

Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Alabama Crimson Tide Kool-Aid McKinstry Press Conference



Q. Booker said you guys were like a team of misfits. You lost Will, lost Bryce. How much have you embraced that?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: That was a challenge coming into the season. I feel like we embraced that moment and we embraced that we wanted to be our own team. We feel like every team is different. Like this year's team is different from last year's team, last year's team different than the year before, so on, so forth.

I felt like we knew this team that we needed to work and we needed to embrace who we are and find out our identity and check out our identity and uplift our identity as a team.

Q. How are you feeling?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I'm feeling good.

Q. Time off helped a little bit?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Q. Early in the season when things weren't going well and some of the former Alabama players started saying some things, did that motivate you at that point?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Well, yeah, former players, they just love the program, love the standard. They got kind of feelings and they're going to say what they say.

But we just be us and do what we do, move on and just be a better team for ourselves.

Q. How have you felt about being in the underdog role? It's not Alabama's typical position. Going into this playoff how does that make you feel?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Well, we just look at it like any

other game. We don't worry too much about whether we're the underdog or not the underdog. We just look at it like we've got another opportunity to go out and show the world who we are, show our identity as a team.

We look at it like that. We don't look at whether we're the underdog or whether the other team is the underdog.

Q. In what ways do you think this Alabama secondary would have an advantage over Michigan's receiving corps?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I feel like we've got to go out there as a secondary and do what we do best, communicate, over-communicate. Make sure we're all on the same page. I feel like we're all on the same page, everybody knows their job and everybody is reading their keys, I feel like we're going to stop them.

Q. What sticks out about JJ McCarthy and their receivers?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I feel like starting with JJ, he's a great quarterback. He can make all the throws, whether it's to the field or he can make good tight throws in tight windows. He can put the ball where he needs to put the ball, so I feel like he's a good quarterback and I feel like receivers do a good job of getting open for him and running decent routes for him and just making tough catches, also, when he puts the ball in tight windows.

Q. Did you talk to Damani Jackson? Did you see him at practice?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I seen him at practice yesterday. I didn't really get a chance to talk to him because we was practicing, but I'm very excited that we got him here.

Q. You kind of came to Alabama just as NIL was starting. How have you seen it change and what impact did the formation of Yea Alabama, has that had a noticeable impact?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: First one, I feel like my class is the last class of not having NIL. NIL really started the class



after me. It started my right before my freshman year, but no one knew where to take it unless you was just a high-profile athlete at that time.

I feel like NIL has grown a tremendous lot and helping programs in a lot of ways.

Q. What sort of impact has the Yea Alabama program -- just sort of looking at it from the outside, there's not a lot that's out there about it. Just I guess from the players' perspective.

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: We're very thankful to Yea Alabama, thankful for everything that they do and how they're trying to make us a better program. We're just very thankful for them.

Q. Can you walk through the mechanics maybe of just a deal that you've had? Is it generated by Yea Alabama, or does somebody reach out to you?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Yeah, Yea Alabama is its own little thing and it's a guy or two that just reaches out to a player, whether they have a brand that want to represent that player or they want the player to represent their brand.

That's how it go, and kind of just prolongs with the deal.

Q. Does this Michigan offense remind you of anyone you've faced this year?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: This offense kind of reminds me a little bit of Auburn. I feel like they do similar things. And also Georgia when they're getting in a lot of silver and just lining up big guys and running the ball right at you.

Q. Going back to the NIL thing, do you feel like getting some NIL money now is going to help you and other players your age maybe be more prepared for the NFL money when it comes just because you've had a chance to learn some financial literacy now?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Yeah, I feel like having a chance to make money now in college will prepare us to learn before we get to the NFL, because you get a chance to have money that's not as much as big as you would have in the NFL.

The mistakes that you make now wouldn't be as hurtful in the NFL because you can learn from those mistakes that you have now here in college now than when you get to the NFL you already know, learned from the mistakes that you learned in college.

When you get to the NFL you'll be already knowing what

you need to do and how you need to handle things.

Q. How different is it, you guys had the early season struggles -- does it make you appreciate where you are and how hard you had to fight to get here?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Yes, I just feel like I love this team. We're always there for each other. We have each other's backs. We lean on each other. We understand that it might not be everyone's day and someone has got to step up and take one for the team.

No matter whose day it is you've always got to prepare, because you never know when your day is going to be needed most from the team.

Just like I said, man, just those early mishaps just gave us a chance to learn and find out who we really are and help us improve our identity and made us a stronger team, made us a stronger bond, and made us connect with each other even more.

