

Alabama Offensive Players Preview CFP National Championship Showdown With Ohio State



Following their 49-28 victory over Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinals, the Buckeyes are amid preparation for a national championship showdown with the Crimson Tide, who defeated Notre Dame 31-14 in their semifinal game.

A slew of Crimson Tide offensive players spoke to members of the media via Zoom video conference Jan. 6, previewing the highly anticipated title game. What follows is a rundown of what senior wide receiver Devonta Smith, senior offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood, fifth-year senior tight end Miller Forristall, fourth-year junior quarterback Mac Jones, sophomore wide receiver John Metchie, and senior running back Najee Harris said:

Alabama senior wide receiver Devonta Smith:

Just wondered what was the emotion like last night? Was there anxiety watching that ceremony?

Last night was a great feeling. It was just a blessing just to be in that situation, to be with Mac and Coach Saban here last night. But now that's in the past and now it's on to Ohio State.

I was just curious as to — you're such a focused individual, moving on to the next thing, but the excitement of last night, did you have trouble sleeping? Was it a good night's sleep for you or were you able to just kind of put that to bed, so to speak, and move on?

I went home and went straight to sleep.

I know it remains to be seen if he's going to play or not, but just how good is it to see Jaylen Waddle back at practice and back on his feet?

It's amazing just to see him recover. I'm glad that he's recovering well and that everything is just going as planned.

How has Jaylen looked at practice? Does he look like himself?

I think he's getting back into it. Of course he's going to take some time just for him to get back comfortable with everything, but he looks good to me.

What do you think? Do you think there's a shot of him playing?

No comment.

Just curious if you had a chance to look at Ohio State's defense more and just what are your thoughts on what you saw from their defensive backs, maybe especially how they matched up with Clemson?

As a defense, they're a very good defense. Everybody gets to the ball. They don't make a lot of mistakes. Their back end, they're very athletic. They're great cover guys.

Moving forward like you'd like to, is this maybe the best defense at least film study-wise that you've seen this year out of Ohio State?

Yes, it's one of them, just with everything that they do, giving us different looks and things like that. Everybody getting to the ball, everybody just doing their job.

Both you and Ohio State cornerback Shaun Wade are future first-round draft picks. How much do you look forward to your one-on-one match-up with him and what will you do to take it tough for him to stop you?

I'm just looking forward to my last game. I'm only guaranteed this last one, so I'm looking forward to getting to play against him.

In this world of college football where everybody wants the ball and everybody wants to play, this season how did Coach Saban and Sark make it work? How did you guys spread the ball around where everybody gets enough touches and everyone is happy?

I think that's just like part of this team, just everybody knowing that there's going to be some games where you're going to get all the touches and some games you're not going to, and I think that's just everybody just buying into the process and just believing the coaches and everything that they do. They're going to put everybody in a great situation to do the right thing.

You had Coach Saban there with you last night. I was just wondering, he's obviously known for his work with defensive backs, but what's the biggest impact you think Nick Saban has made on you as not only a player but maybe off the field, as well?

Just a lot of life lessons, just things outside of football, whether it's how you treat people, and no matter how people are treating you, you always treat everyone else with respect.

What have you seen from Shaun Wade in film work so far, and what is it you're looking forward to?

He's very crafty. He mixes his technique up some and just everything he does. He's a technician with everything he does, and he's a great player.

Could you share with us your perspective on the development of your teammate John Metchie

this year, from freshman season to the way he's been able to contribute as a sophomore?

Just from day one when Metchie came in when he was a freshman he was always in the film room watching extra film, trying to learn defenses and things like that.

So he's put in the work and it's paying off for him just with everything that goes on. He's been great to this team and great to this offense.

When you're watching the film of Ohio State or other teams you're competing against, do you look how they guard their No. 1 receiver, maybe some double coverage or special zones? And also, do you know anybody on the Ohio State team fairly well?

I think every team has coverages where it's going to be doubles in it. That's just part of playing defense, you have those coverages where you are allowed to do that.

