

# Rose Bowl Game presented by Prudential: Alabama vs Michigan

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Pasadena, California, USA

## Alabama Crimson Tide Kevin Steele Press Conference



### Q. Kevin, what's Rick Doggett doing here?

KEVIN STEELE: I was with Rick two days before Christmas. He's doing well. He's doing well.

I mean, when you're a Navy Seal for 22 years, his game day is a little different than our game day. We feel like they're shooting at us. They're shooting at him.

### Q. You've been with Coach Saban for 15 years off and on. Curious to know how he's evolved over that time.

KEVIN STEELE: Well, I've actually known him since 1985, and we have talked football and visited talking football all the way back when he was the coordinator at Michigan State. So it's been a while.

He's evolved in terms of football. He's adapted, obviously, in recruiting in terms of NIL and the transfer portal and all those kind of things, the technical things.

But in terms of the core of who he is and how he goes about the process, there's really not any difference. I can't tell any difference in the first day we worked at Alabama in 2007 and now.

You say that, and people either believe it or they don't want to believe it so they don't believe it. I lived it. There's no difference.

### Q. What do you think the secret is to maintaining that level of engagement and enthusiasm?

KEVIN STEELE: It's a gift. It's a gift. When you're that competitive, I think it's probably easy to --

### Q. What challenges does JJ McCarthy present?

KEVIN STEELE: Well, he's an accurate thrower. He obviously understands their offense very well, and he has

the ability -- although he's not, quote-unquote, a running quarterback, he has running skills so he can run call runs and run them very effectively, but he can also keep plays alive in the passing game with scrambles, scrambles to throw.

Very talented young man, and you can tell he's very comfortable in the offense, which is key for a quarterback.

### Q. You've been at Alabama multiple times under Saban and also seen it from the other side. How much do you buy into the idea of Alabama mystique and the intimidation factor that Alabama creates?

KEVIN STEELE: Well, I think that's game by game, obviously. I think it's more about the process and that -- this is not coach-speak, it's factual. The game really comes down to us, not the opponent. Do we know our job? Do we do our job? Do we execute our job? That's what it comes down to.

That is such a focus in the process from winter conditioning to spring practice to summer workouts to fall camp to the way practices are set up in the fall that it just gets engrained in your system.

I buy into it a lot because I live it, and it's unique what coaches put together, obviously, the record speaks for itself. To do what he's done for as long as he's done it, it's hard to do. I think it may be unmatched in this profession.

Obviously there's some key ingredients in that process that I won't call it mystique. I don't think it's that. I think it's the process.

Yeah, I buy into the process.

### Q. When you see it from the other side, the players --

KEVIN STEELE: Well, there were a couple games it looked good from the other side. There were a couple games that looked really bad from the other side. (Laughter.)

Having been there and then having to go back and play



them at LSU, at Auburn, and coach against them. When you know what you're up against, it can be a daunting task because there's just not -- you're not going to coach against a team that is not prepared to the fullest extent, and you know that.

They've got really, really good players.

**Q. Given all that, would you be shocked -- what would the verb be if this was a walk-off for Nick, if you guys won it?**

KEVIN STEELE: Wow.

**Q. I know, but that's out there.**

KEVIN STEELE: It's always going to be out there. It's always going to be out there.

I will tell you this: Nobody knows that answer except him.

**Q. What the hell would he do all day?**

KEVIN STEELE: That's a good question.

**Q. Michigan's offensive coordinator, Sherrone Moore, was served as head coach four games this season. What do you think of that performance and how he's done?**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, a remarkable job. Obviously when you watch the offense on tape they're well-coached. They've got good plan. Obviously he's in charge of that, so it's -- in itself he's done a phenomenal job, but then to add the pressure and the distractions, because there were distractions with that, and to manage those distractions for Coach Harbaugh and then add on the addition of being the head coach and the offensive coordinator, it's hard. It's hard.

I don't think he probably gets enough recognition for what he did do.

**Q. Some of the young guys in the secondary, how beneficial is it to have guys like Dallas playing up front?**

KEVIN STEELE: Real beneficial. It makes the ball come out quicker. Sometimes it makes it come out to the wrong folks. But it's that clock. The passing game is all about the clock in the quarterback's head, and if that clock is not ticking, you can't cover anybody.

The best players in the world can't cover them if the clock is not ticking.

Dallas has the ability and brass as well as our front to make the clock tick, and that makes it easier to play in the back end.

