

# Capital One Orange Bowl: Alabama vs Oklahoma

Friday, December 28, 2018

## Lincoln Riley

## Nick Saban

### Press Conference

LINCOLN RILEY: This has been a great week. I want to thank the Orange Bowl, their members. This has a reputation of being one of the great bowls in college football, and this week has certainly been no different. Very appreciative of the organization, how well we've been treated this week. Our players have really had a great time, and certainly excited here to finally get to the game. It's been a tremendous week, a great experience, of course, coming back to the playoff. I do think that as we've all said many times, being in this situation, for our coaches and players here a number of times, it's a great thing because there's a lot -- there are a lot around these playoffs, and at the end of the day, it's about getting your team, yourself to be at your very best on the 29th. That's been our goal and our focus the entire time. We're certainly excited to play a tremendous Alabama team with one of the great coaches that's ever done it. But that's what these games should be like. I think when they created the playoffs, that's probably what they envisioned is great match-ups like this. We're certainly looking forward to the opportunity, looking forward to tomorrow night, and thanks for having us here.

NICK SABAN: This has been a wonderful experience for our players, our team, our entire family at the University of Alabama. The Orange Bowl has certainly been first-class in every way, shape and form. We'd like to like everybody associated with the bowl game who works so hard probably all year long to make this such a great event for our team and our players.

I'd like to thank Capital One, president Sean Pittman, CEO Eric Poms. This has certainly been outstanding for our team.

We've had a really good week here. I think our players have really enjoyed it. They've been able to stay focused on what they need to do to prepare, practice, get ready for what is an outstanding team. Coach Riley and his team have done great things all season long. They've got a dynamic offense that is really challenging for any team, I think, and they've had great success all year long. This is the kind of game that I think players that are great competitors love to play in and compete against, and that's what the playoffs are



all about.

We're looking forward to the game tomorrow night and the challenges that we have presented before us, and I think it'll be a great football game.

**Q. A question about your communication methods. As times have changed and social media has become prevalent, you've clung to the phone call as your main method. I'm wondering philosophically why you've continued to communicate that way and not texted or used other DM's, et cetera, that are popular.**

NICK SABAN: Well, I guess I'm just old-fashioned. You know, I'm a little older than a lot of you folks in here, and we've been doing things a certain way for a long time, and I really like to communicate with our players face to face. I really don't email. I don't have Twitter, don't have any of the social media type stuff, which I think is a great way to communicate. I just like to make it a little more personal, and it seems to work okay with our players.

I hate it when somebody said, I texted him to be here at 9:30, but he's not here, and I'm saying, why didn't you just talk to him. Why didn't you just tell him to be here at 9:30. How do you know he even got the text. Did he respond? So I guess a little old-fashioned, but works okay for us.

**Q. On Kyler Murray, first Coach Saban, what concerns you the most? You've faced athletic quarterbacks before, but what concerns you about him, and to Coach Riley, if he chooses to continue football, what's his future as an NFL quarterback?**

NICK SABAN: Well, I think the guy is one of the most dynamic players that I have ever seen in college football in terms of his skill set. He can beat you with his feet. He's got great speed. He's very athletic. He's a good passer. They have an outstanding scheme that really challenges you defensively and takes advantage of his skill set in every way, which is pretty obvious by the production that they've had all season long in terms of their ability to score points, make explosive plays, his ability to make explosive plays, and to distribute the ball in a way that all the other players on his team have an opportunity to make explosive plays. And they have great balance, so it's not just one-dimensional. They run the ball effectively. They make explosive plays in

the passing game, and I think it all starts with the system that they have, his ability to execute that system pretty flawlessly for the most part, and it takes advantage of his skill set to a tee.

LINCOLN RILEY: Regarding Kyler's NFL prospects, everybody knows he's got a big decision to make, which he'll -- he, his family, anybody else that he wants involved will sit down and visit once the season comes to an end. He's in a great situation. I mean, the guy is already the ninth overall pick in the Major League Baseball draft, and I think he'll probably be somewhere around the same spot if he chooses to go football-wise. I realize those -- there's a lot that goes into that, what teams are selecting, what their needs are, but we just had a guy go first overall the year before, and I think this guy is that kind of impact player, and certainly a rare athlete, one of those that you very well may go through the rest of your career coaching and never have one like that again. I mean, he's that unique.

He's either going to be a Major League Baseball star or he's going to be a Pro Bowler, he just needs to decide which one. Maybe both.

**Q. Lincoln, as you've looked at Alabama's defense, what's your thoughts, and what makes them year in and year out one of the best defenses in college football?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Well, the guy sitting over here to my left has quite a bit to do with that. Regardless who the coordinator is, regardless of who the players are, they've got a system that they believe in, and it's impressive to watch. They adjust through the years, but you can tell they have core beliefs in things that they're really, really good at that they continue to stress, and it shows up on the field.