I don't know anyone on Ohio State's team.

How are you preparing for the upcoming season?

Just coming in, day in and day out, just doing my job, just doing the things that the coaches wanted me to do and just putting in extra work.

You've probably had quite a few battles in practice with Patrick over the years; I'm wondering what makes him so good, and have you ever faced anybody better in a game?

What makes Pat so good is just how technical he is with everything, whether it's getting his foot in the ground, things like that. He does everything just right, and he doesn't make a lot of mistakes. He's very smart. He can read offenses. He reads the splits and things like that. He's a great corner.

Building off the previous question on John Metchie III, can you elaborate on how John has grown as a person off the field?

I believe he's just got more comfortable with being around here, just not necessarily from being around this area. He's got a lot more comfortable with things around here, and it's just made him develop more and become a better player.

Alabama senior offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood:

Alex, just talk about Ohio State's front seven, what type of problems they might cause for your offensive line after watching that Clemson game.

Their front seven, just like most good teams, they're strong, physical, they're stout in the interior, and they've got really good edge rushers on the edge, and their linebackers are super athletic, can go sideline to sideline. They can hit you downhill. They're a good group.

You mentioned before the Notre Dame game that you guys wanted to prove yourself as the best offensive line. Well, you won the Joe Moore Award. What does that mean to you guys as a unit?

That means the world to us because that's one of our goals as a group that we've always had, like going

into every season I know for me here at Alabama, and it's just a testament to the work we put in to get it. You know what I mean? And just how hard we worked for it, and we're extremely grateful.

I know you were asked a little bit about Ohio State's front seven, but specifically their linebackers, it's a pretty veteran group and they seem like they're both able to rush the passer but also play well in coverage. What are the challenges of playing against a group of veteran linebackers that maybe are hard to deceive?

I mean, it's going to be challenging because just like you said, their seniors, they're smart. They've played a lot of football, so they know what they're doing, and they're great at what they do. It's not going to be a lot of, like, trick them and stuff like that. We've just got to play football.

I mean, I don't really know how to explain it. We've just got to attack them directly, know what I mean, because they are smart and they are good. So it's just going to be like mano-a-mano.

Similarly to these questions about Ohio State's defense, when you get in a match-up like this where you know it's going to be good-on-good at this level, how much is the excitement level wrapped up for this offensive line for that challenge?

It goes way through the roof. Like not saying we aren't excited for any game or any opponent we're playing, but we're just competitors. We love to compete, and we're going to step up to the challenge and we're going to see if they want to play football.

I know you've talked a lot about your decision to come back this season. How soon is it to be able to end this season back in your home state of Florida playing for a National Championship.

I mean, it's great, me being a Floridian. To be honest, I love Florida. I think it's the best state ever. I'm extremely grateful and happy to have the opportunity to play in the National Championship, of course, but it also being at home in the crib is a great feeling. I'm super excited for it.

Sark [Steve Sarkisian] was bragging on the leadership of the team earlier, and what makes the leadership of this team so good in your opinion?

I think it's so good because like the leaders of this team, they like do what they preach, know what I mean? It's not just a bunch of guys just saying one thing and doing another. It's like a collective group of leaders that actually believe in what we're saying, know what I mean, and actually want to accomplish the goals that we're saying and stuff like that.

We just try to like positively affect as many people as we can around us to like get us all on the same page, know what I mean, so I feel like that's the most effective part of it.

What did you think of Najee (Harris) hurdling the Notre Dame guy, and was that especially exhilarating for the huddle for the offensive players?

Yes, of course. It always is. But to be honest, I wasn't surprised. He's done it so many times over his career here. He's going to do what he does.

A lot was made about heading into that semifinal game without Landon Dickerson and Chris

Owen taking his place. Tell me about that experience for your group collectively along the offensive line without Landon in the semifinal.

That experience was fun because, I mean, we all had like all the belief that Chris would get the job done, and we feel like he did. And although Landon, he wasn't there playing, he still played like a huge part in the leadership of the O-line, know what I mean? Like being on the sidelines, just communicating with us and telling us the things he saw and things that we could do better and stuff like that.

