

**November 30, 2014**



An interview with:

## **COACH NICK SABAN**

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the head coach of the Crimson Tide, champions of the SEC Western Division.

Coach, please take a minute to talk about your team as you prepare for Saturday.

COACH SABAN: First of all, I'd like to mention the fact that it's very special to the University of Alabama, our football program and team, to play in the SEC Championship game. This game has always been great teams playing. Winner has gone on to play the national championship game the last eight years. Always great atmosphere in the Georgia Dome. Great competitive venue for our players and our fans.

I'd like to congratulate Missouri on a great year and winning the East. Coach Pinkel, my old teammate, has done a fantastic job. They have a very good team. It's going to be a real challenge for our team.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Coach Saban.

**Q. It's been a couple years since you played Missouri. What has been your impression of the way that Gary and the Missouri program has adapted to the conference?**

COACH SABAN: Well, they've done fantastic. They represented the East two years in a row in the SEC Championship game, finished 12-2 last season, won the Cotton Bowl. They won six straight games this year.

I think they're one of the best teams in our league, no doubt. Certainly very deserving of what they've accomplished. They've overcome a lot of adversity this year to do it.

They've got a good quarterback, good receivers, nationally ranked defense that has some

real pass-rush specialists. So this is an outstanding team. I think they've done a great job since they joined the league, especially the last two years.

**Q. People are questioning whether Amari Cooper is the best wide receiver in Alabama history, maybe best player in Alabama history. Is there something unique about the way he plays the position?**

COACH SABAN: I just think Amari is not worthy of comparing him to anybody else. He is Amari Cooper. He has his own style. He's a competitive guy who works very hard. He has really good speed, can get in and out of breaks. He works hard in the game to get open. He does a good job of executing. He's made a lot of big plays for us this year.

I think he is probably one of the best wide receivers in the country. I don't get the opportunity to see them all. But he's certainly been a dynamic player for our team and has made a great contribution to our season.

**Q. I know you probably only looked at Missouri briefly. In the short time you looked at them on tape, what stands out about Shane Ray and Markus Golden as pass-rushers?**

COACH SABAN: I haven't really seen their defense that much other than watching them a couple times during the season.

Obviously those guys are very productive. 13 and a half sacks for Shane Ray. Markus has eight and a half sacks and 16 tackles for loss. The other guy has 20 tackles for loss.

These guys are obviously very quick guys that are instinctive, that beat people with their quickness. They're very productive in their system and scheme. They do a good job of executing.

Not many guys have made that kind of an impact with their defense anywhere in the country in terms of giving the offense negative plays.

**Q. Everybody talks about the pass-rush for Missouri. They've been pretty good against the run, too. Do you see any vulnerabilities in this defense? How do you go about attacking this team right now?**

COACH SABAN: We just got done playing a game last night at midnight. We just started working on them. We didn't know we were going to play them until we won the game last night, and that they were going to represent the East until Friday.

I can't really answer that question intelligently right now until we have a little more time to study.

**Q. Is there an injury update on Cam Robinson?**

COACH SABAN: You know, Cam sprained his shoulder in the game. We're hopeful that he'll be back in a day or two and be able to practice. Right now he's day-to-day.

**Q. How have you seen this team evolve since then and maybe where it's come the furthest?**

COACH SABAN: I think this team has shown a tremendous resiliency all year long to make plays in critical times in games. They've always been able to overcome adversity, do the things they needed to do to be able to come out on top. I think that speaks a lot of the competitive character that the group has.

I think offensively we've probably been a little more consistent in the last few ballgames. Defensively we haven't been quite as consistent. We'd like to get back to playing a little better defensively, continuing to build on what we've been able to accomplish offensively here in the last few weeks.

**Q. What is the message or the challenge you put to your defense before Saturday?**

COACH SABAN: I think defensively we know we're going to play a very, very good team, a good quarterback in Mauk. They've been very productive with their receivers. They've got good runningbacks, good speed, good skill guys. Marcus Murphy is kind of a special player for them.

So our defense is going to have to play with a lot more discipline in terms of everyone doing their job for us to have a chance to be successful in this game or any game that we play.

We weren't real pleased with some of the big plays that we gave up, especially in the first half in last night's game. That's something we certainly need to address, try to take the things that we can learn from the game last night and improve.

**Q. I know you went to school with Coach Pinkel and were teammates. What was your relationship like back then? Has it grown more since you both became coaches?**

COACH SABAN: Gary and I have always been good friends. We were good friends in college. We also started out coaching together. I was actually one year ahead of him in school. He played as a senior when I was a first-year graduate assistant, then he became a graduate assistant. We actually were graduate assistants together, started out coaching together.

I have a lot of respect for Gary and what he's done in his coaching career. I think he's one of the finest people as a person in our profession that I know. I've always had a tremendous amount of respect for him personally and professionally.

**Q. The kicking situation, you used a few different guys last night. Is that the plan moving forward? Is Griffith going to be kicking more?**

COACH SABAN: We want Griff to kick. We're trying to manage him through some of his health issues. Hopefully he'll feel a little better and be able to do a little more kicking and be ready to kick in the next game.

**Q. We talked about how good this league is all season long. Talk about your team's consistency you had to play with just to survive the SEC West.**

COACH SABAN: I'm proud of what our team has been able to accomplish to this point, the way they played. We had a tough loss early in the season to Ole Miss on the road. The question then was how are they going to respond to that. I think they responded pretty well. I think they responded pretty well last night to some tough circumstances in the game.

I'm just really proud of the way our guys have competed all year long. We've got a good bunch of guys. Just want to keep working to try to play with a little more consistency.

I still don't think we've played as well as

we're capable of playing. Hopefully we'll look at this new season and opportunity to play for the SEC Championship as a stimulus to try to go out there and practice and prepare well, play our best.