**Q. How crucial has (indiscernible.)**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, he's a grown man. I'm sure y'all have seen him today. Very, very mature. Very mature. Very serious about what he does. He commands double teams, and that's hard in this business. He's very technically sound.

**Q. How nice is it to have a guy like that that you can move all across the offensive line?**

KEVIN STEELE: It's very nice. Moving parts are always good because -- and for different reasons. Run games are designed different. Who they're doubling, are they a zone team, are they a gap team, so defending that and being able to get the bigger guy where you need him, but then in the passing game, protections are different.

You're always trying to say, okay, where can we create the one-on-ones, and where can we get our best big pass rusher against your worst pass protector.

Because you can move him around just like the outside backers, everybody knows that. We can get them to get their protection this way and now here's Dallas on this side.

Obviously everybody talks about that kind of stuff, but it also is a chess match in the core, too.

**Q. It's been a while since you've been in the NFL, but how organizationally and with resources, how close is Alabama's program to an NFL program?**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, I'm not saying that we could go to the NFL and compete on Sundays, okay. You asked about the process.

Well, for the really, really good NFL teams, it's very, very similar. Very similar.

**Q. In what way?**

KEVIN STEELE: Just the organization and the way it's set up, the development of the players, the focus on the total player. People don't realize that in the NFL. There's a lot of resources for those guys, from diet to the mental aspect of the game to all the resources they get to learn the game, the way things are installed.

All those kind of things. The teaching setup, how it's set up



in terms of the way you deliver the information to the players.

Some people can't afford to do it that way because there's a lot of things in that. But it's all the resources that we had in the NFL we have at Alabama.

**Q. Early in the season when the team was struggling a bit, it seemed like Coach Saban was very positive publicly with how he was talking about the team, urging fans to be patient with the team. Is that something you would have seen from him 15 years ago?**

KEVIN STEELE: Yeah. Yeah. I think people forget, I've seen it. He has an uncanny ability to know what each team needs, each group of guys need, each side of the ball needs. He's just got a gift there.

So yeah, I've seen it before. I think it probably was focused on because now it's so expected to win every game at Alabama, and so when you have a game where you don't win it, then all the focus -- well, it must be gone. The mystique is gone. That's your word. And he has an uncanny ability to manage that group, whatever it is.

**Q. Why did this team need that in particular? Was it just confidence issues or --**

KEVIN STEELE: No, I think just in terms of just focus and execution and maturity, repetition on the grass. I mean, you think about it, okay, we lost one game, and it was at that point in time, externally as I understand now looking back. At that time I wasn't of it to be honest with you. Okay, it's over.

Well, I've been at other places. They've only been undefeated, what, twice in 15 years, but they've won six National Championships.

We forget that. We forget that. It's been done before.

**Q. What type of an impact do you think not having Zinter had on the makeup of Michigan's offensive line in the Big Ten Championship?**

KEVIN STEELE: To be honest they've had a lot of moving parts in the offensive line all year anyway, and obviously he is an outstanding football player and was -- as I understand it, the leader of the group. I don't know that. I just understand that from research.

But those guys have stepped in. They've moved guys around, which some of them went back to where they were. You can't tell a lot of difference. You really can't.

**Q. Nick's scheme is set up to protect the seams. That seems to be an emphasis throughout the years. How much do you feel like you guys are uniquely set up to defend the tight end because of that? That seems to be an emphasis of his throughout the years?**

KEVIN STEELE: Yeah, I think direct throws will kill you, and a lot of times tight ends get in the seams on direct throws just like the SEC Championship game. They had a guy that was very capable of doing that.

It goes back to what I said before. Coach Saban is the best that's ever been that I've been around at being able to take what you do best and take it away not with just one pitch.

We're going to throw a fast ball at this. He's got a curve ball for it, a knuckle ball for it, a slider for it, a curve ball for it, and so he's taking away because he's changing leverages. He's got a gift for that.

**Q. Obviously with the edge pressure that you might be able to create with Turner and Braswell and what you can do on the outside with Arnold and McKinstry, how much does that create conflict for Michigan in terms of what they can do with the tight end?**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, you'd have to ask Coach Harbaugh and his staff that. I know that we have a lot of confidence in those guys, and it allows us to do a lot. There's a reason in the NFL that the highest paid players on defense are at corner and edge rushers. It allows you to do a lot more.