It was like he was still there, to be honest, because the job was still executed and we still had his presence as a leader there for us, so it was fun.

I just want to ask you, you being a leader on the team, how are you able to get the guys to let them know that we still have unfinished business and we're high off the Rose Bowl and of course you have a teammate that won the Heisman? How do you as a leader tell your guys, look, we've still got business to take care of?

Exactly what you just said, just tell them directly. We've still got business to take care of. I'm a senior and I've played a lot of football here over the past four years, and they respect what I say because they're going to take it like as-is, face value.

This whole week I've just been telling guys to just seize every opportunity this week to get better, know what I mean? Like sacrifice and invest all your time into this one game for one week, know what I mean? Just buy into all the things we're doing, trust the process, and we're going to get the result we want.

DeVonta (Smith) is kind of a humble guy, doesn't bring much attention to himself. He's very humble when talking about the Heisman Trophy. Do you guys celebrate that with him? What's he like behind the scenes when he's not at the podium? Is he excited about this thing that happened last night?

Yeah, of course he is. He's uber excited about it. He's grateful. But one thing about Smitty, he's a great player, but he's an even better teammate and person. I mean, you couldn't ask for a better friend, to be honest. I've known him since before we even got here, and he's always been just like a great dude, know what I mean?

Of course he's excited about his Heisman or whatever, but I'm pretty sure his focus is still on this National Championship.

What's the best — what impresses you the most about Najee (Harris)? He put up great numbers, and yet he kind of goes under the radar with the years DeVonta (Smith) had and Mac (Jones). What's stood out most to you about Najee?

What impresses me most about Najee is by far his work ethic. We all see what he does on the field and on game day and stuff like that, but what a lot of people don't see is the work he puts in behind the scenes.

He's definitely one of the hardest workers I've ever met, and I'm glad to have him as a teammate because his work ethic, it like rubs off on people, know what I mean? He just attacks every day with a purpose and intent to be the best that he can be, and it's great to see. It's very inspiring, to be honest.

Alabama fifth-year senior tight end Miller Forristall:

Could you talk a bit about a guy on the other side of the ball on your team, Dylan Moses. You've seen him in practice for years. What's he doing well, his leadership and his play on the field?

I think — well, good morning. I think Dylan is a great guy to have on your team. Besides the fact that he's an outstanding player, an outstanding athlete, he does everything right on and off the field, and I couldn't be more thankful to have a guy like that on my team and to be able to play with him.

It's been fun playing with him the last three years and I'm super thankful for the experience to go against such a good player in practice every day.

Looking at Ohio State's defense and how they've matched up with tight ends this year, it's been some safeties, some corners, sometimes a linebacker. What have you seen from those match-ups in previous games that you can take into this one?

I think when you turn on the film the first thing that strikes you is, man, they're a really good football team. They are disciplined. They do what they're supposed to do. Not only that, they're super athletic, as well.

So they pose a really good match-up problem for us to look at, and to kind of go across the board and make sure we have a really good game plan going into this game.

You'll have a lot of good football stories to tell your kids and grandkids. When you tell them you played with a Heisman Trophy winner, how will you describe DeVonta Smith to them?

I think I'll describe DeVonta Smith as a fighter. But in the ultimate sense. A guy that continued to put his head down and go to work no matter what. A guy that was continually about his team. A great teammate.

That's how I described him to my high school coach the other day. He asked me about DeVonta Smith. He wanted to know — it's the same high school coach as Trevor Lawrence. He goes, Man, I want to root for Trevor, but tell me about this DeVonta Smith guy.

I said he's a great teammate and that is something sticks out to me, not only as a guy who is so incredibly talented and a great player, but also a great teammate.

More about Dylan (Moses). He posted earlier this last week that he was going through a tough time this season. How do you help out a teammate when he's going through a time like that? What are some of the steps you do to kind of bring your teammates up?

