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Alabama – 42
Missouri – 13

An Interview With:

COACH SABAN BLAKE SIMS

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue with Alabama, Coach Saban, along with MVP Blake Sims. We'll begin and ask Coach for his general thoughts on the game and ask the same of Blake, and then we'll take your questions.

COACH SABAN: First of all, I can't tell you how proud I am of our team, our players. I don't know that I've ever been so anxious to want to win a game for a group of guys that did a phenomenal job all day long, are working to improve, overcoming adversity, did a great job with their competitive character in some really tough circumstances.

I've backed them when I needed to back them, and I booted them in the butt when we needed to boot them in the butt, but they've always responded the right way. I've never wanted a group to have a chance to be successful in a game as I did tonight in winning the SEC Championship.

I think that everybody sort of minimizes the importance of this game now and wants to talk about the playoff, but I'll tell you what, it's a significant accomplishment. I've been in this league for a long time. It's tough to win. It's tough to win in your division, and it's tough to win in this game.

You've got to give Missouri's team a lot of credit. They had a great year. They did a great job of battling back in the third quarter when they could have sort of said, I don't know if we can win this game. It was a real credit to our guys to

respond to that and take the game back over in the fourth quarter.

So this is a great venue. The SEC Championship game. Atlanta's a great city to hold this event, and they do a great job of hosting it. I just -- it's kind of ironic that we started the season here and we finished the season, at least the regular season for now, here. But the amazing thing about it is, if you think about the team then and the team now, that's what I'm most proud of.

THE MODERATOR: Blake, your general thoughts on the game, please.

BLAKE SIMS: We went out and fought very hard through the summer and through the spring. We told each other that the little things are going to count. That's one thing Coach Saban did very well, letting us know every week that it's the little things. There's going to be bad plays that are going to be made against Missouri, against any team that we have played in the past. He helped us out to learn that we need to worry about the next play.

He did a great job letting the offensive line know what they've got to do, pretty much letting the whole offense know what they've got to do and the defense. I just want to give all the credit to the linemen and to the wide receivers and the running back because they worked hard and they gave me time to make adjustments and make good calls.

Coach Kiffin did a great job with the game plan and letting us know what we have to do. Our coaches really care about us, and they want to see us win the game and be successful in life, and I'm just happy for this team because we have worked very hard.

Q. Blake Sims has had quite a journey to get to this moment in his life. What did we learn about Blake Sims this year?

COACH SABAN: Well, I don't know that I've ever seen a player go through any more than Blake went through for four years as a player, and never once did he ever not do whatever he needed

to do to help the team.

He played on a scout team so many times when we'd play against a zone read quarterback, when he was the backup quarterback, never complained about it. And I've never seen a guy work so hard from last spring when he had an opportunity to be the quarterback, through the summer, and to work in fall camp and get the confidence of his players and execute well and just learn how to take what the defense gives. He has done a phenomenal job for us all year long.

It really -- as a coach, you love to see guys that go through what he's gone through, work so hard, always persevered, and then have success. This is a phenomenal success that he's had with the season, but it's a credit to his character and his work ethic.

Q. Nick, has Blake been the perfect leader for this team? And why have you been so anxious to want to see this team win this game?

COACH SABAN: Well, I think that part of the reason that I love this team so much is we have great team chemistry. We don't have a lot of issues ever. Everybody really sort of supports and helps each other. I think everybody has been all in to the vision of what we want to accomplish this year. And it's really fun to coach guys that have that kind of attitude about what they're trying to accomplish and what they're trying to do.

We have lots of opportunities on our team where guys could be selfish, because we had one receiver that had a fantastic year and maybe they could have caught more balls. Christian Jones is out there blocking like crazy for that guy, and so is De White. Nobody really cares. Everybody really cares about having success and being successful. Everybody kind of has each other's back.

In this day and age, the way people are, that's kind of unique, and it's really appreciated by me as a coach to have that kind of group of guys to work with.

Q. Nick, you guys have become pretty good at this continuous football, fast-paced. How has it been for you to play that style and have the right guy to play that style with?

COACH SABAN: You know, I really think that we don't want to take too much credit for this because we play that style because of this guy, and he does a really good job of that. We toyed with it early in the season, and we were a little bit

of a work in progress getting to it, but because he executes it so well and makes really good reads, it's been very, very beneficial to us.

