

**July 17, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH NICK SABAN**

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by Alabama head coach Nick Saban.

COACH SABAN: Thank you. It's obviously great to be here. This is always kind of the kickoff or what really -- football is here. I hope y'all had a great summer with your family. We had a lot of excitement in our family with a new grandbaby, my daughter getting engaged. With the addition of these folks in our family, I just seem to continue right on down the totem pole.

I've always been behind the two dogs, but the line is getting deeper and deeper when it comes to Miss Terry.

Our situation as a team is a lot different this year than it's been the last couple years when we were coming off of successful seasons, championship seasons. The challenges were so much different in terms of trying to deal with success and complacency. Having lost our last two games last year, I think it's a little bit different mindset with our players.

We have to reestablish our identity as a team at Alabama. It's going to take every player to have a tremendous amount of buy-in for us to be able to do that.

I think you basically need to check your ego at the door, all of us in our organizations: players, coaches, everybody in our organization. You know, really trust and believe in the things that have helped us be successful. Have enough humility to understand our role, what we need to do to help the team be successful, and certainly have the willingness as a family and a group to serve each other and help each other so that we have the best opportunity to accomplish this.

It's not really about judging. It's not really about complaining. It's not really about questioning. It's really about buying in and actually doing all that you can do to submit to the things

that you have to do to have the best opportunity to be successful.

We're basically an unproven team in some areas. There's a lot of question marks because of the players that we lost and the players that we have coming in.

In some cases, you know, they're critical positions like quarterback. We have a transfer player, Blake Sims, who has been in the program, who is a little different style quarterback, who was our quarterback in the spring, and is certainly going to compete for the position, and a couple other young guys who haven't really played much.

This is an unproven area for us and creates a question mark as to -- there's always going to be a process that a player has to go through to play winning football, but it does create a question mark as to, When is this going to resolve itself? We have a little bit of that in the offensive line in replacing several starters.

Defensively we probably weren't quite as good as we were last year as we were in the past. We're in a little bit of a rebuilding situation, even though we played a lot of young players that have the right attitude and character to improve and be more consistent players. There still is some question marks about how our defense comes together.

We have two new specialists. We're probably going to have a freshman punter. Adam Griffith is going to be a new field goal kicker.

We're a team that has a lot of question marks. It's always our intent to do everything that we can to help our players be successful in every way, in their personal development as well as academically, being able to develop a career off the field, which is what is going to benefit them most in life, as well as their development as football players.

That's what we're going to continue to try to do our best so that we can have the best possible program in the country.

We had three changes on our staff. I know there's some interest. Two of the guys, Bo Davis, Kevin Steele, have been on our staff before, so

they're just coming back. But lots of interest in Lane Kiffin, who has done a really, really good job for us. The players have responded to him very well. New energy, new enthusiasm, new ideas to do some things offensively that would enhance our chances of being successful. I'm really excited to have the opportunity to work with him.

I think all of us would be remiss, I was a head coach once and went back and worked as an assistant, and that's a difficult transition for anybody. I think Lane has certainly handled that very, very well.

I think there's one challenge in college football that I'd like to talk about. I think it speaks a little bit to the culture of young people that we all have to deal with.

I know that many of you probably have children, especially that are adolescents. I've gone through that with two who are now grown and either married and have children or are getting married. Both graduated from college.

But sometimes these adolescents disappoint us. How do we react to that? How do we respond to that? When you have a family and you have someone in your family who disappoints you, we certainly can't kick them out of our family. I think we have to try to support them, teach them, get them to do the right things because we love them, we care about them.

I think we probably have some of those issues sometimes with our players. I think there's a greater disparity in the behavioral culture of our young people now when they come to college, some people refer to it as maturity, than maybe there ever has been in the past. And we keep growing a little bit further and further apart with the older guys on our team versus the younger guys on our team.

We all have a program that tries to help these guys develop the kind of thoughts, habits and priorities that are going to help them be successful in their life.

But their ability to make good choices and decisions, to control their impulsive behaviors and do things correctly is something this process, you know, sort of helps develop.

And if you see it on our team with the older more mature guys versus the younger guys, you see that the process really does work. It has a tremendous effect. I mean, we've had 89 players compete at Alabama in the last six years who had a degree, already had a degree, graduated early, some kind of way. We had 28 last year in the Sugar Bowl. Two of them had Masters degrees.

Still playing, but had their degrees, which is the ultimate of what we want to try to accomplish with these players.