Dylan is a guy I can relate to a lot in that sense. I had an ACL just like he did, and everyone you think comes back and you hear all this, Oh, you're going to come back bigger, faster, stronger immediately, and you just don't all the time.

I struggled coming back from my ACL a little bit. Took me a while. Honestly, it took me two good years to feel like myself again. Dylan and I have talked on and off a lot about encouragement, man. Sometimes you don't always feel like you used to, but you can still play better and you can still be better than the

player you were.

So we talk about that a lot actually as a guy who's had an ACL and I think I'm old here, so I try and impart the little wisdom I have to these guys that have been here not quite as long as I have.

You've been around here for a while, and there's a lot of talk about legacies of teams and teams that of — the 2018 team was one of the best teams that came around here and didn't win a championship, so it kind of loses that legacy. How much are you thinking about that with this team and what do you hope the legacy of this team will be?

To be quite honest I haven't quite thought of the legacy of the team. I know coach mentioned a little bit how we have the opportunity to do something special that no one has ever done before, but honestly I think everybody is just kind of focused on Ohio State, as cliché as that sounds.

I don't think anybody is looking forward to, Oh, what a legacy we could have. We just kind of want to do what we can do today, not necessarily what we could do down the road.

Just want to ask you about Sark [Steve Sarkisian], just how happy you guys are for him to get the job at Texas, but also the fact that he's able to stick around and finish the season out with you guys.

It's awesome. We're excited for this game and we're focused on this game. We're glad he's going to be here and be a part of that with him. Like I said, we're super excited for him and that's a great opportunity, but I know he is and so are we both focused on Ohio State and what is to come and what is a Tuesday practice today.

That's first and foremost, but we're super excited for him.

Kind of along those lines, schools from all over the country try to poach Alabama assistants and analysts and whoever to build their own staffs. What is it about y'all's internal formula or magic or recipe, whatever word you want to use, that other people so badly want to steal and recreate?

I think it's the fact that we win, first and foremost, but it's the system and the process that Coach has instilled in not only his players, but every coach that comes here. There's a reason you get coaches from all walks of life, young coaches, old coaches, coaches on the back end of their career, the front end. They want to come here and learn under Coach Saban, and people want that.

People want Heisman Trophy winners and championship games and just to play really good football day in and day out. I think people are trying to get a taste of that from Coach Saban, honestly.

Just as a fellow athlete, what is the thing that impresses you the most about Najee Harris?

Najee is one of the hardest workers we have on the team. I don't think people appreciate, that guy does a lot of work. And especially outside of our time here, he does a lot of work.

But I think physically his balance and flexibility are the two things that impress me the most. Just the balance to stay on after hits and hurdle someone and continue to keep running. That physically is what's most astounding, I think, about his game.

I was just wondering, if you had to describe — nobody probably knows Nick Saban better than you do from a player standpoint. What is his magic? What is his secret? What is the potion he spreads around you guys?

Like I said, everybody hears about the process, and I think in really simple terms, it's kind of the ability to be excellent in everything you do one day at a time. Not necessarily trying to look ahead, but be excellent in what he's going to do today and the task at hand, and he does that better than anyone. To be excellent every day at the task at hand. No one does it better consistently.

I wanted to ask you about Ohio State's linebackers. They play four of them quite a bit and any three of those guys could be matched up with you. What kind of problems or issues do they present for you as a tight end?

Any time you're playing in the National Championship game you know you're playing really good players, and this is no exception. They're old, they're veteran players who know exactly what they're doing, and then add on top of that, like I said earlier, they're really good athletes. They can strike and get off blocks really well, and they kind of run the show back there for the defense.

We kind of know what we're up against, really good players, veteran players, and we have to practice and prepare really, really well to be successful. That's kind of the mindset right now, is practice and prepare the right way so hopefully we can play how we want to.

What are you going to take away from Nick Saban's leadership to apply to the rest of your life?

That's a big question. I've been here for five years, so I've heard a lot of things that I'll pocket for the rest of my life. But like I said earlier, just the way he goes about his life. And he does just attack all the little things with the same ferocity and intensity that he attacks the big things, whether it's how he's scripted goal line or how he's coaching the National Championship game. It's done the same way.

