

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Nick Saban

Press Conference

GREG SANKEY: Our first coach this morning is Nick Saban who has led his teams over his career to seven national championships. He has earned eight National Coach of the Year awards and 10 SEC championships.

He and his wife, Terry, have made a \$1.25 million contribution to the soon-to-be-open Saban Center in the city of Tuscaloosa that will offer science, technology, engineering, and math programs to young people from that community, along with theater and outdoor recreation activities. An indication of how we across the conference can impact the lives around us beyond just the game of football.

University of Alabama head football coach, Nick Saban.

NICK SABAN: Good morning. It's great to be here. I hope everyone's had an eventful, good summer.

This SEC Media Day thing is one of my favorite events of the year because it sort of signifies the beginning of the kickoff of another football season.

Lots of people love vacation, but I'm the leader of an organization, but I'm not the leader when I'm on vacation. When I get the list to take the garbage out, run the sweeper, Pledge the refrigerator, it's always, after a certain period of time, refreshing to be able to go back to work so that I can be the leader of an organization.

This is my 21st season in the SEC. A lot of great memories, a lot of relationships that have been built and memories that are going to be cherished for a long, long time.

Even though you have great family time and look forward coming off vacation, you have great family time, you always look forward to preparing for the challenges of another season.

We've had a really good off-season with our team. We had



a good summer with our players. I think our team has made improvements and progress in a lot of areas, whether it's physical development, attitude development, and trying to develop a mindset that will allow us to have good team chemistry in the future.

As we always do, it's kind of like here we go again in making predictions about how young people, adolescents, will perform in the future. So that's why we play the games, that's why we have a season, so that we can sort of see how we grow and develop, how the team develops, sort of all the things you need to develop on a team, the togetherness, the positive energy and attitude, people being responsible for their own self-determination, the work, preparation, ability to overcome adversity, pride in performance that allows the team to play with the consistency you need to be successful for the entire season, especially in the SEC, which is a very challenging league.

I think it's also more difficult than ever to sort of predict how your team is going to develop in all these areas because we have more turnover on rosters in terms of how do you create a sense of object constancy, which we all strive for in our lives, sense of belonging, sense of family, sense of consistency in what's coming next, what the challenges are, who I am, where I'm going, how I'm going to get there.

These things are all really critical factors in developing, creating an identity personally, individually for players, as well as for a team. I think the more turnover you have on your roster, probably the harder it is to predict how those things actually happen.

I think it's also probably because of a lot of the changes that we have in college football as we move forward. It's also very, very important to stay focused on what do you need to do to have a program that creates value for players and their future in terms of their personal development, their academic development, ability to develop a career off the field, which really prepares them for their future after football, and how can they develop a career as a football player.

All these things contribute to how players can be more



successful in life. I still think the focus needs to be on how do we continue to be able to have the kind of program that's going to help players develop value for their future, which is why we all went to college, all of us, me included, all of you. And that's with the changes, we want to make sure we sort of stay focused on the things that are most important for college student-athletes.

The players that we have here, Bryce, Will, Jordan Battle, have all represented our program in a first-class way. I think they've represented the university in a first-class way, and the conference.

All these guys are on track to graduate in December, which we're very proud of the academic standard that we've been able to maintain in terms of graduation rate. I think we're in the top three in the country in APR.

These guys have provided good leadership for our team. They've worked hard. They're the right kind of people. They've got the right stuff. They're very talented players.

But the challenge is, are the players on our team all going to buy into the principles and values and standards of the organization, which these guys have done a great job of demonstrating, so that we can create the kind of identity that will create the kind of consistency and performance we need to have a actual team.

So mindset is really important to that. Leadership, which these guys have done a great job of providing, is also very important to that. But it's also how did the other people on the team sort of buy into the leadership that has been provided. That's always a work in progress with new players in the organization, new players on the team.