So this process that we're talking about, which involves a little bit of discipline, which I don't know if we really kind of relate to this the way I do, but I think discipline is, Here is something that you want to do, here is something that you know you're supposed to do that you really don't want to do. Can you make yourself do it?

Over here is something you know you're not supposed to do, but you really want to do it. Can you keep yourself from doing it?

Well, controlling these impulsive behaviors is a little bit different for all of us now at our age and our maturity level versus when we were 17 and 18 years old. I'm not speaking for you, but I will speak for me. I've changed a lot in that regard.

So my point is, we need to help this process, and it takes a while to develop this process. You know what, it's developed off the field. This discipline is developed off the field. Just like if we redshirt a player because he lacks strength, where is the strength developed? It's developed in the weight room and it's applied on the field. Discipline is developed off the field.

With the players in our family, on our team, we're going to do things that are going to help them change their behavior so that they have a better chance to be successful.

I want you to know that there's not one player, not one player, since I've been a head coach that I kicked off the team that ever went anywhere and amounted to anything and accomplished anything, playing or academically. All right?

That's not always the answer. Discipline is not punishment. Punishment is only effective when it can help change somebody's behavior.

Now, when somebody proves they can't be part of an organization, then sometimes you got to get the wrong people off the bus. I get that, all right? But I just want you all to know that we all have to be committed to trying to help our young people from a culture standpoint have a better chance to be successful in their life. That's something that we're very much committed to and really is the reason that we coach 'cause that's the part that I like the best. It gives me the most positive self-gratification to see somebody have a chance to be successful.

So with that, any questions.

**Q. You've hired a number of former head coaches on your staff through the years. You mentioned Lane before. What does that experience add to your program?**

COACH SABAN: Well, I think anytime anybody has knowledge and experience, it certainly contributes a lot of value in your organization. I think it kind of goes both ways. I think you learn a little from them, I think they learn a little from you. I think you can make subtle changes in what you do to make it more effective because of the input you get from your staff.

The more experience that your staff has, obviously I think the better they understand the big picture and have the kind of foresight that you need to have that you know when you make changes, what the cause and effect of those changes are going to be.

Lane certainly has been helpful in a lot of those areas.

**Q. Can you talk about going into the season with a young quarterback, no matter who is, and the adjustments you have to make as you find out what he can do in game conditions?**

COACH SABAN: I think every quarterback has to go through sort of a process of development because three things that are critical factors to me at quarterback is decision making, processing information quickly, making quick, good decisions.

So decision making and judgment is a critical factor, accuracy with the ball is a critical factor, and leadership is a critical factor. Two out of three of those things are a little bit innate in terms of a guy understanding a system, feeling confident in application of that system so they can make good choices and decisions, can lead, can be accurate, to enhance the players around him. That's the challenge with a young quarterback.

How long is it going to take that guy to go through that process? How long is it going to take him to where he can do those things effectively and gain the respect of his teammates and have an effect on them so that you play well together as a unit? I think that's the biggest challenge.

Older, more mature players seem to be able to do that a little more quickly. Not that there's not some young guys that have done it very well and are very capable of doing it.

**Q. The BCS was pretty good the last eight years to the SEC. What are your thoughts on the new College Playoff and its impact, kind of adding that extra game to the schedule potentially?**

COACH SABAN: You know, I'm hopeful that when we choose the teams that are in the Playoff, that we take the 13 years of experience that the BCS had in tweaking their system of picking teams so that they get the right four teams in the game. That would be number one.

I do think when you look at the history of the BCS, they usually got it right with their process. The criticism always came when there were more than two teams that were deserving.

Now, the same thing is going to happen with a four-team playoff because there's always going to be a fifth team that could have been deserving that will create controversy.

But I do think from a fan standpoint, this is going to be something that a lot of people have looked forward to. It will be good for college football and it's good for the game.

I think if we continue to expand, whether it's a playoff system or whatever it is, I think we're sort of getting to the saturation point when it comes to how many games can a college football player play without sort of overdoing it relative to the responsibilities that he has academically and the other things that are going on in their life besides just playing football games, because there's a potential for a player to play 15 games in our league, with a championship game as well as two playoff games.

There's only going to be a few teams that do that, and I'm sure every coach would certainly like to be one of those teams that had an opportunity to do that.

But I think we have to take the student-athlete's well-being into consideration if we continue to play more games.