I really do believe that. He is better at the little things than anybody else, thus he's better at the big things. It's simple but really, really hard to do.

What's John Metchie like as a teammate, and how has he grown over his time with the program?

Metchie was a guy not a lot of people knew about until probably the spring game, and he had eight catches and 104 yards and everyone was like, This John Metchie guy is going to be pretty solid.

It's been fun to see him grow and develop and mature a little bit. He's got this loaded receiver room year in and year out, so some names get glossed over, but Metchie is a guy this year who's put his head down and gone to work all summer. It's not like we had the weight room open or anything, but I'd see him at a field here or there just working his butt off, trying to find a place in this offense, and I really think he has, by the way he works and puts his head down.

He's fun and energetic to be around, a guy with a lot of energy and a smile on his face. So he's fun to have on the offense.

If I can ask you an old man question, you mentioned about Coach Saban and what kind of

influence he's had on you. I've heard from former players and current players on how much Nick Saban jokes on the field and the practice field. I'm wondering through five years maybe the cleanest joke you can tell us right here in the press conference or how much of the jokes is kind of — does Coach need to get some fresh material on his banter there in the practice field?

He definitely needs some new material. I was talking to Ronnie Brown the other day, another Cartersville alum, and he mentioned a joke Coach Saban said to him when he was in Miami, and I said he used that one the other day. It's been a while since he was in Miami. Coach is a lot more lively and a lot more jovial than people just assume, the way he carries himself on screen, and he's a lot more fun to be around than people take him as.

People take that we have no fun and that he's no fun. He thinks he's funnier than he is, but he is pretty funny. I don't know if I have a joke to share. Josh Macton is laughing at me in the back. But that doesn't make it not true.

Alabama fourth-year junior quarterback Mac Jones:

Can you kind of describe the challenge that Ohio State's defense will pose you, especially the front four, the defensive line?

Yeah, I mean, overall they have great players. Not a super complicated scheme and they don't have to be that way because they have great players, but it's mostly four down fronts.

I've been impressed watching them on film, very vertical team in terms of the D-line getting back there at the quarterback, and then obviously all 11 players rallying to the ball.

They do a good job and we've got to be ready to roll, and it's going to be the best defense we've played this year.

I asked Alex the same question. You guys have a bunch of Florida natives on your roster. How special is it to be able to end this season, one that's kind of been unprecedented with all these disruptions and everything, in your home state of Florida?

Yeah, it is really cool, just being from Florida and getting a chance to go back there and then playing in Miami is a great city.

But you know, at the end of the day it's just another game, and we've got to go out there and play our game, and Ohio State is going to do the same. They're going to play the game just like it's any other game, and we're just looking forward to that.

You guys have played a lot of great secondaries this year. When you look at Ohio State's on film, what challenges do the Buckeyes' defensive backs present that you'll have to overcome in this one?

Yeah, I think the four guys they play back there are talented football players. I played 7-on-7 with Shaun Wade, 24, a great guy, great family, really a technician, a longer guy, and he played small in coverage, and then Sevyn Banks on the other side.

First of all, he has a cool name and he's a great football player. His speed, change of directions is all there. And then their two safeties, 21 and 41, do a great job in the back end run fitting, playing coverage, post high defense. They're ballhawks, so you've got to keep your eyes on them.

But they play with speed and they play together back there, and like I said, the whole defense, really good defense, and it starts up front, but they play well all around.

Just wondering, how do you hope this team will be remembered?

I think we'll be remembered for a lot already, but to do what we've done this season has been impressive. We've got one more game and it's the most important game.

But we're not satisfied with where we are and people are going to put a lot of pressure on this game, but I'm super proud of our teammates and coaches and the fans for supporting us all season long.

There's no added pressure, but at the same time, it's kind of what we signed up for coming to Alabama, is just to get a chance to play in a National Championship and then hopefully win one.