**Q. It looked Yeldon came back strong after you rested him with the ankle. What did you see in terms of his play? Huge runs when you were down.**

COACH SABAN: T.J. did a great job in the game. He really played well in the game, made some explosive runs. Looked like he had some of the explosion back. Hopefully we can build on that.

I thought he played really, really well in the game. I was really happy to see it. I think we're obviously a better team when him and Derrick Henry both can play. Hopefully we'll be able to get him even healthier so he can continue to progress this week.

**Q. We asked Coach Pinkel about some of the things he's taken from Coach James in the past. Is there anything you've taken from James, a message or something that you'll be thinking about as you head into the game this weekend?**

COACH SABAN: Well, a lot of the stuff that we did way back when I was a player and first started coaching for Coach James are still things that we use in our program today.

It starts with how we recruit players, how we evaluate players, character and attitude, how those things sort of play into it, how you sort of try to find out those things about players so you get the kind of guys that are a good fit for your program. That was a big thing that Don always emphasized.

He was really, really well-organized. That's something that we've always tried to be and do. Some of the things we did in the off-season program we still do. Some of the conditioning things we do during the season we still do.

There's quite a bit of stuff. Don was one of the best coaches to me of all time. He was my coach, had a great impact on my life. I certainly appreciate him more than anyone could know for the start that he sort of inspired me to have as a coach.

A lot of his influences really affected our coaching career.

**Q. It's no secret that you've had a lot of success in recruiting. That's not always the case with Missouri. Does that speak to the job that Gary Pinkel does or does it say that those recruiting rankings can be a little overblown?**

COACH SABAN: I don't know how much validity recruiting rankings actually have. So that's part of the answer.

But I also think it does speak to the job that Gary and his staff have done in building their team and building their program, the very good job they've done of recruiting players as well as developing those players.

Sometimes I don't know what comes first in recruiting rankings, the cart or the horse. When a guy gets recruited by what I'm going to call high-profile programs, he gets ranked higher. That's where I question the validity of how accurate some of those things may be.

**Q. Last night in the game with Blake Sims getting his ankle rolled, then throwing three interceptions, was that the ankle, poor decisions, something Auburn did? What is the status going forward?**

COACH SABAN: Blake is fine. I don't think the ankle was bothering him in the game. I think a couple situations contributed to that. One time a receiver kind of broke the route when he wasn't supposed to, guy stepped in front where the guy is supposed to cross his face. That is what the quarterback expected to happen.

One of the other interceptions was Cooper beat his guy. That's what the quarterback was seeing in man-to-man. A guy that was covering somebody else fell off and intercepted the ball. That was a little bit of a spacing issue probably.

Then another one was sort of a technical drifting sideways in the pocket, sort of overthrowing the ball.

They were technical things not just about Blake, but some things about how we executed things. Blake is fine. We just need to keep working with Blake so he has the kind of confidence he needs to go out there and play well, lead our team, make good decisions, take what the defense gives him.

**Q. Back to when you and Gary were teammates, did you expect at the time maybe he would follow in the footsteps of Coach James and yourself or was it too early to**

know?

COACH SABAN: Well, I can't speak for him. I never really wanted to be a coach. Coach James asked me to be a graduate assistant. My wife had another year of school, so I decided to do it, even though I didn't want to go to graduate school.

I really liked it. I have thanked Coach James many, many times for inspiring me into the opportunity to do it. Also a lot of the lessons that I learned from him starting out as a young coach. Didn't surprise me at all the kind of person Gary was, the intelligence he had, whatever he chose to do, he would do very well. He's certainly done very well as a coach.

**Q. Rashaan Evans is a guy we saw a lot of in the second half last night. What has been the key to him getting on the field more? What did you think of his performance last night? Will we see some of him Saturday?**

COACH SABAN: Rashaan has done a good job for us developing all year long. He's got some special quickness in pass-rush. Late in the game last night we had guys that played a lot of plays. We have a lot of confidence in Rashaan that he can go in there and give us some pass-rush, give us some minutes. He did a really good job of pressuring the quarterback. He plays with great effort. I'm really pleased with what he was able to do when he got the opportunity last night.

**Q. You rotated cornerbacks in the game last night. What is the plan there? Stick with Bradley or keep rotating guys?**

COACH SABAN: Well, we haven't really decided yet. Eddie played well for us all year long. Bradley did a nice job when he went in the game last night. Probably see how things go in practice this week and make a decision later on in the week about that.

**Q. Regardless of what happens in this game, do you feel the SEC should have a team in the playoffs?**

COACH SABAN: Well, I can't speak to that. I think we have an outstanding league. We have a lot of good teams. The fact that we play each other, end up beating each other probably hurts a little bit relative to the quality especially of our division.

I think some of the teams in our division are really, really good teams. I'm sure there's some other really good teams out there that I have not seen.

So without looking at everyone, I would think that somebody in our league qualifies to be one of the better four teams in the country based on the quality of the league, the good teams that we all have to play.

**Q. I heard from my colleague that you have been playing the Kick-6 since Chris Davis' return over and over again. Now that you've gotten the revenge win, what will be the video you'll be playing going into the SEC Championship game?**

COACH SABAN: We haven't decided that yet. I don't know how much we played the video in the locker room. I'm sure it got played. It was a tough, tough game for all of us, the way we finished the game, not just that play, but the last five or six minutes of the game a year ago. That team was 11-0, sort of didn't get an opportunity to do what they had strived for all year long.

Now this team has created an opportunity for themselves. I think we just want to get them to look forward to the challenges that they have, what they need to do to try to take advantage of the opportunity that they've created for themselves.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, that's all the questions we have for you this evening. Thank you for your time. We'll see you in Atlanta.

COACH SABAN: Thank you.

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