They've done a great job recruiting and developing players. They've got really outstanding players at every single position. This year in particular, the defensive tackle, 92, is as good as I've ever coached against. So he's certainly in a group of great players, really stands out. And they play well together, like most great defenses. If you're going to score some points or get any yards, you're going to have to earn every single bit of it. They're not going to give you anything, and they make a lot of big plays themselves. They're certainly as good as we've gone up against.

**Q. Coach Saban, I know winning is not easy. You guys make it look easy sometimes, but I know it's not. What still drives you on an annual basis to keep doing this? When you've done what you've done, where is the motivation -- kids have a four-year window and they want to win championships and then they move on to the next thing. You've**

**been in this place for a long time. What is still the motivating factor for you to keep doing this year after year?**

NICK SABAN: I think I've always been kind of geared up to always sort of look at what's in front of you, not necessarily look what's behind you, and I think that the next game is always the most important, the next season is always the most important, the next team, the next group of players, and there's always a great challenge in that. I think that we sometimes use the analogy of every season is like climbing a mountain, and obviously when you get in a situation like we're in now, both teams, it gets a little more treacherous at the top in terms of the consequences of mistakes and things that can happen. But when next season starts, you kind of push the boulder up the hill or up the mountain this year, but next year it starts all over. So you have a process of things that are very challenging for that particular team, and that's what I always sort of look at and focus on. Just don't look back, always look ahead. One of the things that I always say to our team is, so what's next. Maybe you accomplished something in the last game, but the next game is the most important game, and that's what we need to prepare for, and that's what's going to help you create value, because you're kind of only as good as your last play in this profession and in this business.

And that's not been something that's been difficult for me to do. I think when it gets that way, then maybe that's the time you shouldn't be in it because I never want to ever be in a situation where I feel like I'm letting our players down in terms of creating value for them and personal development, academic support, how they can develop careers on and off the field, and that's what our program is all about. And that's very challenging when you have a group of young men who are all geared to accomplish something special, but sometimes they need a little help on exactly how to do that.

**Q. When you're playing against a team that potentially can score a lot of points, does that affect your coaching of the three phases of your team, the offense, the defense and the special teams? And then for Coach Riley, if you're playing a team that's fairly good on defense, does that affect the three phases for you when you're coaching against that team?**

NICK SABAN: Well, I think that there are certain things in each team and every game that you play that you're always going to look at the style of play of the other team and try to define for your team exactly what you need to do to win, and I think when you're playing against a team that has tremendous firepower, which Oklahoma and Coach Riley's team certainly has, if you're going to not execute well in the game, turnovers,

dropped balls, not continue drives on third down, let them have extra opportunities in the game, you're actually enhancing their opportunities to a large degree, and that's something that you definitely want to avoid.

But it still comes down to your ability to execute, whether it's offense, defense or special teams, that are going to create better situations for your team and not create extra opportunities for their team.

LINCOLN RILEY: Absolutely. I think each team has their formula for winning, and not every team's formula is the same. So certainly we look at the opponent, break them down into different phases and what we need to do to be successful on offense, defense or special teams, but then that's where my job comes into play, where you have to look at all three of those together and how could -- maybe how good Alabama is on offense affect what you do in other phases of the game or vice versa. So it's like a puzzle. You've got to put it together. You've got to find a formula to find a way to win against a very good football team. So it certainly has an effect, and it's certainly part of our preparation.

**Q. Coach Saban, you've been really successful it seems with the analyst role, and you have several more under your wing than most other schools. I wonder your philosophy on that and the number that you have and just what they do for your program.**

NICK SABAN: Well, first of all, the start of all this philosophy really comes from the fact that I think when you're a head coach for a long time, you lose sight because of the relationships that you're able to build on who the best assistant coaches are, who the best people are out there in your profession, and I think when they took the head coaches off the road in spring recruiting, you lost an opportunity to meet a lot of people in your profession because it limited the amount of time that the head coach was able to be out of the office.

So I started with the philosophy that, A, I like to help people in our profession rehabilitate their career, whatever you want to call it, but also add to some of their knowledge and experience could add to some of the things that we're doing, so it sort of worked well both ways. We've had some guys come in like Mike Locksley, for example, was an analyst for a year. His career was a little bit in a tough spot, and then he was a receiver coach for a year and now he's done a really good job as offensive coordinator and he has an opportunity to be a head coach. It's an opportunity for them to learn and grow, but it's also an opportunity for us to learn and grow, as well, from their knowledge and

experience.