Just wondering what's it like for you to go head to head with Justin Fields in this game, and how do you enjoy that as a quarterback?

Yeah, I love playing against a great quarterback. Justin Fields is a top quarterback in the country and he's played well this entire year and throughout his whole career, and I'm just blessed to be able to play on the field with him.

Our defense has a great challenge with their offense, but he's a great player and I'm looking forward to talking with him and watching him play.

I just wanted to ask you, how would you describe your relationship with Sark [Steve Sarkisian] and how that's gone this season? And what would be your advice to future quarterbacks who are going to work with him?

Yeah, Coach Sark has done a great job game planning all year long. He calls great plays. All the players really like him, and we just appreciate all the hard work he's put into this program.

He's calling cool plays, but at the same time, we stick to our base rules and just follow what he wants us to do.

And future quarterbacks, I'd just say enjoy Coach Sark. He's a great guy. You can learn a lot about being a great person, and then also applying things to your game. He's coached at all levels, NFL, college, so you can get a lot of different information from what he teaches you when you watch film.

And then just learn how to think like Coach Sark, because he sees everything the defense does and he's going to put you in the best position to succeed as a quarterback and an offense.

You mentioned playing 7-on-7 with Shaun (Wade). Just kind of curious if you have any standout memories of playing with him or practicing against him or anything that stands out when you think back to that?

I don't know if I can remember a specific moment, but Shaun, like I said, he comes from a great family

and he's a technician, and he's kind of a perfectionist in his own way. He celebrates when he makes great plays, but he's more of a quiet guy and just kind of does his job.

In high school, really humble for being a top recruit, and at the time I wasn't very highly recruited and he always had my back in interviews or anything like that. I really appreciate him and his family, and I'm just really happy for how he's played throughout his career at Ohio State.

An awful lot of good players have come through Alabama over the years. What do you think this group of offense — how are they unique and special in your eyes?

I don't know. I think it's cool that we've all had a chance to play with each other the past couple years and everyone has kind of had their own role and their roles have changed throughout the years. There's plenty of examples of that, but I think it just shows the stick-to-itiveness of our offense and our whole team.

The defense there is plenty of players that are the same way. But I really love this team, and I've got a chance to play on four really great teams at Alabama, but I think this one is really special. I think it starts with the players and how we just came in together and fought for a common goal of trying to get a chance to play in the National Championship game, which is right where we are.

What does this team mean to you?

The team? This team in general, just I'm really happy for these guys fighting through adversity. Like I said before, we've got a great group of guys, but at the same time, we have a lot of great support staff around here in this building that help everything go, and they probably don't get enough credit that they deserve.

But this team is awesome, and we're just looking forward to finishing this year strong and getting a chance to play the final game of the year together for 60 minutes.

I know you were really proud of watching DeVonta (Smith) win the Heisman, but when did that chemistry between you and DeVonta start? Talk about that chemistry that you two have.

Yeah, first of all, I just want to congratulate Smitty for his award. That's really awesome and I'm proud for his family and Amite City. That was really cool to see him on the broadcast and his whole family, and the whole city was really in there cheering DeVonta on.

But we've had that chemistry for a while. I think about camps and things like that. Me and Smitty were the two skinniest guys out there throwing the ball to each other, so it kind of just started there. But he's worked really hard and he deserves everything that's come his way.

I know his availability is still up in the air, but how good was it to see Jaylen Waddle back on the practice field?

Yeah, he actually looked really good, but I don't know if I can answer that question properly because you've got to ask Coach Saban and the training staff.

But he's worked really hard in his rehab, and we'll see what happens.

Tell me about the moment last night in particular when Smitty's name was called and being

the first guy to hug him and what that moment was like for you?

Yeah, it was really cool. I was telling some people earlier, I was nervous about getting Smitty the ball this year. I was like, I've got to make sure that Smitty gets the ball and makes plays.

So I just wanted to make sure I did my job in his success, and obviously he's helped me out a ton, and everyone else has too.