So he's the reason that we do it, because it's what he does best, and the rest of our players really kind of fit in that too with the kind of team we have. So it's worked out great for us. And if we didn't do it, I don't think we'd be here where we are right now.

Q. Nick, the night you lost the Ole Miss game, you immediately mentioned the two teams that had lost games and come back to win national titles. What are the common threads maybe that this team has, and were you confident that they would respond in the same way?

COACH SABAN: Well, I always believe in this group. I always have believed in this group. I just asked them questions, and I asked the question after the Ole Miss game, how are you going to respond to a loss? We've only had one team that didn't lose a game. That's a very difficult thing to do. And I think they responded the right way.

Obviously, we wouldn't be here now if they didn't, and they really overcame a lot of adversity and some real tough games to get here. You've got to have a lot of appreciation for that kind of competitive character.

Q. Blake, you're from right down the world, Gainesville, Georgia. How does it feel to be here in Atlanta, backyard to you growing up, and to have this happen to you on your final game and the MVP and everything? Does it kind of feel surreal?

BLAKE SIMS: It's a great feeling. Back in high school, I played here my last game in the championship, and we lost. Pretty much I was just playing for everybody down the road in Gainesville High. And just pretty much just going out playing, doing everything that Coach Saban has taught me and Coach Kiffin has taught me and just trust my players that they're going to play hearts out and leave no regrets on the field.

Q. If I could get a comment from both the coach and Blake, as far as this fourth quarter goes, things were looking a little tentative at that point, I would think. You were up by eight. But what were your thoughts, and

what did you do to make thing turn around in that fourth quarter?

COACH SABAN: Well, I think that -- I was starting to think in my mind I didn't do a very good job at halftime to get the players to come out. We had three third-down-and-tens that they converted on in the third quarter to score the points that they scored, which is pretty frustrating when we put a lot of emphasis on getting off the field on third down. And a couple of them were scramble big plays that set up scores. So they captured the momentum of the game.

But I always believe that our players think that they know they're in a 60-minute game. They expected this to be a tough game. So this is the resiliency that you talk about that nobody really lost their poise. We put a great drive together to go down to score and make it 28-13. I think that was a real key. But after that, we really controlled the football, and they never really had another opportunity to score.

So we expected this to be a tough game. We had a lot of respect for Missouri.

BLAKE SIMS: We just went out there and just tried to play. The offensive line just put their hand down. They moved the line of scrimmage, just like our coaches told us, and we didn't want to look back. We just look forward every time. Even if the score was close, we didn't look at the score, and we just try to look ahead every time and try to get as many touchdowns as we can.

COACH SABAN: I've got something for you guys. Can we get somebody out there to get him to do a redo of Cool Hand Luke. I told Blake I want him to play this game like Cool Hand Luke, and he looks at me and says, who the hell is that? We've got to get that on Netflix or something.

Q. You mentioned the new format and how people want to talk about that, and certainly that's next for you. Does it matter, when you have four teams that are going to be left regardless of the four, who's the No. 1 seed, who's the No. 4 seed, and so on through the field?

COACH SABAN: My comment the other day at the luncheon was -- and I guess I should say it again -- is I grew up in an era and a time when every game in college football mattered. We didn't have a playoff. They didn't have a true champion. And I understand the interest in that, and it's great for the fans. But that was one of the unique things in college football is that a lot of

college football players got a lot of positive self-gratification from going to a Bowl game, whether they won seven games, eight games, nine games, it all mattered.

And everybody sat on New Year's Day and watched how many games that were all important? Those games are not getting the same respect now because we have a Final Four, and that's all that anybody talks about is who's in the Final Four? I couldn't get them to talk about the game today. I mean, I was trying to get ESPN to acknowledge that we had an SEC Championship game today rather than who we're going to play the next time.

I don't really -- you know, we have to have some system evaluation. I thought the BCS did a pretty good job of ranking teams and had a pretty good criteria. I don't think there's enough out there right now to make any kind of judgments about what's happening right now. I just think that our team has done enough that they should be included, and I don't care who you play or how it gets seeded, all the teams are going to be good teams. And there's probably some other really good teams that won't get the opportunity, and that's the part that I hope gets respected in the other Bowl games.

You know what, I usually do this at the end of the year, and I know you all think I don't like the media, but I love the media because I love what you do for the players. I love the attention that you give them. It's where they get a lot of positive self-gratification when you talk about them and write about them, and I really do appreciate what you do, and it creates a tremendous amount of interest for college football, and that's all great by me. Thank you.

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