**Q. (Indiscernible) at this point in your career when some guys might want to get out and play golf every day?**

KEVIN STEELE: It's a lot of fun, particularly this group. Very, very, very easy to coach. Extremely coachable group of guys. Fun to be around. Very competitive. I'm enjoying it. I feel like I've got something to give. If that ever goes away or it's dissipating or hurting the program, then I've got a boat. (Laughter.)

**Q. What's the name of your boat?**

KEVIN STEELE: Coach. Literally. It's also the name of what my grandkids call me.

**Q. Being Nick's OC is not the easiest job in the world. When he brought Tommy in, from a defensive perspective what jumped out to you and as you look back on the season how he handled things?**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, he's a tough guy. That's the thing that -- obviously I kid him about it. This is being funny. A quarterback from Notre Dame being tough? I'm being funny.

He's a tough guy, really tough guy, really smart guy. He's submitted to running the ball, which is SEC style, and so obviously when you've had -- he grew up in a coaching family. He was the quarterback at Notre Dame. That's a pretty hard job.

It's not like he's had jobs where people didn't pay any attention to it. He's been around pressure before, and he never flinched. Never flinched.

**Q. We've not talked to you since the thing earlier with the season, but Lane Kiffin saying you weren't running the defense, what was your reaction to that at the time?**

KEVIN STEELE: I didn't pay any attention to it. I really didn't. At all.

**Q. What was it like for you guys after week 2 and week 3 in that Monday meeting or Sunday meeting, the staff meetings with Nick?**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, the process is -- people don't understand the process. It's the same every Sunday, whether we win by 40 or we had a hiccup like we had. It's all about the technical improvement of the players.

So it really wasn't any different. We're not a staff that comes in and wins by 40 and everybody is sitting around eating donuts and drinking coffee and laughing and we start the meeting 40 minutes late because we just had a big win.

Sundays at the University of Alabama, that's gone. The 24-hour rule, it's over.

**Q. No ranting --**

KEVIN STEELE: Well, I wouldn't say ranting. That's not correct. Stern instruction.

**Q. When you talk about how coachable these guys are, how soon can you see that on the practice field? Was it spring practice? Was it even before you got them on the grass?**

KEVIN STEELE: Yeah, you can. The spirit of the guys and the coachability of the guys. I like Malachi Moore. You could not ask for a more coachable person. He's like coaching a coach. He's very smart. He's just, give it to

me, make me better, how can I be better every day.

**Q. When you get multiple guys like that in a unit or on a team, how much does that multiply around everybody else?**

KEVIN STEELE: Right. Championships come not because of what happens on the field. It comes by how many champions you've got sitting in the seat in the meeting room. And so that's where it comes from.

**Q. For a freshman like Caleb to fit in the way he has, how has he been able to adapt to the very high standard that's required of everything to be --**

KEVIN STEELE: That's just the way he's made. That's just maturity. That's just his DNA. That's just the way he's put together.

**Q. Did it surprise you -- you said this is such a coachable group. Maybe a couple years ago before NIL went into effect that you'd be able to find groups like this because there was so much talk at the time, oh, this is going to splinter locker rooms, it's going to --**

KEVIN STEELE: And I think it probably could. It probably has at some places. I don't know that. But every place is different.

Yeah, there's always been concern of that.

**Q. Is there anything that you've seen that Nick has done to kind of make sure it doesn't become the thing and it's just a thing?**

KEVIN STEELE: Yeah, I think that it goes back to the process of the team, the team's success and how to get that, and the focus continually on that.

So that other would be distractions. The way the process is built is to eliminate distractions. So we just applied it to that.

**Q. Do you feel like NIL has affected this team at all, its performance?**

KEVIN STEELE: I have not seen it. I have not seen it. It's never mentioned there.

**Q. What was it like being back in the Iron Bowl?**

KEVIN STEELE: Seen a few. Even as a kid. I grew up going to it, so I've seen a few of them. I know I've been at Nebraska, Oklahoma; coached there.

I've been at Florida, Florida State, coached there, Clemson, South Carolina, coach there, LSU and Alabama, I've coached that game. So I've been in some rivalries. I grew up watching UCLA and USC, Michigan, Ohio State, those -- Notre Dame, Southern Cal. I understand that.

But that game for me is uniquely different, uniquely different. It's just got a spirit about it that won't ever die, even on 4th and 31.

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