

# Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game: Alabama vs. Miami

Saturday, September 4, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Alabama Crimson Tide

## NICK SABAN

### Press Conference

Alabama - 44, Miami - 13

NICK SABAN: Well, it was so great to play a game with fans. And I would really like to thank the fans. You all make college football really special for the players.

I was really proud of our players today in terms of the way they competed in the game today. I thought we came out and did a really good job on offense. Scored the first, you know, three or four possessions.

Got some stops on defense. I think as the game went on, I think we got a little bit sloppy. Which is something that we can learn from.

The one thing the game always does is shows you very clearly where you are, who you are, what you need to work on, what you can improve on and what you did well.

And we, obviously, did a lot of really good things well. I thought Bryce played really well for his first start. You know, Metchie was really good, Williams was really good.

We got to play a lot of players. The defense competed well in the game. We had a couple stops in the red zone, which just was a sign of how they competed in the game.

Got to give a lot of credit to Miami. I have a lot of respect for, you know, their players and their quarterback. You know, they got really good skilled players on offense. So I was really excited.

And I'm sure that when we watch the film, we'll see a lot of things that are a lot -- way too many penalties. There's a lot of things that we can go through that we would like to get better.

But those things happened more in the second half when the game got a little bit sloppy for us. And so we'll work on trying to correct those things.



The one thing that was really nice out there: You know, Trey Sanders has been through -- and Lez Frank missed the whole year. Got in a car wreck, missed another whole year.

And there's probably nobody on our team that has had more adversity and more things to overcome. So I was as happy as all get out to see him score a touchdown today.

Most people don't know how hard this guy's worked to try to get back as a football player. So anyway, I was really, really pleased about that.

**Q. Yeah, Coach, a little bit more about Bryce's performance, first career start. I think he had nine different targets. And how he looked back there to you?**

NICK SABAN: Oh, I think Bryce did really, really well. You know, he's smart. Most people just look at the stats and say he was whatever he was, for whatever he was for this many yards.

But, you know, he redirects the protection, he plays like a veteran out there. And, you know, we had the one, you know, sack fumble which was something that we don't really want to have. But, really, not all his fault that he doesn't get protected.

But I was really impressed with the way he played in the game, the poise that he played with, the command that he had. He kind of took what the defense gave. And really directed the offense in a really positive way.

And when we had opportunities to make plays on third down and a couple other explosive plays, he certainly did a great job in getting the ball to the right guy in the right time in the right place. So I was really pleased.

**Q. You had mentioned during the week that Miami likes to be aggressive on defense with the eyes coverage. How many of those looks did you see and how were you able to take advantage of them?**

NICK SABAN: Well, we saw them all. And especially at the end of the game when we were just trying to, like, take the air out of it and run the ball. And, you know, they were shooting the gaps and, you know, getting -- making it pretty difficult.

But what I alluded to before, we saw all those things in Bryce because his great preparation. Smart, recognized them.

You know, got the protection set the right way. So he gave himself a chance to make plays and we were able to take advantage down the field.

**Q. Coach, just to see if you have an update on guys like Chris Allen, Henry, and Brian --**

NICK SABAN: I really can't hear you.

THE MODERATOR: Speak up a little bit.

**Q. Guys like Chris Allen, Henry To'oto'o, and Brian Branch --**

NICK SABAN: Yeah, Chris Allen's got a pretty significant foot injury. And they'll further evaluate. But it looks like he may not lost for the season.

Henry hurt his elbow, but he'll be okay. I don't think anybody else has got a significant injury. Got some guys beat up, got some guys that got cramps. We got some guys that needed IVs. But I don't think we have anybody else that is serious in terms of a long term injury.

Hopefully, we'll get some guys back. Damieon George, an offensive lineman. Hopefully Labryan Ray will be able to come back. I think Demarcco Hellams will be able to come back.

So I think we are hopeful that we'll get some guys back. But they dressed today, but they couldn't play. They weren't ready to play. And hopefully they'll be ready.

They actually warmed up and went through pregame warm up. But it was by design that we wouldn't play them today. And hopefully they'll be ready for next week.

**Q. Were you pleased with what you saw from your offense on third down and also from your defense? At least in the first half, it looked like both sides of the ball played well on third down.**

NICK SABAN: Well, we played really well in the first half. We had good energy, we had good enthusiasm. We did a good job executing things. We affected the quarterback on

defense.

They gave us a lot of stuff. They did a lot things, a lot of formations. All the receivers over on one side. A lot of stuff that we were constantly adjusting to.

And probably limited a little bit what we did because, you know, we were trying to make a lot of adjustments. So we were trying to make it simpler for the players.

But I thought we did a pretty good job in the first half, both sides of the ball on third down. Really did a nice job on offense. I mean, what, did we score the first five, four possessions?

I was really pleased with that. With having eight new starters, you know, on offense, three new starters on the offensive line. Not great experience at tight end. Basically, all new runners.

You know, and, obviously, Williams didn't play for us, but he has played a lot of college football. And Metchie and those two guys did a nice job today. We got to play a lot of players.

**Q. It seems like a guy like Cameron Latu sets the tone physically. How does he do that for you guys so far and today as well?**

NICK SABAN: You know, Cameron came to Alabama as an outside linebacker. And, you know, we had a need for tight end.

He also played tight end in high school. So I think before last season, you know, I said, You know, I think you have a lot better shot to be a tight end. You got good hands, you got great size, you're a good athlete. And he bought into it.

And it's taken a little bit of time for him to develop and feel comfortable and confident at the position. But I was encouraged.

And I think the success that he had today will build confidence. And I think that's really important, especially when you have a lot of new players that have -- don't have a lot of experience.

When they get in the game and they have some success, that really helps their confidence. And, you know, hopefully it will help them continue to develop and improve.

**Q. Hey, Nick. What did you see from Drew Sanders? And just how confident are you in moving forward, especially with the absence of Chris Allen?**

NICK SABAN: Yeah, Drew's a good player. And we've rotated those three guys, you know, all through camp and all through the spring as starters.

Chris Allen is a fantastic player, though, and he's a really good pass rusher. And really was a luxury to have him and Will on the edges as outside backers.

But we have confidence in Drew and, you know, we have a couple other young players that are going to have to -- you know, Dallas Turner and, you know, some of the younger players that we have are going to get an opportunity to play now at that position as well.

**Q. Coach, how would you evaluate the offensive line, specifically, the center position? How do you think they did?**

NICK SABAN: Well, it's hard for me to tell. I thought we ran the ball fairly effectively until the end of the game when they were blowing everybody in the gaps and we really didn't want to throw it. We were trying to play slow and get the game over.

But, you know, I thought we were fairly consistent at the running game. I thought the pass protection was good for the most part.

It was an RPO that we had the sack fumble on, so that really wasn't a protection issue. So I thought they did a good job.

It's really hard when you're watching a game from the sidelines to -- you know, when we watch the film, we'll know a lot better.

**Q. Hey, Nick, follow-up on the offense. Earlier in the week, you referred to the offense as a work in progress. Did you feel like tonight reflected that or was this maybe better than you expected?**

NICK SABAN: No, I was very pleased with -- you know, when you have that many guys that haven't played that much, new quarterback and all that, you really never know quite for sure how they're going to respond in a competitive situation. But I thought they did a great job in the game and I was very encouraged.