**Q. I know players are always superstitious. Are you guys superstitious, as well? Do you guys go through the same routine before big games?**

LINCOLN RILEY: I'm a little superstitious. The bowl schedule makes that a little bit tougher on a day like today. But yeah, I've got my little superstitions. I think it's just more you kind of get into your mode during the week and you kind of -- especially in this job now for me, what's different, still running the offense, is trying to be as efficient as I can be with my time. And so trying to create a pattern to which I know where I'm going to be, what I'm going to be working on at certain points of the day and really that continues all throughout the week. So my superstition is more related to being efficient and making sure I'm doing the best job I can and covering all the bases that I need to cover.

NICK SABAN: I would say that routine is very important. I'm not going to get into the depth of the routines that I have. Some of them are superstitious, whether it's the socks you wear or the shoes you wear, the suits you wear the day of the game. I'm not getting into all that. (Laughter.) What you carry in your pocket. I have a lot of those. But I think the routine that you create throughout the week is not really a superstition, but it's something that allows you to be most efficient, and I think that's really the key to the drill.

**Q. For both of you, with the long period between the end of the regular season and tomorrow's game, which do you think is most favored, the better offense or the better defense?**

LINCOLN RILEY: Hopefully Oklahoma's offense and defense. (Laughter.)

I don't know, it's a good question. I mean, I don't really know what the answer is. I think at the end of the day, you've got your processes again that you go through to game plan like you do every week of the year. This is probably to me more similar to the first game of the year or maybe even after a bye week, just because you do have a little bit of extra time. It's not like you've got the entire month, with the early signing day where it is now and that signing day really has become the true National Signing Day, and we both were in conference championship games. So we lost a week of recruiting. You've really got two weeks that's one of the most critical times of recruiting, getting out to see these prospects, their families before that first signing date.

A lot of our time was spent there, but yeah, you get -- you've kind of got two weeks to roll on it, and hopefully you're able to get some guys healthy. Hopefully you're

able to get a good feel for what your opponent does and again, what is your formula for winning and what do you need to do better than maybe you did in the previous game, and taking those next steps to continue to be the team that you feel like you can be.

Yeah, it's a tough question. Like I said, you hope to just use the time the best you can and get all three sides as ready as possible.

NICK SABAN: I think some of the things that we always are concerned about when we have a lot of time between games is I feel like skill guys always come back more quickly maybe than the big guys. They lose less and come back faster. It takes the big guys a little longer. I'm talking about maybe the O-line, the D-line. I think tackling is always a big concern when players sort of get into a rhythm of the season and you're playing a game every week and then you don't play for a while. It's hard to simulate some of those things in practice like you'd like to. Pace of play in a game is always a concern because you're not used to that rhythm that you have when you're playing games every week.

These are all issues that are the same for both teams that are always things that we try to prepare ourselves for as a part of our preparation for a bowl game so that they don't impact the outcome of the game.

**Q. For both coaches, you've both obviously been in this situation before. Last time it was regulated for what your players have to do, but do you alter how much freedom you give your team based on the team you have, from season to season? Do you alter the kind of freedom you give your players for a bowl game like this depending on what team you have, an older team as opposed to a young team, or is it pretty much regulated from year to year?**

LINCOLN RILEY: To me it goes back to, again, your formula for winning. You've got to know the pulse of your own team, and what do they need to be successful. Yeah, I would say it's not a cookie cutter answer for us every single year based on your location, based on your team, and at the end of the day, your gut feel as a coach as to what they need to be at their very top level. So that's certainly what I base that on.

**Q. This is the first year I can remember where the playoff committee said we're going to overlook a team's defense in favor of how good their offense is. Does that make you feel like you are carrying the torch for a brand of football that can break the mold a little bit?**

LINCOLN RILEY: No. Not really. We're just here trying to win. Just like we've tried to win all the other ones. Again, it sounds like a broken record, what's your

formula for winning. We've found ways to win games. We want to continue to get better on all three sides of the ball going into this game and into the future years of our program. There's no doubt about that. But we found ways to win, and we're going to try to do it again.

**Q. For both coaches, how much of this game, especially when you have so much time in between the last game and this game, is preparing for maybe what you don't see on film, like defensive line catching touchdown passes, surprise inside kicks, and then rolling with the punches when things like that happen?**

NICK SABAN: Well, I think that any time a team has extra time to prepare, obviously it gives you a chance to do some things differently. I think players' ability to adapt and adjust in games as well as coaches' ability to help them do that is probably critical when you play in games like this. I mean, Coach Riley over here, he's got lots of plays, and we haven't been able to cover all the ones that they did all season long. We're working on it, though. (Laughs.)

LINCOLN RILEY: Yeah, same thing. This game is probably more similar to the first game of the year than any from that regard, that of course you're going to see some new things from both teams, but at the same time, when you're in the playoff, these two teams are here for a reason. So what you've done up to that point is probably pretty decent, too. I'm sure there will be some new things, but I doubt either one of us are going to get too far away from what's helped us get to this point.