**Q. What is the status of Drake and Reed on the team? The quarterback position, the perception is that Coker is going to come in and get the job. Speak to that competition with Sims.**

COACH SABAN: That's really not internally the perception by me, our staff or our players. Jake Coker has the opportunity to come in and compete for the position. Blake Sims has been competing for the position. Really did a

pretty good job in the spring. Didn't play great in the spring game, but we really didn't do the things that he's capable of doing.

So there's going to be a competition there, as well as some of the younger players will be involved in that competition.

We really can't make that decision or prediction as to what's going to happen at that position, but the development of that position, regardless of who the player is, is going to be critical to the success of our team.

Some of the things that I said before about guys learning how to control their impulsive behavior, choices and decisions, thoughts, habits and priorities, buying into the whole process of what you have to do to be a successful football player in college. Those players are suspended but they're not kicked off the team.

They're suspended from activity. When they prove that I think or we think that they're ready to come back and show a little bit more responsibility and discipline for how they handle themselves, their decision making, how they represent the university, their family and themselves, then we'll allow them to come back on the team.

We're not making that judgment, you know, right now.

**Q. You expressed some displeasure with a couple of your players for choosing the NFL. Is it getting harder to convince the guys that aren't sure fire first-round picks to come back or is it a year-by-year thing with certain players?**

COACH SABAN: I think as you look at trends, you'd have to say that I think in three years, we went from 53 players to 102 players going out early for the draft. 36 of those players did not even get drafted this year. I think 32 of those guys got drafted in the first or second round.

My philosophy is, look, I'm not disappointed in any players. When they make the decision to go do what they're going to do, we're 100% supportive of them and we want to see them do well. That benefits them, it benefits us. It's what we're all about, all right?

But we do try to give them good advice when it comes to making a business decision about their football career.

What people don't look at is if you're going to be a fifth- or six-round draft pick, they go out early so they get to a second contract faster. There's only a 25% chance you're going to get a

second contract. Your chances of making the team are not nearly as good as a first-, second-, or third-round draft pick.

If you stayed in school, you'd have a much better chance of becoming one of those guys by improving, developing and playing more rather than taking that gamble and that risk that you will be able to sustain a career by being not a high draft pick.

Because the financial commitment that a team makes in you by being a first- or second-round draft pick protects you or keeps or tries to develop you. But if you're not, from a business standpoint, you're really looking at a lot of exposure, especially if you can't make the team, all right, because you have no protection.

So we're going to continue to try to do the things that we've done. I know the NFL has expressed, or we read about some rules that we're only going to be allowed to submit, and you need to check this out, but I just read it before I came over here, five players for junior grades because it's getting overwhelming for them. We had 11 last year.

A guy is going to get a first-round grade, a second-round grade or a stay-in-school grade. Look, all these players that went out for the draft, that went out for the draft late, or didn't get drafted, they were potential draft picks next year. They're not in the draft next year. They're not playing college football either.

**Q. Before C.J. Mosley left, specifically during practices before the Oklahoma game, he had tapped Trey DePriest as the next leader on defense because of his play calling, his ability to read the plays. First and foremost, do you believe from what you've seen during the spring that he'll live up to that assessment? How is life treating you as a grandfather? When she gets older, will she have access to the stash of Little Debbie's?**

COACH SABAN: Everybody hits my Debbie cookies up. Everybody gets on me for eating them, but there's nobody that passes the cookie jar without grabbing one. I'm sure my granddaughter won't be any different.

Life with the grandbaby is great. It's a great experience. I hope it's one that many of you have the opportunity to have someday in your future.

I've only made a few mistakes in terms of

being a grandfather to this point. That's after so many times of as soon as the baby makes a peep, seeing somebody run to pick her up, you say, She'll be fine, just let her cry. That was a mistake now (smiling). That was a huge mistake.

But, you know, my only concern so far with the grandbaby is when she does go to kindergarten, if she walks in and doesn't get a standing ovation, how is she going to respond to that, because she gets a lot of attention at our house, and I think that's a good thing.

But anyway...

**Q. Trey DePriest.**

COACH SABAN: Trey has been a very good player for us. I think he has a tremendous ability to impact and effect our players on the team. But until you see how players respond and the chemistry develops, which I thought it started to do that on defense in the spring, I think Landon Collins is a very good leader and he's had some impact.

We have more players probably sort of aware of the importance of the role of leaders on the team to sort of try to affect and serve other people.

You know, leadership is your ability to impact someone else for their benefit. When you impact somebody else for your benefit, that's manipulation. I think sometimes people can see through that pretty easily, all right?

