



**ALABAMA COACH NICK SABAN  
AJ MCCARRON  
COURTNEY UPSHAW**

**Jan. 9, 2012**

**THE MODERATOR:** At this time we'll get started with the Alabama press conference for the 2012 Allstate BCS National Championship.

We've been joined by head coach Nick Saban along with quarterback AJ McCarron. Here comes linebacker Courtney Upshaw. Just a few comments from Coach Saban, and then we'll open the floor for questions.

**COACH SABAN:** It's certainly been a privilege to have the opportunity to coach this group of young men on this team. It's sometimes easy to do the right thing some of the time. But these guys, over the last year, have done things right almost all the time. And the goal today was you control your destiny, you control what you do; the outcome of the game, as good as LSU was, will be determined by how we play and what we do.

And I think the players really responded well to that. You know, we went to see the movie *Red Tails* last night, which I would recommend to anybody, but those guys's motto was the last plane, the last bullet, the last man, the last minute, we fight.

And we always stay with the mission. And I think that kind of described the spirit of that group extremely well, but it also describes the spirit of the group of players that we have on our team this year and takes a tremendous amount of resiliency to come back.

It was tougher losing a game, and I think that demonstrates the character of the people in that locker room to come back from that game and finish the season like they did.

**THE MODERATOR:** Questions?

**Q. Coach and AJ, Marquis gets hurt very early in the game and Norwood comes in, four catches, 78 yards. Talk about the job he did stepping in.**

**COACH SABAN:** Norwood did a great job in the game, made some big catches. We knew we were going to have to throw the ball on first down to move the ball effectively.

I thought our receivers did a great job. AJ did a great job. We had solid protection for the most part. So it was really a team effort.

But those guys made some outstanding catches. And Kevin has ?? when he's got the opportunity to play this year, he's played well and made good plays for us. And made big catches and he certainly made some big catches tonight.

**AJ MCCARRON:** I mean, we didn't have that happen all year. But when we rotate in and out during practice, and when we see that happen all year long, every day of the week, guys step up, make plays for us.

And the offensive line gave me time. And I just put it in their area, and those guys went up and made a bunch of plays tonight for me. And you can't say enough about that group.

**Q. AJ, what was your reaction when you got the game plan and you saw, I guess, how much was going to be on your shoulders, especially on first down plays?**

**AJ MCCARRON:** I was very thankful, first of all, about it. We've been leaning on No. 3 all year.

He's our workhorse. I mean, he's our main guy.

And we knew coming into the game somebody else had to step up, and Coach just gave me an opportunity. Like I said, when you have a group of receivers like I have, makes your job easy as a quarterback. And you just gotta put it in their area. They go up and make the plays for you and they make you look like the hero.

But, I mean, it all falls back on those guys and that offensive line for giving me enough time.

**Q. Nick, this movie that you guys went to see last night sounds a little like a variation on what you've been saying all year about finish, finish, finish, something left over from last year. In this game, did you feel like this team came as close as a team can come to finishing every play mentally, physically, emotionally?**

**COACH SABAN:** That was kind of the message before the game, is that we wanted to finish. In fact, it was a question: How bad do you want to finish? What's your effort going to be, your enthusiasm, your excitement to play in the game, the toughness that you're willing to play with, all the intangibles, and you do it one play at a time?

Regardless of what happens in the game ?? and I think that was ?? we certainly didn't play a perfect game. We got a field goal blocked. We couldn't score a touchdown for a long time. But the guys just kept playing and never once was anybody ever discouraged about anything that ever happened in the game.

And I think that attitude prevailed for us as a team. We were just going to play one play at a time, finish each play. And regardless of what the circumstance was on the play before, have a sort of an "I will not be denied" attitude about how to play the next play.

And I think that that spirit was sort of reflected out there in the way our players competed.

**Q. AJ, what motivated you going into the second half after you did so well in the first half? You came out in the second half, you were fired up again. It's something ?? it didn't happen in the first game, but the second game you really came out fired up. What was your motivation?**

**AJ MCCARRON:** Well, you know, I always laugh about it. After ?? or during that Florida game, I'm sure pretty much most of the country saw Coach rip me for showing too much emotion. And after the LSU game the first time, he told me to play like myself, show emotion.