Just to see Smitty, his entire life just kind of going to that moment, you could see it. He was kind of like a little shocked, but I was so happy for him. It's like a video game, man. You're up there and you get to see your teammate win the Heisman Trophy and you feel like that's just one of the coolest things that you can do, is have a chance to be with him, especially in kind of the crazy year that it's been, and just be able to be the first guy to kind of congratulate him.

I'm just so happy for Smitty and his family and his city and the whole nine.

I think this is the most prolific wide open offense I've ever seen from Alabama. Obviously they put their trust in you to run this show. What is it like when you know you've got the confidence of a Nick Saban and a Steve Sarkisian to almost call any play at any time and with those kind of weapons around you?

Yeah, it's really just an awesome experience to be able to lead these guys, and I've said this before, but they make everything go. I mean, like you said, we have a great play caller and then we have a great offensive line and skill players that make it all happen.

Really we prepare really hard. It doesn't just show up on game day. It takes a lot of really months and years of preparation, and we've just kind of molded together as a group, but at the same time - I've said this before - we had some improvements to make after last game, and we're going to do that this week and we've started that already, and just looking forward to this next game.

I know you can't really comment on Jaylen Waddle, but how exciting would it be, the possibility of reinserting him into this offense, now that things are even clicking without him?

Yeah, it would be really cool. Jaylen has worked really hard to get back on the field and I know he wants nothing more than to play, but I think they're just going to make that decision downstairs. But it's his choice, and I feel like in watching him, he looks really good out there. So we'll see what happens.

Alabama sophomore wide receiver John Metchie:

I'm wondering, how difficult is it waiting and not knowing whether you're going to play Monday or whether it's going to be another week given the COVID situation?

I wouldn't say it's too difficult. I think we just focus on what we have to do to prepare for the game, and whenever that is and whatever date it is, I know that we'll be ready and well prepared to play.

Can you maybe walk us through that 40-yard reception in the Rose Bowl and DeVonta Smith's blocking on that play, as well?

I think it was just a good call and great execution. I think we got the call into the right look that we wanted, and of course what we take pride on as receivers is also playing without the ball, and I think

that was great of Smitty leading me down the field, leading the way.

Can you tell us a little bit about the relationship you have with your brothers, some of your friends back in Brampton that I understand you still keep very close ties with through the course of the season and what those kind of relationships mean, supporting you in your football journey?

The relationships I have with my brothers and all my close friends back in Brampton and back home mean everything to me. They are the reason why I am the way I am. They've helped me with everything, and they continue to be there for me unconditionally. Those relationships definitely mean a lot to me.

A two-parter: How has Jaylen (Waddle) looked in practice, and what would getting him back for this game mean to you guys?

Waddle has looked good. He's been doing a lot of treatment. He's been on top of everything, and I feel like that's that.

Him coming back, as to him coming back, I think everyone knows what he brings and what that brings when he's on the field to the defense, how they look at that, how dynamic our offense is.

So I feel like everyone kind of knows what he brings to the table.

I'm not sure how much you look at individual match-ups before, but there's a chance Sevyn Banks, No. 7, for Ohio State could be on you a lot. If you've studied tape on him, what do you see from him? He's a young receiver who's in his first year starting for Ohio State.

I don't really look at individual match-ups a lot, but I do look at their defenses and their personnel and who we're going to play.

But he's definitely a good DB. Their DBs are really long, lengthy, good in coverage. So I think just on my part, being prepared, being prepared to face whoever and win my box.

Just wonder, where were you watching the Heisman stuff last night, and what was your reaction when you saw DeVonta (Smith) today?

I was watching it at my place the other night and I wasn't surprised. I had said it long ago that Smitty is the best player in college football this year. So definitely seeing him win was great. I'm extremely proud of him.

But I definitely wasn't surprised because I knew he was going to win it from — from time.

Is it cool to see a wide receiver finally win the Heisman Trophy? And do you think we'll see more wideouts win it in the future?

I hope. I hope more wideouts win in the future. But it definitely is cool, especially it being somebody from Alabama and somebody in our receiver room.

