



Alabama
Head Coach Nick Saban
December 31, 2017



COACH SABAN: Well, first of all, we'd like to express our appreciation and thanks to all of the folks in the Sugar Bowl who have made this a special evening for our players. Everything is going very smoothly. The organization is really great. There's a lot of tradition here with the Sugar Bowl and the University of Alabama, and it's certainly been everything that we expected in terms of first-class hospitality.

I'd also like to take a moment to wish everybody out there a happy new year. We have a lot of fans, a lot of supporters, a lot of folks that we appreciate. And I know this is a time that everybody makes resolutions, which is all about what you're going to do in the future. So I hope that those resolutions are something that you have a lot of good luck with. And I would only say that, if you persist at the right things, you will have a chance to have good luck. And, if you resist the right things, that will help as well. So, hopefully, everyone will have a great year.

I think this game is a great opportunity for the players. And we're playing against a very, very good team. We played them several years now so it makes it a little bit of a rivalry game in circumstances like this. And it seems like we have had really good preparation for the game, and I think it's time to go out and play and just see who the best team is.

So I think our guys are excited, and I have been pleased by the preparation and focus that they have had. And we look forward to tomorrow night.

Q. Coach, much was made of the fact that you had some injuries at linebacker for the regular game. What is the status of those headed into the game? I think Dylan [Moses] is out, but the rest of the guys.

COACH SABAN: Well, I think everyone -- it's been pretty well documented that Shaun Dion Hamilton is out for the game. Moses is out. Those guys both play the same position, but Mack Wilson will be available to play in the game who was out of the previous games. And I think there were two outside linebackers, [Terrell] Lewis and Christian Miller, who actually played a bit here in the Auburn game but practiced very little leading up to the game. And both of those guys are probably 100% now. And they have practiced enough to be effective in the game.

So Hootie Jones is out for the game. So what has been documented as players are out is pretty much where we're at and the guys that are coming back. But it's still two linebackers at the same position that are missing.

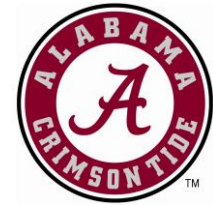
And I think the challenge those guys have and the defenses -- it's very important to get the signal, get it communicated, and get the defense lined up so Mack [Wilson] is very capable. Doesn't have a lot of experience doing it, but I'm sure he will do a good job in the game.

I have a meeting with the players at 2:15, and I hope they're not of the mind-set that I see here today.

Q. Dabo [Swinney] just said he wouldn't be surprised if there were more matchups in the playoffs between you guys. Do you feel like that, so this is something that we could keep seeing where you are a program and where Clemson is as a program?



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COACH SABAN: I wouldn't be surprising to me. I'm not much on making predictions. But each year you have -- they have a lot of good players. I think we have a lot of good players, and we have a lot of good, young players. But each year you lose a part of your team and guys go off for the draft. You have your seniors that have done a good job for you. Everybody has roles that they have to take on next season. So it's almost like you're rebuilding your team each and every year, in my opinion, and it's a totally new challenge as to how people embrace the roles that they have, leadership.

So, hopefully, we will be able to continue to have a team that can compete at a very high standard and have opportunities like this in the future. It's certainly a goal of the program.

Q. Nick, it was talked about how it's anticipated if people expected the wide-open high scoring game that you guys had last season that isn't necessarily reflective of these teams this year. I wondered if you saw a game that might not be up in the 30s with a whole lot of back and forth scoring?

COACH SABAN: Well, I think it's very difficult to predict. I think both teams have the capability of scoring points, but I also think that both teams have pretty good defensive players. I think that our two defenses are one and two in scoring defense. I'm not sure who is first and who is second. So that means these teams have been difficult to score on for whatever reasons.

But we have had some of those scenarios in the past, in the games we played in the past. And they have been high-scoring games. So it's really hard to predict, in my opinion, as to how this game will turn out. I think there's probably going to be six or seven plays in the game that will make a huge impact on the outcome of the game.

And, unfortunately, as a player and as a competitor, you never know when those plays are coming, so that's why you got to play one play at a time for 60 minutes in the game. And, hopefully, when you get an opportunity to make a play, that will have an impact in the game and be in the right position to do it. But I really don't have a great feel for how this game might turn out.

Q. Are you happy with the format that we have in place right now, or would you like to see it expanded to six or eight teams because there's always a couple of teams that feel like they should be here?

COACH SABAN: I said this when we had two teams and y'all wanted to go to four teams -- we had two teams. It was always somebody that thought they should be one of the teams. If they have four teams, there's going to be somebody that thinks they should be here. You have 65 teams in a basketball tournament or 68 or whatever, and then you have a two-hour show on ESPN about the teams that didn't get in.

So I don't think it makes a difference how many teams we have. There's always going to be somebody who thinks they should have been -- somebody else should have been out and they should have been in.