**COACH SABAN:** Let me correct that. I just didn't want to have to pull that big guy you're ready to get into it with off of you. (Laughter).

**AJ MCCARRON:** So Coach told me to, you know, show some emotion. Play like myself. And I'm just thankful Coach gave me the opportunity to come out and put the ball in my hands and let me make some plays.

And I think a bunch of our success goes to the guys that don't really get it, that people don't see, is the defensive scouts. I mean, those guys gave us a perfect look all week long of the past 44 days or however long we've been practicing for LSU. Those guys have been perfect on that side of the ball during practice.

Those are the guys that don't ever get noticed in the newspapers. And they earned this just as much as everybody else that played the game tonight.

**Q. AJ, I know you like to share credit, and I know that it was a team win, but tonight you had one of the best games for an Alabama quarterback ever in a national championship game. Numbers-wise it was one of the best that a quarterback has ever had. What did you do over the past 44 days to prepare yourself completely for that?**

**AJ MCCARRON:** I don't think I did anything special, really. I mean, I always bust my butt in the film room. I mean, it helps when you got a little longer, you can study them a lot more.

But I bust my butt in there, and I know everything they want to do. Certain downs and distances. But that goes back to our coaching staff. We have the best coaching staff in the country.

And, I mean, I felt like it was in my hands to kind of send Coach Mack off on a win, a big win, off to his new coaching journey.

And, like I said, I'm just glad Coach gave me the opportunity. I don't think I did anything special, though. Like Coach always tells me, just go out and play your game.

On the bus ride the other day I sat with him. He just talked and he said: Listen. You don't have to win the game, just go play your game. And I felt like I did that tonight.

**Q. Courtney, just a quick question. The defense pitched a shutout tonight, and LSU only crossed the 50, I think, one time. Can you talk about the chemistry and just the overall**

performance?

**COURTNEY UPSHAW:** It comes from we all are out there having fun. Coach Saban tell us all, you know what I'm saying, even the guys on the sideline, even if you're not a player, just make sure you're in the game. When one player make a play, all ten and the rest of the guys are trying to go celebrate with that guy, you know what I'm saying, us going out and having fun with each other.

**Q. Near as we could tell ?? Coach, as near as we could tell, AJ was the first sophomore or younger quarterback to win a championship in the BCS era. What sets him apart from other quarterbacks that you've coached or coached against?**

**COACH SABAN:** Well, AJ has been in the program for three years. And even though this is his first year starting, I think he's taken advantage of maturing as a player, because he does prepare well, he has really good football instincts about what he's doing, he's a talented guy, and he's learned, I think, how to take what the defense gives and play with patience and not try to force plays. And he's played well for us all year long.

And I told him when we were riding on the bus the other day, you know, that first LSU game was not one of your best games, but you really don't have to win this game; you just gotta play your game. And that's really what we want all of our players to do.

And I thought he did a fantastic job of that tonight.

Now, I would like to make a comment about the question you asked Courtney over here about our defense. I mean, you're talking about one of the most competitive groups of guys as a group. Sometimes I get mad at them at practice because they get a little bit hurt and they don't run to the ball like I want them to or like we want them to or whatever.

But I always know, all right, when you throw the ball out, they're going to go get it. Because they are a hateful bunch and they are as competitive as you can ever imagine. And I think that's probably why they played really well in big games.

**Q. Courtney and Nick, Coach always talks about total domination. Did you do that tonight? And, also, did you sense that Jordan Jefferson was just totally frustrated to the point that he really couldn't function?**

**COURTNEY UPSHAW:** Well, we wanted to just go out and execute our game plan. We knew they was going to try, you know what I'm saying, to do something here and there, and we just wanted to stay with the game plan, keep them contained, keep them in this pocket, make him a passer.

The coaching staff put it, you know what I'm saying ?? put it to us straight. We had to go out and execute, you know what I'm saying, the game plan, do our job, and don't try to do too much.

**COACH SABAN:** They really had us a little bit off balance. They spread us in regular people, and they had some people open. And in those cases, in most of those cases it was the pass rush and the pressure that affected the quarterback, even if we didn't sack him, that probably saved us. Because there was two or three plays where they had the tight end open down the middle. We tried to play nickel against it. That didn't work out so well.

So they did some good things in the game that caused a little bit of confusion for us. Our players adapted well to it and adjusted, and I think did a really good job.