So we have challenges on our team. I mean, we had seven players drafted, two first-round draft picks, some very, very good players at wide receiver and other positions that will be difficult to replace. I think we've had 113 players drafted in the last 14 years, 31 first-round draft picks. Very proud of the fact we've done a good job of creating value for players at the next level.

But it will be a challenge for us to replace the skill players lost, two great receivers on our team last year. We've got some significant challenges in replacing some offensive line people. Bryce Young is a great player, a great leader, a great quarterback obviously. But quarterback is also a position that may be one of the most difficult positions in all of sports to play if you're not surrounded by good people. So the challenge for us is to make sure we do an outstanding job of developing the players around him so that we can continue to be a very productive offensive team.

Defensively I think we've got seven starters back. Again, the biggest challenge is how do we replace the corners that we lost, because corner is probably the one position that puts the greatest restriction on what you can do on defense. That's going to be a significant challenge for us, as well.

I do think we have good specialists so we should be good at special teams. I'm really pleased with the new special teams coordinator, Coleman Hutzler, that we have. He's done a good job. The players have bought into it, which is always important on special teams.

From a staff standpoint, this is the first time in a long time we've had both coordinators, continuity in both coordinators, which I think is probably an important thing for us. The new coaches that we have brought in to replace coaches on our staff have fit in extremely well. They made a positive contribution in the relationships they've been able to develop with players and the energy and enthusiasm and new ideas they've brought to the organization. We're very, very pleased with the staff that we have right now in terms of how they can contribute to developing our team.

I'd like to thank you all for all that you do to create interest in college football. There's a lot of positive self-gratification that players gain from the things that you do, which I think college football is a great game, tremendous interest on a national level, to see how these players develop and see how the competitiveness balance is, something that fans and people that watch college football are always interested in.

I think you all have done a really good job of creating a circumstance that is very positive for our sport. We certainly thank you for that.

So any questions.

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question...

Q. I don't know if you noticed, it stopped raining right before you came up. I don't know if you had control over that or not.

NICK SABAN: I don't think so (smiling).

Q. As far as Will and Bryce, can you think of another team where you've had such elite guys on each side of the ball? What is it like having two guys back that are so good, arguably the best in the country?

NICK SABAN: Well, I don't like to compare players, but to



have two players that make such a significant impact on our team as those two guys, I don't recall ever having a circumstance like that.

We've had some great impact players, but never one on offense, one on defense, of the caliber that these guys have been able to play on a consistent basis.

But I think probably bigger than that is the impact that they have on the players around them. These guys set a great example. They're players that other people on our team can emulate in a positive way because of the example that they set. These guys are very serving to their teammates in terms of they really do care about helping other people for their benefit.

So these guys have not only been great players, they've contributed from a leadership standpoint probably as significantly as any leaders that we've had - and we've had some really good leaders in our program and organization.

Really excited about having these guys on our team. You couldn't ask for two better people. I've always said that when the best players on your team are really good people with great attitude and great mindset, it's really helpful to developing the type of team chemistry you need to have a successful team.

Q. There's been a seismic shift with HBCUs and their popularity, but you also have FBS programs playing them. LSU is playing Southern. You have Notre Dame stepping out and playing Tennessee State. Could we ever see an Alabama playing an Alabama State or an Alabama A&M down the line? Second part to that is how have FCS systems become feeders to Power Five programs as well in the transfer portal?

NICK SABAN: I think I certainly can see, we've tried to be very supportive. Miss Terry is on the Board of Trustees at Stillman College. I've always been an advocate of playing in-state schools because I think it sort of helps them raise their level and their ability to compete, which obviously if you do that, you also contribute to how successful the players in those organizations can be.

So I would be very much in favor of that.

I do think that some of the really, really good players -- I think it's going to work both ways. I think some of the really good players in that league are going to have opportunities to go other places, but I also think that there will be some players that come back to that league that will also be able to enhance their value as players because of the opportunity that will be created for them by playing at that level.