Q. Is this team tougher than last year?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Well, like I said, teams are different. You have two different teams, so it's hard for me just to say which one of the teams is mentally tougher of the teams. I feel like we were both two great teams.

Q. I know you were practicing yesterday, but did you get a chance to say anything to Damani Jackson or talk to him at all?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: No, I didn't get a chance to talk to him because we was practicing, but I'm very excited that we have him.

Q. You're the same recruiting class with him, right?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I'm not sure. I don't think so.

Q. You didn't know him heading in --

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: No.

Q. What advice would you give him?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Just come in and work. You're going to be around good players. You're going to be around great coaches and great development. I would say, come in, work, keep your head down, trust the process, and things will work out well.

Q. Malachi said he reminds himself that Caleb Downs is still a freshman. When did he stop looking like a

freshman to you?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I would say Caleb Downs really stopped looking like a freshman really fall camp. I feel like he's always been a pro. He's always handled himself like a pro. He always takes advantage of all of his opportunities, and he's always there to listen and learn. I feel like he's a great team player.

Q. Is he kind of an old soul or are there times outside of football that you can tell he's a few years younger?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Yeah, when he's about business he's about his business. He don't really give you childish vibes, but sometimes he is his age.

Q. Do you have an example or anything like that?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: No.

Q. What are your impressions of JJ McCarthy?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like he's a great quarterback. I feel like he do what his team needs him to do. I feel like the coaches do a good job putting him in a position to make him play very well. He makes all the throws. He can make all the throws. He can fit the balls into tight windows and make accurate throws. He has great ball placement.

Q. How was the not watching film on the iPads impacted your preparation at all?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: No, it hasn't.

Q. Do any of Michigan's receivers stand out to you? It's not a group that's had a lot of accolades this year.

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like they're just a great receiving corps together. They do a good job together.

I feel like they do what we need to do for the team, and I feel like them and JJ connect on a very good basis. I feel like they know how each other are and they play well together.

Q. Is there an offense that's comparable to what you're seeing on film from Michigan?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Auburn offense kind of compares the most to me.

Q. That's an offense that has had success with you, especially on the ground. What do you have to do better to not have that happen?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like we've just got to read our keys, make sure everybody is doing their job, not trying to do somebody else's job, making sure we're where we need to be, and making sure we're all on the same page.

Also making sure we're communicating.

Q. A lot of the Michigan players were saying Caleb is the hardest hitter on the team. Who is the hardest hitter on the secondary?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Shoot, hardest hitter in the secondary? It's probably both of those guys, both of those guys, both of our safeties. Also Jaylen Key, too. I feel like a lot of those guys do a good job bringing the bang.

Q. (Indiscernible) ...this sort of I guess this mantra about what the defense is all about?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I'm not familiar with it.

Q. Have you found yourself looking at Coach Saban going, is he really 72? He's like a grandfather coaching football.

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: We're really thankful for Coach Saban. He moves around very good. He jogs everywhere he goes. He gets around practice very well and also walks with a pep in his step. For him to be the age that he is, he moves good.

Q. Were you able to see Damani Jackson in practice yesterday and what were your thoughts of him?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Yes, I seen him at practice yesterday. I didn't get a chance to talk to him or rap with him at all because we was practicing, but I'm very excited to have him here.

Q. Did you know him before all of this? Had you ever run into it or anything like that?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: No, sir.

Q. Where do you think you've improved the most from a technique standpoint and an actual performance standpoint this year?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like I was making sure I was more locked in on my press technique, making sure press technique is a string point of my game. I feel like I improve more just being more confident within myself, understanding the game, more understanding what down and distance it is and what routes may come off down and

distance. I'm just trying to figure out different things for tendencies for a team.

I feel like before I was just out there playing just using my talent and using my ability and playing within the defense, but this year I feel like I took it to another level.

Q. They have a really good tight end that gets in seams and becomes kind of a mismatch. What have you seen from the tight end and how do you combat that?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Yes, their tight end, he's a good player. He does a good job of making plays for them and being able to play and also being able to make plays in the passing game for them. I feel like he's a good player.

Q. Caleb Downs, he's got quite a routine, how he handles himself. What have you seen from him in terms of the condition he keeps himself in and the routine he has?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like he just handles himself very well with treatment and just doing all the small things to just make him a better player and make him be able to perform the way that he's performing.