But to do that you have to be somebody that somebody wants to emulate. You have to set a good example. You have to care about other people.

I don't think there's any player that I've ever coached that cares what you know until he knows that you care. There's three words that I always talk about that really comes to, 'interested enough to care about somebody else': feel, felt, found. I know how you feel, I felt that way before, here's what I found out.

If you can do that, you can be in a position to help serve somebody else, which that's being a blessing to somebody else.

I really liked what Admiral McRaven said at the Texas graduation, when he spoke at their graduation. There were 8,000 graduates there, he said, We're going to change the world today. All you 8,000 people got to do is go affect 10 other people in a positive way, they go affect 10 more, you go through five generations times 10, that's like 800 million people.

Well, it sounds easy, but why doesn't it get done that way? Because, you know, people aren't willing to go do the things you have to do to affect someone else. That's something that's really important to try to get young players to do, to help the young players on our team -- young people to do, to help the young players on our team. Trey has done a good job of that to this point.

**Q. I know you're a proponent of adding that extra league game that was not adopted. With the College Football Playoff coming up, how much of strength of schedule, it may hurt the SEC, and do you ever see the SEC going to add that extra league game?**

COACH SABAN: I played in the NFL for eight years. We had 32 teams in the league. We all played the 32 teams in the league. I think that we're talking about going to this five conference sort of whatever we're going to call it, big five or whatever it is. I'd be all for playing all of our games against those guys.

You know, it's what the fans want. I mean, we need to be more concerned about the people who support the programs and the university and come and see the games. I mean, those are the most important. But we never think about that. Everybody is worried about whether they're going to qualify to go to a bowl game, all that stuff.

If we made that rule, we'd have 10 SEC games. But I also don't think you should have to win six games to get in a bowl game. This new committee we got, they're picking six games, is that not right? They're picking all the games that are involved in the playoff, six bowls.

I think they should pick everybody like they do in basketball. If you go 5-7, you have a quality schedule, you can still get in a bowl game, rather than somebody trying to manipulate their schedule, go 6-6 so they can get in a bowl game.

I'm all for playing as many good quality games for players, fans and the betterment of our game.

But I think some fundamental changes have to be made before anybody would be interested in that. I know that everybody thinks I'm crazy, but I think that, you know, every player that comes to an SEC school should play every team in the SEC, which means you have to play two or three teams on the other side. Well, you can't expand the conference and not expand the number of games you play to be able to do that.

I'm the only coach that's interested in doing that, so...

People should make those decisions beyond us. They should do it based on what is in the best interest of our league and college football in general.

**Q. Have you had a chance to speak with Jimbo Fisher at all this off-season, talk about some of the challenges he faces trying to defend his national championship?**

COACH SABAN: You know, we haven't really discussed that. I do talk to Jimbo from time to time. He's never asked the question. I never offer any advice unless I'm asked.

We do speak from time to time. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Jimbo. He's a great friend and a tremendous coach. He has a great program. He's a guy that did a fantastic job for us. We're friends, but we don't always talk about football-related type stuff.

**Q. There were a couple of rumors about you in the off-season, you probably didn't notice. I was curious if Texas didn't make you an offer to be their coach, was it anywhere close to \$100 million, and what was your level of interest in that job?**

COACH SABAN: Well, I didn't have any conversations with them. Nobody offered me anything. So I guess if I didn't have any conversations with them, I didn't have very much interest.

I think the University of Texas is a fantastic place, and they've got a lot of wonderful people there, it's a great institution. But this is about the station in my life where we are. We moved around a lot. If I had to do it over, I'd have just tried to stay in one place and establish a great program, not have all these goals and aspirations of things that eventually, you know, you weren't happy doing.

So I'm very happy at Alabama. Miss Terry is very happy at Alabama. We certainly enjoy the challenges that we have there, the friends that we have established here. This is where we just choose to, you know, end our career someday.

It wasn't anything about any other place, it was just about where we are and what we want to try to do with the rest of our career.

I know if we lost this many games, you would be on me. I know you all pick a winner in the conference every year. I'm not saying who you picked this year. But last year you'd actually been wrong, you know, like 17 out of 21 times. Now

you're wrong 18 out of 22. But you've also not picked the right team the last five years in a row.

Every year that we've been fortunate enough to win the championship, you picked somebody else to win it. So just to let you know that we're evaluating you (laughter).

Thank you.

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