All good things.

Q. There are going to be four student reporters from the Alabama communications department and four student reporters from the University of Texas communications department covering the game in Austin on September 10th. These are brand-new reporters covering this big of a game. What would be your advice and tips for them?

NICK SABAN: First of all, I would say that there's nothing in my job description that would indicate that I'm qualified to answer that (laughter).

But, look, I think fair and honest always works. I think it's a great opportunity for these young people to be able to cover a game of significance. Texas has a great program. Sark's done a really good job there, and it's going to be a very challenging game for us.

I think if these young folks can report the facts as well as be fair and honest in their assessments of how things go, I think that's as much as anyone could ask from a professional standpoint.

Q. Before you arrived at Alabama, the program never had a Heisman Trophy winner. With Bryce Young's win now for most in the SEC, in terms of the winners and the finalists, what has that success meant as far as winning the award and how it translates to success in your program?

NICK SABAN: I think it kind of goes both ways. I think the success that the program has had probably lends itself to more attention that our players get, whether it's to make All-American or win national awards like the Outland Trophy or the Nagurski or the Heisman or whatever it is.

Because these guys all were great players and had great seasons on a very successful team that got a lot of national exposure and recognition, their performance was rewarded, their positive performance was rewarded because they got a lot of exposure because the success the team had.

I think it kind of goes both ways in terms of players being recognized.

We're always very grateful that our players do get recognized in a positive way because I do think those things create value for them in their future. That's obviously the goal.

Q. I've noticed when you were talking about the key



building blocks for a program, you mentioned personal development, academic development and creating value for their football career. You didn't mention NIL. I know that's something you've weighed in on earlier this off-season. What is your view on how Alabama can get involved in that space? Just because it is changing dynamics in college football whether you like them or not.

NICK SABAN: Well, I don't dislike name, image and likeness. I'm all for the players. I want our players to do well. Our players made over \$3 million in name, image and likeness. I'm all for the players being able to do as well as they can and use their name, image and likeness to create value for themselves.

We have a great brand at Alabama, so players are certainly -- their value there is going to be enhanced because of the value that our brand can help them create.

But the thing that I have sort of expressed, not concerns about, but there's got to be some uniformity and protocol of how name, image and likeness is implemented. I think there's probably a couple factors that are important in that. How does this impact competitive balance in college athletics? And is there transparency to maintain fairness across the board in terms of college athletics? How do we protect the players? Because there's more and more people that are trying to get between the player and the money.

In the NFL they have guidelines for agents because the NFL Players Association sort of has rules and regulations about how they should professionally help the players. That's something that we really want to make sure that our players are not being misguided in any way.

The biggest concern is how does this impact and affect recruiting? On the recruiting trail right now, there's a lot of people using this as inducements to go to their school by making promises as to whether they may or may not be able to keep in terms of what players are doing.

I think that is what can create a competitive balance issue between the haves and have not's. We're one of the haves. Don't think that what I'm saying is a concern that we have at Alabama because we're one of the haves.

Everybody in college football cannot do these things relative to how they raise money in a collective or whatever, how they distribute money to players.

Those are the concerns that I have in terms of how do we place guidelines around this so that we can maintain a competitive balance.

There is no competitive sport anywhere that doesn't have guidelines on how they maintain some kind of competitive balance. I think that's important to college football. I think it's important to fans. That's why they have rules in the NFL where you have a salary cap, you have difficult schedules if you have a successful season, you draft later if you have a successful season, you draft early if you have an unsuccessful season.

All these things are created so there is competitive balance, which is great for the game and it's great for fans. Name, image and likeness is not an issue for us at Alabama. Our players I think did better than anybody in the country last year.

Q. You're in the rare position of not only having a Heisman-winning quarterback, but having him return for another season. Can you talk about what kind of things you guys are coaching Bryce Young on the year after he won college football's highest award? In terms of offensive line, what kind of progress have you guys made this spring, a season after giving up a pretty high pressure rate on the quarterback?