**Q. Would you call it domination? Would you use that word?**

**COACH SABAN:** No. No, I'm sure when we watch the film these guys know we always have a good, bad and ugly reel. I can always find something ugly to talk about. (Laughter).

**Q. Courtney, just as the game went along, what were you sensing from their offense, their players, in terms of any sort of frustration or confusion?**

**COURTNEY UPSHAW:** I don't know. I mean, in a way you can say that you can sense their frustration. They was getting down on it. Going into the fourth quarter you gotta score, you know what I'm saying, to stay in the game.

I know on defense we just kept saying that we want to go out and make plays and that the game wasn't over, because we knew watching them in the SEC Championship that they came back in the second half and was basically dominant against Georgia.

We wanted to go out and win the game. And that's one of our mottos, is to finish.

**Q. Nick, you're not easily impressed, but I saw you looking at the stat sheet. When you look at those numbers, are you tiny bit impressed by what your team did?**

**COACH SABAN:** I was really looking at ?? I know AJ threw it a lot, but I was just seeing how

many he completed and how many yards we had passing.

But LSU's got a really good team. I'm really proud of the way our team competed in this game today. They're the only team that beat us. And, you know, in a way, to have two teams as good as our two teams in the same division, in the same conference, is pretty unique.

But I think, you know ?? I think that their players are one of the most difficult groups that we have to prepare for and play against. And I was really proud of the way our players played in this game tonight.

And I know we're going to have to play them again next year.

**Q. Coach, this is your second championship victory in this building. It will be another four years that the BCS comes back to this building. Think you have to wait that long for another championship?**

**COACH SABAN:** Look, I'm a day-to-day guy. So we're process-oriented in what we do. It's always our goal to give our players the best chance to be successful. And the only thing I'm disappointed about, because it means a lot to me to win the SEC Championship, and we weren't able to accomplish that this year.

But I'm very proud of what our players did in coming back and winning this game. And we'll continue to recruit and try to develop the players we have, and hopefully at some point in time in the future maybe we'll have another opportunity to do this.

**Q. Nick, I'm hearing my peers describe it as having ?? you put the load on AJ's shoulders. Is that an accurate characterization of the game plan? And at what point did you decide to do that and why?**

**COACH SABAN:** Well, it wasn't about AJ. It was about they've got a very good defensive front. And they play a lot of eight-man fronts on run downs.

And we felt like in the first game we should have thrown the ball more on first down in our sort of assessment of ourselves. And we knew we were going to have to throw the ball on first down to take advantage of that circumstance and situation.

So it was about what we needed to do to win the game. And I believe in trusting and believing in the players. And I've always trusted AJ, and I believe in him. And I don't mind putting the ball in his hand so he has an opportunity to make those plays, as long as he makes good choices and decisions about what he does with it. And he's done a good job of that all year.

So it was no problem for us to do that. And when we had to run it, we were able to run it fairly effectively in the second half. And offensive line did a really good job because you can't throw it unless you can protect. And they've got some good rushers inside and out.

So our offensive line did a good job. The receivers did a good job. I think AJ would be the first one to tell you, when you have success, whether you're throwing it or running it, everybody out there's gotta do their job. And I think it was a job well done by the entire group.

**Q. Coach, this defense gave up 92 total yards tonight. You've had a lot of great defensive teams you've coached. Now that the season's over, is this the best defense that you've ever coached?**

**COACH SABAN:** I don't like to make comparisons. These guys are, you know, a fine group. This has been a great team to coach, it really has.

I mean, somewhere along the line after the Bowl game last year they made a commitment. There was a lot of good leadership on this team. I actually thought in some ways we had more talent on our team last year than this year.

But the character, the attitude, the resiliency of this group, the work and the commitment and the buy-in was what made this team different.

And I can't tell you what defense was the best. I can just tell you this was one of the most enjoyable teams to coach.

**Q. (Question about Jeremy Shelley off microphone)?**

**COACH SABAN:** Jeremy did a great job in the game. We have a lot of confidence in Jeremy. He doesn't have great range, but when we get it down there by the 25-yard line he does a pretty good job for the most part. We got one blocked and he pushed one to the right a little bit.

But we're just going to keep on keeping on and keep giving him opportunities, and I think he did a fantastic job.

**THE MODERATOR:** Thank you.