Q. (Indiscernible) talking about replicating JJ McCarthy. What have you seen from him and how beneficial is that?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Well, just having a good guy over there that we can face and someone who can act like another quarterback and just getting us the best version of that quarterback is always a good thing, because you see in them what you'll get in a game. So just being able to take advantage of that, it's very important.

Q. There was a turning point in the season after the Texas loss -- what do you think the turning point with this team was? How did you come together?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like we just -- after those second and third games, I feel like we had a moment where we can either be in a break, and I feel like we stood together. We was there for each other. We was a brotherhood. We found our identity and we came together and just made the decision within each other to say, hey, man, what are we going to do. It's on us.

It's not all this, the past is on us, and the future is definitely on us.

I mean, it's up to us to do what we want to do as a team, and everything that we had that we wanted was still in front

of us, and I feel like we did everything we could do to get to this point now.

Q. When you're watching film, what stands out about their quarterback?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like he can -- he's a great player. The coaches do a good job of making sure that he's doing everything that he's comfortable with. I feel like he can make all the throws, and I feel like he's good at fitting the ball in tight windows and just having good ball placement.

Q. Kool-Aid, what was the turning point or was there one? Was there a moment, a meeting, shouting?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I wouldn't say a lot of shouting was going on. I feel like we had a lot of player-held meetings. Not a lot of, but we had a player-led meeting and I feel like we just talked to the guys and we just heard everyone out.

Q. (Indiscernible).

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: I feel like we just heard everyone out and got an opportunity for everybody to express themselves to the players and just for us to come up with a plan that we wanted to be and the team that we wanted to be.

Q. Was it noticeable to you guys early in the season that Coach Saban was talking about this team very positively in public and urging the fan base to be patient with this team? Did you guys notice that?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Well, I don't really just do too much media, but I can't remember if I did hear that or not early in the season. It was so long ago.

Q. Did that mimic what he was like internally, that he was positive, still felt like he wasn't upset that you guys were struggling?

KOOL-AID McKINSTRY: Well, you know, just being on a team and hearing how the head coach, especially head coach like Nick Saban, still talking good and still having confidence within us as a team is very important, and I feel like they did play a big role into why we're here today, us just being confident and us knowing that our coaches are still confident in us and still believe that we can do what we need to do. It's a very key part to where we're here now.

Q. How far back recruiting-wise did you hear, well, Coach Saban doesn't have long to go, he's going to retire? Were people putting that in your head or

asking? It's happened again now because he's 72, but you've heard it before, right?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: No, I really never even really thought about that. I never had a thought in my head when I was in recruitment that Coach Saban would ever be retiring or not being the coach at Alabama. I always knew he would be here for my four years.

Q. Did other coaches say that to you?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: No, none of the other coaches ever brought that up to me in recruitment, even from other teams. I never heard that.

Q. Have you noticed much of a change with Coach Steele taking over this year?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Well, biggest change I would say is I just feel like we're -- I want to say we just play very like more physical I would say.

We do a lot up front to mess with the quarterback or mess with the offensive line. That's the biggest thing I would say.

Q. I know you're obviously probably tied to the receivers, but stopping love land at tight end, is that a challenge (indiscernible)?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I feel like he's a good player and the coaches do a good job of using him in a great way to match his skill set. I feel like he can block and I feel like he can slip out into the seam and also line up in the slot and do it very well. I feel like they do a good job of just using him and using his skill set.

Q. Do you think you guys are built to stop in some ways their tight ends because of what you guys can create on the edge with Turner and Braswell and also you've got yourself, Kool-Aid, to kind of occupy the receivers to create the conflict with them as far as what they can do from a blocking standpoint as well as trying to get those tight ends out on pass rush? Do you feel like you guys are equipped in some ways to --

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I feel like we're just us, and our defensive scheme is just our defensive scheme. We just do what we do. We just play. We go out there and just do our job as a team and all of them guys on the field just do their job.

Q. Michigan's running game, what stands out?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I feel like they're downhill. They have a good running game. Their offensive line works very

well in getting a good push up front, and I feel like they're running back is a good back. I feel like they're very good at running the ball.

Q. Do you still have an NIL deal with Kool-Aid?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: No, it came to an end.

Q. Do you see any signs of Coach saying adios this year to football?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: Me personally, I don't see none. I don't see no thoughts of just seeing him in general that this may be it for him. This is new to me now. It never crossed my mind before.

Q. When they recruit you because I'm sure a lot of people used that against him. Did you hear that from rival schools that he wasn't going to coach a lot longer?

KOOL-AID MCKINSTRY: I never heard that in my recruitment from other schools or from no one in general. This is my first time.

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