



**2018 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Alabama
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2018**



COACH SABAN: Thanks to the Sugar Bowl committee and all of the people that provided tremendous hospitality for us all week. This is one of the smoothest bowl trips that I think we have ever had. The City of New Orleans was fantastic, and we'd just like to thank everybody who contributed. I know how hard y'all worked to put this event on, and it certainly was first class.

Also very, very proud of our team. I think this game was about sort of our identity as a team. And I don't think that anybody could question the relentless competitive attitude that we played with, warrior-like mentality out there. And it's certainly what we needed. There are things that we could have done better, but I'm proud of the way our guys competed in the game. And I think that was the difference in the game. The toughness that we played with, the effort that we played with. We were able to affect their quarterback, stop the run. Got off the field early in the game on third down quite a bit. We played the kind of game we wanted to play on offense. We wanted to run the ball. And 2-yard run wasn't a bad run because we didn't want to get in a lot of third-and-long situations. And we did a good job of keeping the ball in the game and scored when we had the opportunities to score.

So this is something that I'm really, really pleased and happy for our players. They really worked hard for this game, and they certainly had the right mental attitude about getting after it in this game. And it was a little bit personal, I think, for us after what happened to us in this game last year. So I'm really, really pleased for our players.

Q. Coach, I was hoping you could comment on the game that Anfernee Jennings had for you. And is there any update on his injury?

COACH SABAN: He had a fantastic game. I think everybody was responsible for this victory because everybody took ownership for it. Everybody took ownership for their role, whether it was a kickoff cover team or the defense. But Anfernee Jennings certainly played an outstanding game. He has a sprained knee. We don't know what his status will be for the next game.

Q. Da'Ron [Payne], somebody asked you this week if you were lobbying to catch a pass. Did they listen to you?

DL DA'RON PAYNE: Yeah, I think they listened to me. I had been talking to Coach lots about it. He said, "Just keep on working, and you might get it." And I tried my best to go out and practice and work hard, and they finally gave it to me.

COACH SABAN: When he made the interception, there was no doubt that we were going to throw him the ball on the goal line. (Laughter).



**2018 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Alabama
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2018**



Q. Da'Ron, the catch is one thing. But the footwork to keep your feet in, that was just as impressive. Talk a little bit about that and how that play unfolded for you really.

DL DA'RON PAYNE: All we did was tell him to throw it to belly, so I just made sure that I caught the ball.

Q. This is for Jalen and Da'Ron. Your coach just said this was personal. Can you both describe what this has been like, whether it's the last year or the last month, people questioning Alabama and saying that maybe the time of the dynasty was coming to an end.

DL DA'RON PAYNE: We definitely heard the world, but we did a good job of just focusing in on the team and just executing anything coach wanted us to do and just locking in and just being all about the team and just keeping distractions outside.

QB JALEN HURTS: I think, as a team, we had a mentality of don't remember the wins, remember the losses. And we never forget what happened, but we wanted to take it in as a learning experience and learn from it. And we had the opportunity to do that today and display it. And we overcame it, and we got them. We will go to the national championship game.

Q. Nick, could you talk about the way the defense kind of controlled the game from the early three-and-outs and the turnovers down the stretch.

COACH SABAN: I think we had a really, really good plan against them. I think Jeremy Pruitt deserves a lot of credit for that. I think the players really did a good job of executing the plan. They throw a lot of formations, a lot of shifts, and a lot of motions. And we adjusted well, didn't make a lot of mental errors in the game, made the right calls on some of their running plays. It's difficult when you have a quarterback that is as good a runner as Kelly Bryant because you're really playing against wildcat-type running back every down. But the guy is capable as a pass run. And they have really good skill guys.

And this is a great team effort by our entire defense. The front guys did a good job of controlling the line of scrimmage. The linebackers did a great job of adjusting. The secondary guys did a pretty good job of covering all day. So this was really a great team effort. And the guys played about as hard as any of our defensive teams that I can ever remember in this particular game.

Q. Nick, you mentioned on the field that you're proud of Kirby [Smart] and the program that he has built at Georgia. When you have assistants who then go out and become head coaches, what is something that he had that you thought this going to work and he is going to be able to get things going at Georgia?

COACH SABAN: I think when people are in a position of responsibility, which Kirby was our defensive coordinator for a long time -- and if you look at the track record of what he was responsible for and the success that he had, the good defensive teams that we had, we had good players. But we always did a great job of coaching those players and always put together good plans for them to be able to go out there and execute.



**2018 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Alabama
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2018**



So it's no surprise to me that his role expanded to be a head coach. But his leadership and hard work -- he's a good football coach, a very bright guy. And he took over a program that has been successful and was actually fairly successful when he took over the program. And he's done a great job of taking it to the next level.

Q. Coach, the cameras were focused on you in the second half conveying a message to your offensive coordinator. I was wondering what you were saying to Coach [Brian] Daboll.

COACH SABAN: You couldn't tell? (Laughter).

I wanted to take the air out of the ball and run the ball and shrink the clock and shrink the game. And we threw a couple of passes back to back, and they turned out to be negative plays, so I guess I was being a bit of a fan.

The fans always -- if it works, it's a good play; and if it doesn't work, it's a bad play. So I was being a bit of a fan. But I thought in that situation in the game, we should have tried to take the air out of it and run the ball and shrink the game, especially being up 18 points.

Q. Jalen, some of your offensive linemen said they kind of got sick of hearing about Clemson's front four. Did you see a big difference with them?

QB JALEN HURTS: Did y'all see a difference? They did a good job. I'm happy for them. We worked really hard this week. And our credit goes to those guys up front. That's where it starts, and that's where it ends.

COACH SABAN: I tell you what, our offensive line did a really good job because I think they got two first-round guys that are seniors this year. [Dexter] Lawrence is a first-round guy next year for sure. So they were playing some really good players and did a really good job.

Q. This is for Da'Ron. Could you just give us a sense of what it felt like out there to be swarming the way you were around Kelly Bryant and you making him so uncomfortable and limiting him to probably his worst game all year.

DL DA'RON PAYNE: During the week, Coach (Nick Saban) put emphasis on just being destructive in our pass rushing and just keeping in our pass rushing lanes and making sure that we get after them. And I think we did a good job of locking in during the practice and just getting after them as a whole defense.

Q. What does it say about the strength of the SEC? And do you think having two teams from the same conference in the title game is good for college football?

COACH SABAN: Well, we were fortunate several years ago to play LSU right here in the same kind of circumstance and the same kind of situation. I think it speaks volumes of the quality of programs that we have, especially to have two programs, two teams that are in the national championship game.



**2018 Allstate Sugar Bowl
Alabama
Post-Game Press Conference
January 1, 2018**



And I think sometimes people try to put a little hate on the SEC because of some of the success that we have. And I don't think that is really fair because I think it's a great competitive league with a lot of great coaches and a lot of great institutions. And I have always thought it was one of the best competitive venues to be involved in in my time at LSU and also at Alabama.

So we really enjoy it here. And it's been a lot of fun and a lot of great competition. You don't get these opportunities often. We have been fortunate to have a few, and I just want to help the players finish the season the best way that we can.

Q. It looked like you had an open field move on your running back on your interception. It's quite a spectacle to see a guy like you running down the field 21 yards. Can you talk a little bit about that.

DL DA'RON PAYNE: I was kind of shocked I had the ball in my hands. I was just trying to get to the end zone.

COACH SABAN: Thank you. I really appreciate what the press does for the positive self-gratification you give a lot of our players. And I know it's important to them, and we certainly appreciate it.