

Heisman Memorial Trophy Presentation

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Coach Nick Saban Media Conference



NICK SABAN: First of all, I'd like to congratulate Bryce. He had an outstanding year for us, and I'm sure he'd be the first to say that anytime you get recognized with an individual honor, there was a lot of other folks on your team that did a lot to make that happen. But we're really proud of the season that he had, the great leadership that he provided, and the accomplishments that he helped us make as a team.

He was fantastic down the stretch, so we really appreciated him. He's a fine young man and a great family, so we're really proud to have him be a part of Alabama's family.

Q. You came to Alabama in 2007; you've had Heisman Trophy winners at three different positions. Was that ever something you envisioned happening with the program?

NICK SABAN: Well, we try to recruit the best players that we possibly can and try to create a rule book that helps them develop personally, academically and athletically. We've had a lot of great players, a lot of great players who weren't in the Heisman Trophy consideration, but we've been fortunate to have several who have, and we're very fortunate to have four that have won because I think this is a tremendous honor for any young man who's a college football player. It's a legacy that will be with you forever, and there's only great players who had great dedication to the game, great work ethic and great performance that have the opportunity to win this award, and it's something that's very prestigious.

Q. At what point in the season did you realize that this could be a special year for Bryce?

NICK SABAN: Well, I think Bryce played extremely well for us all year long. We've sort of had our ups and downs as a team. I don't really think that his performance was ever contributed to that. He played extremely well on a consistent basis, and I think consistency in performance is what helps you sort of have the kind of season that he had

relative to statistics or wins or however you want to look at it.

But phenomenal drive at Auburn and phenomenal performance against Georgia in the SEC Championship game I think really sort of accentuated the kind of season that Bryce was capable of and the kind of season that he had.

Q. Coach, every time we've asked Bryce this week about this award, this individual award, he goes back to his teammates. Is that what it's all about, because there's not just one guy on the field, it's --

NICK SABAN: Well, I think this is a great team game. I think football is a great team game. I think there's a lot of lessons in life that you can learn from a great team game, togetherness, working together, people being accountable trusting and respecting each other to do their job, and I think quarterback is a difficult position to play if the people around you don't play well, whether it's offensive line blocking, runners running, receivers getting open.

Bryce certainly did his part, but I think he realizes how important it is for the people around him to play well. I think when you get recognized, you certainly want to recognize those guys for helping you have the success that you have.

Q. You've had a few Heisman Trophy finalists at the quarterback position in recent years, and I'm just wondering, since Bryce has finally won, what does that say about you guys' ability to develop at that position?

NICK SABAN: Well, I'm really pleased with the last four guys that we've had. I know several of them have been finalists. I think it speaks volumes of what our coaching staff has been able to do with the quarterback position. I also think philosophically we made a huge change probably somewhere seven or eight years ago to be a more wide-open spread type team, which makes you a more quarterback-oriented team, so all these young men have had tremendous success and it enhanced their development, and I think that's important to having a



successful program is having quality people play the quarterback position, do a good job of helping them develop so they can have outstanding performances throughout the year, which certainly all these young men that you mentioned did, but Bryce certainly was fantastic for us this year.

I'm so pleased and happy and proud that he was actually honored and recognized for that.

Q. I know you're probably hesitant to compare your players, but is there anything that set Bryce apart from the last three guys who have been so spectacular for you?

NICK SABAN: Right. You know, I think you're right about one thing: I don't compare players. I think they were all outstanding players in their own way. I think they all have a little different style in terms of how they had success.

But I think this year's team was a young team. A lot of the other teams that we've had have been older with lots of really good players, and the quarterback didn't need to be maybe the focal point that Bryce had to be on this team this year with eight new starters on offense, new receiving corps except for one guy, new runners, three new starters in the offensive line, new tight ends.

It was a work in progress that he certainly engineered very tactfully with a presence and a leadership that in a performance base made all those guys gain confidence and get better. I think it was a little different dynamic for him this year than maybe it was for some of the other guys in their years.

Q. You spoke about how hard it is to play the quarterback position; when you look at how Bryce has grown each game, especially against Auburn, especially against Georgia being the underdog, what do you think has been Bryce's biggest asset en route to winning the Heisman Trophy tonight?

NICK SABAN: I think Bryce's biggest asset is he's a very talented player. He's very accurate with the ball, makes good judgments, but I think he prepares really well. He understands what the other team is trying to do, what they are doing, and he really understands what we are trying to do to be able to execute against them.

Really works hard every day, and probably spends more time in preparation. That's one of the things all of our quarterbacks have done, but he's really spent a lot of time in preparation this year, and he's been able to execute and get us in the right plays and throw the ball the right place to the right guys on lots of occasions that have been very

necessary for us to have success.

I think that's probably one of the things that also sets him apart, that he had to make some plays at some critical times that maybe some other guys didn't have the opportunity to do.

Q. You changed offensive coordinators and quarterbacks coach this off-season. Someone said before you've had four quarterbacks as Heisman finalists. Those have all been under different offensive coordinators and quarterbacks coaches, so I guess my question is how was it for Bryce adjusting to that different coaching staff this off-season, and do you have a strategy with so much turnover in your assistant pool?

NICK SABAN: Right, I think one of the things that our players, because we've had quite a few coaches go on to be head coaches other places, and sometimes we have turnover in staff because of that, and we always seem to be able to attract really quality people to take their place, and our players sort of look at it like this is an opportunity to learn from someone else.

But philosophically, we do not change the offense just because we change who the offensive coordinator is or the quarterback coach. Everybody brings new energy, new ideas, new enthusiasm to the organization, but we keep the same system in place, the same terminology for the players so that we don't have these abrupt changes for guys trying to develop to have to go through.

Our coaches have to adapt to what we do. I think Bill O'Brien did an outstanding job of that and certainly did a great job with Bryce.

Q. You touched on how some years ago you made a major philosophical change in your offense. Does this feel like sort of an important moment or benchmark in that multiyear process going from your first two winners being running backs to now a receiver and a quarterback in back-to-back years?

NICK SABAN: Probably to some degree. We were more of a running team, play good defense, and when we played the teams that were spread teams that went fast, that threw RPOs, we lost a couple games, and I said if we can't beat them, we need to join them. So we kind of changed styles, changed style of player, changed style of quarterback, and we still want great runners and we want to have great balance.

I think we've had four first-round draft pick wide receivers in the last two years. We want to continue to have those kind

of skill guys. We've had some really good skill guys on our team this year.

Yeah, we changed philosophies, and I think we benefitted from it. Hopefully we can continue to get the kind of players to be interested in Alabama that we continue to have that kind of success.

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