NICK SABAN: I think that's one of the biggest challenges, is the offensive line rebuild that we need to do. I'm excited about the coach that we have at that position, Coach Wolford has done a really good job with the players and relationship building, fundamental progress.

We do have some new players that may contribute to that that weren't there in the spring. That's something that we'll have to sort of assess in fall camp.

I think that one of the most important things for Bryce or any player who has success is to understand that success is not a continuum. You have to continue to -- success is momentary. So if you're going to continue to have success, you have to stay focused on the things you need to do to improve, to prepare, to lead, to impact and affect other people around you.

Bryce has shown every indication that he's got a willingness to do all those things. He's a perfectionist in terms of what he wants to do and what he wants to accomplish.

So far I've been pleased with the way he's been able to maintain the mindset that you need to do to continue to improve and make progress as a player.

Q. Do you see the SEC having 18 or 20 teams in the next few years? How do you think that would look? Would that mean a 10-game league schedule maybe?



NICK SABAN: I have no idea. Glen, you've been around me for 20 years now, and you know I don't like to answer hypothetical questions, which that could be as hypothetical as any I've ever been asked.

I do think there is some tendency, as current events sort of indicate, that mega conferences may be something in the future. It's not my job or my role to understand the dynamics of what's in the best interest of college football, the SEC, other conferences in terms of how they expand.

But this has always been something that has happened. I know one thing for sure, we have a great league. We made two really positive additions to our league that are going to come online in a few years.

I think there's a lot of underlying dynamics from a business standpoint that could impact and affect how this happens, if it does happen in the future.

But for right now, we have 14 teams in our league for the next couple years. We have some really, really good teams in our league. It's a very competitive league. You got to be on task each and every week that you play. That's kind of what we're trying to stay focused on.

That question's probably a better question for Greg Sankey or conference commissioners who maybe are looking at what's in the best interest of their league in the future. I'm sure they would say maybe yes and maybe no. Who knows what those circumstances may have an impact and effect in a positive way on each and every league and on college football in general.

But I do think if we move toward the mega conference, again, that whole thing about competitive balance is going to be in question.

Look, I'm not here to say we should have it or we shouldn't have it. But if we have two 20-team leagues, how is that going to impact all the people that are not in those leagues?

That's a question for all of you to speculate and answer on. I really can't speculate on that.

Q. I don't know if it was a down year for you since you didn't win the national championship, but you also lost a couple games to former assistants, which you never do. When you self-scout, do you see anything in common that teams might use as a blueprint to try to beat Alabama, having built one of the greatest defenses ever?

NICK SABAN: Well, I think, first of all, all the coaches who have had opportunities to go on and be head coaches in Division I, I'm very proud of. I think they all did an outstanding job for us. They all had goals and aspirations that motivated them to do an outstanding job because they wanted to be head coaches. I'm happy for them and their family that they got that opportunity.

Sooner or later these people that get these opportunities would get in situations where they had a chance to have nationally recognized, nationally powerful, whatever you want to call it, top-ranked teams like Georgia was last year, like Texas will be I'm sure very soon with Sark being the head coach there, the staff that he has, the job that they're doing.

This is not something that is surprising to me. A lot of people are at really, really good schools. They've done a really, really good job. They've used their own personal imprint to maybe take a few things that they learned that we do that helped us be successful along with their imprint of what they want to do so they can have successful programs.

This is not a surprise to me. It was sort of expected actually. I'm happy to see each and every one of those guys do extremely well. Not extremely well against Alabama, but extremely well (smiling). I'm kind of proud of the fact that there are some of our coaches who have got some of the most successful programs in the country.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this morning.

NICK SABAN: All right. Thank you all again. Appreciate what you do for college football and all our players and the self-gratification you provide for them. Thank you very much.

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