was a bad play call but I messed up on the play. Had I would have got that guy, the next closest guy was 20 yards down the field and I like to take out running back in a situation like that.

But I should have made that play and I didn't, so he just showed us, like, hey, we are one guy away from these plays turning into explosive plays. And once we started doing that, yeah, it went from, yeah, we got the explosive plays now, and let's put it together for 60 minutes. That's been our motto all year just being persistent and going through it.

**Q. How has watching or not watching certain film changed your preparation and prepare you for potential sign stealing from Michigan?**

JC LATHAM: We watch them on the film same amount, same situations. We all do it together, so it's not really -- we can't watch this. We watch it together.

**Q. You said the coaches don't want you watching stuff by yourselves then?**

JC LATHAM: Yeah, we just don't do that. But I mean, whatever it is that we are watching, whether it's like situational or just games, we just do it together instead of on our own.

**Q. What was it like in September, October, when you guys were getting criticized and doubted in a way that Alabama teams typically don't?**

JC LATHAM: I mean, it was different obviously. We knew we would face that eventually with the loss of so many guys if we weren't playing up to the standard. I mean, Alabama has a standard, National Championship or bust. At that time, guys couldn't see us making it to this point right now.

So yeah, that was a pretty big deal. But I mean, like I said, it was all of us together. It was a community of us who rallied together and told each other what we needed to do

to be better. We weren't focused on the outside noise. You can't win a National Championship in week two. So we were not focused on the necessity end result after that loss. We were mainly focused on how we can get better. It showed us in what areas how we can get better. Saban said it was a test and we passed in some areas but we failed in more, which is why we lost the game.

**Q. You said you can't win it in week two but you can lose it in some ways. When you look back on the season, how many kind of close games and situations you guys got out of, and to put on the performance you had against Georgia, why did it look so different?**

JC LATHAM: Like I was just saying earlier, when it came down to the offensive side, defense, I tip my hat to. They played amazing all year. I think that's one of the best defenses in the country.

As far as an offensive standpoint goes earlier, like I said with Rees, he took accountability and he showed us the areas; the play that I missed against Ole Miss. He showed us like, hey, we start making these plays, our offense becomes very dangerous. It wasn't like a bad play call where we are running into where and they are unblocked, whatever the case may be. We are just one guy away from making that play.

As an offense, you've got to have 11 guys doing the right thing, because if one guy does something wrong, case in point, that play, the play won't work.

It wasn't like we just randomly flipped the switch. We just all had to buy in and worry about doing our job and doing it at a high level consistently.

**Q. How is the NIL program at Alabama changed in your three years?**

JC LATHAM: I think it changed -- I mean, I really can't say changed necessarily because when I got there, it started. But I mean, Saban definitely looks to help guys make -- or take advantage of the opportunity at hand. A lot of us play for our families and a lot of us try to just be allowed to really just help our families out financially. So Saban is not one to say no to that. He definitely wants us to -- I mean, we are all in college. We are all young. He wants us to be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor that we worked so hard and help our families and benefit our families through NIL. It definitely became more of just another branch at Alabama that looks to help everybody out.

**Q. How much of an emphasis was there to guard your practice play stuff? Von said you were not allowed to take your tablets home.**

JC LATHAM: Yeah, just taking extra precaution to make sure that we are all good. We still watch film as a group together. We do it before we do anything that we want to do, like prioritize, like I said before, we go out and get some food, we make sure we get some film in. It's just a different way to watch film. It's like not necessarily we can't watch at home.

**Q. How much did you normally watch at home? How much did it change it up?**

JC LATHAM: So I knew, if anything, I watch it more intricately now because I know I can't later. But at home, I would just, you know, if I'm chilling on my game or if I'm getting some recovery in, I pop on some film and do 30 minutes at a time, 45 minutes at a time, whatever it might be, when I wake up or before I start school or before I eat breakfast or while I'm eating breakfast, watch some film. Changed the way I watch it but I definitely watch it more in-depth now because I can't watch it at home.

**Q. You're doing it for a reason, is there frustration that Michigan made you,?**

JC LATHAM: No, I control my emotions. So whatever the coaches say that we have to do, we'll do it and we'll get the job done.

**Q. Did the coaches explicitly say because of sign stealing?**

JC LATHAM: No, they just told us we want to take an extra precaution.

**Q. When the whole thing broke in October -- did you have to pay attention --**

JC LATHAM: It was probably front page of a lot of -- on different social media outlets, but we were really just focused on ourselves, so we weren't really paying attention to it.

**Q. Do you have an opinion on the scandal?**

JC LATHAM: No. I mean, I play football.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...