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Look, I have talked about this a lot in the past, and I know there's a lot of media attention that surrounds playoff games and there's a lot of interest, and I don't deny that fact. But I think one of the most significant things about college football that has provided a lot of positive gratification for a lot of players through the years that have had successful seasons is the reward of going to a bowl game. And I think the more playoff games that you have, the more it minimizes the importance of bowl games.

So if we're going to increase the playoffs, I think that's going to minimize the importance of bowl games. I said this when we had a playoff, and it did to some degree. So I think somebody out there just needs to figure out what is best for college football and let's go down that road. But I don't think that if we expand the playoffs, that bowl games in the playoff are going to be able to coexist very well. And I don't think that's a good thing for college football.

Q. Coach, speaking of intensity, is this a high-intensity team or more business-like in their approach? And do you have a preference?

COACH SABAN: Well, I think that intensity is energy. You can have had a business-like approach, and you can have low energy and high intensity. I think we have some players on our team that are very intense; some are a little more emotional; some that are a little more businesslike. But I think, regardless what the personality traits are, they all want to try to take on what they need to do to have a chance to be successful, do their job well so that the team has a chance to be successful in the game.

So I don't think there's one particular formula of intensity versus businesslike that really fits what playing football may be all about. We want our players to have a personality, in terms of what they do. I know that we get, sort of -- I don't know -- negatively impacted, criticized, whatever, for being too businesslike because that is kind of my personality. But I don't think our team is that way. And I don't think all of our coaches are that way. And, quite frankly, I'm not always that way.

So I guess whatever the formula that works to give you the chemistry on your team that you like, and I think that probably leadership, people taking ownership, affecting each other, and I think, when you talk about ownership, people think, "Well, I'm supposed to do my job." Well, I think that is probably true. But there's also people who take ownership for making sure everybody else on the team is doing their job. And not everybody is willing to do that. But I think that's a necessary ingredient to having a good team.

Q. I was wondering how the semifinal Saturday goes for you or semifinal day goes for you guys when there's another game going on, especially when it's before your game? Is there any monitoring, game on in the locker room? Or is it completely away from you guys until after your game?

COACH SABAN: I personally don't choose to watch other games. That's me personally. We don't have some kind of a rule that says, you know, I will watch a football game on TV on the day of the game.



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I'm sure we have some people that will want to watch and some people who don't. But it's a little bit of a distraction to me personally to get involved emotionally in watching another game the day that we play. So I usually choose not to do that.

Q. The LaBryan Ray stats on Monday, you touched on some of the injuries and how you have seen him handle the situation being a young freshman and stepping up for others with injuries this season.

COACH SABAN: LaBryan Ray was a guy we started out the season thinking that maybe we wouldn't play him. But we thought he was capable of playing, so we put him in the position of we want to coach this guy and develop this guy so, if we need him to play, he can play. And he embraced that role very well. And we did need him to play, and he did play, and he played well.

And his status for this game is he is available to play, but he's also in sort of the same situation that several of our players were for the Auburn game. They were medically cleared to play, but they were limited in terms of the number of reps that they could get in practice. So their role in the game had to reflect that. And I think that's where LaBryan Ray is. But we're very pleased with him, and he has played very well for us. And I think he could make a positive contribution in this game if we could get some plays out of him.

Q. Nick, it's your third time in the playoff. What have you guys learned about preparing this format? How have you evolved what is important, et cetera?

COACH SABAN: Well, I think that when we started this -- I think it was four years ago -- we tried to -- because we were all in the culture of the bowl experience for our players that we were trying to continue that they have a bowl experience. I think that was the expectation of the players.

And each year that we have played, I see, from a player's perspective, the outcome of the game being a much more significant priority than the bowl game, just like our players choosing curfew one night at 12:00 and the rest of the nights 11:00. I mean, it was a battle to get them in at 2:00 in the morning when you used to go to bowl games in New Orleans years ago.

So I think that's a mindset of the players that have experience in these games. And they have had success, and they understand the significance of that success. And they have also had failings and failures, and they understand that. And I think that has become a little more of a priority, at least on our team, from a player's perspective.

Q. Coach, can you talk about Shaun Dion [Hamilton] and what his presence has meant this week at practice and what it meant to you personally and how much of a veteran he has been on the team?

COACH SABAN: Well, Sean Dion [Hamilton] is an outstanding individual, great person, really good competitor, great leader, very smart, intelligent. And he was voted the "most inspirational player" on our team by his teammates, which, I think, speaks volumes for the respect they have for him.



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Some players, if they're not playing, they can't even pay attention at practice. They're just there because the coach said they had to be there. But he is out there coaching the guys that are taking his place, teaching them, looking at the script. And I think the players really appreciate that. Because he's really showing leadership and taking an interest in helping somebody else for their benefit. And I think that's a really important part of being a good leader. And he certainly embraced that role since he has been hurt, and I think it's been very helpful to the players.