Especially it being more of a quarterback/running back award people say, but it definitely is cool, and I definitely hope that more wide receivers win the Heisman Trophy coming up.

What's something about Mac Jones that you feel maybe doesn't get enough appreciation from the rest of us?

I'm not really sure. I think Mac does everything well. I think he does everything great, actually, as far as being a leader, his ability, what he does on the field, his preparation for the games. I think he's great at all those things.

How are you and the other receivers able to be on the exact same page as Mac (Jones)? And how does he make the determination who's going to get the ball?

Just practice. I think we practice really hard. We always practice hard. I think that's where a lot of the chemistry is built, a lot of the bonds are built.

And as far as determining who gets the ball, we just kind of go out there and play and the ball finds the right person. Like we say, the ball will always find the right person. So I think that that's pretty much it.

Just wondering if you could tell us, just how much of a different player are you now than you were before you came to Bama?

I'm different in a lot of ways, physically, mentally, emotionally. You just grow coming to Alabama. Just knowing that every day you're going to compete and that this place is going to bring the best out of you. It's going to force the best out of you for you to be the best version of yourself, for you to be a competitor.

I think in all those ways, I've definitely grown.

You said DeVonta (Smith) is the best player in college football; can one defender slow him down?

No. Nah.

You elaborated last week before the Rose Bowl about the journey you've been on, different countries around the world. What have you learned or what did you learn about yourself along that journey, living in different countries, that's helped prepare you as a football player and a person?

I think that has taught me to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Just because I've never really been in one place for an extremely long amount of time and I kind of always have been moving around, so it's always a new environment, which can be uncomfortable for a lot of people.

But it's kind of taught me to be comfortable being uncomfortable, and that helps a lot in the sport and in life.

Alabama senior running back Najee Harris:

Najee, we've seen you hurdle defenders going back to your Antioch days. What do you recall about your first hurdle at Antioch, and what kind of spark — what got you doing that? Why do you enjoy that?

I mean, it's cool. I don't really remember the first hurdle really. But I mean, it was just a way — so I got

tired of getting chopped in the legs, man, in the ankles. It hurts. I guess I just started hurdling. I don't really remember the first hurdle, though.

Now that you're almost a year removed from the decision you and several of your classmates made to come back to school, what's the feeling like to being this close to having everything work as you all had hoped?

I guess you could say it worked out. The decision was — of course it was coming back. We all came back. We made the decision.

Really in the beginning I think we all agreed on that, like if we come back, we can't come back and walk through things and like think that since we're coming back and going to be seniors that it can come easy to us.

So we all, I think, bought into if we're going to come back, we have to come back 100 percent and I guess show people the example of how we should practice and how we should play for the young guys coming in.

I think that it worked out so far.

There was a time when guys like you from California and the East Bay would stay in that region, Pac-12, whatnot. Why are guys like you and Aaron and Isaiah going east, leaving the area?

Yeah. I think — well, I don't know for them, why they did it, but for me personally, I feel like — they say a lot of West Coast guys can't play in I guess conferences like this, the SEC, so I wanted to like see, like kill that hype, I guess, in a way and that show that we can play, that West Coast people can play.

We have a lot more guys from the West Coast playing in the SEC than before, so it's good to see a lot of guys travel across. But I think it's good for people to stay home. I think it's good for people to go to other states to get, I guess, a better experience — a different environment I guess you could say, of culture around here.

I've been here at Alabama for four years. I learned a lot of new things, the weather one of them. Being a West Coast guy you're used to sunshine; over here it's humid.

At first I didn't like it, but when you're here long enough you find out that this is like the best place to train for upcoming sports, to train in this humidity. That's how I take it. And just seeing a new culture, a new environment, like I said, and showing people that West Coast guys can play in conferences like this.

Ohio State's run defense has been one of the best in the country this year. Just what do you see when you watch them on film?

They've got a good defensive line, a really good defensive line. Their front four is all really good, and of course Baron (Browning) up there at the linebacker position and the other guys, all them are good.

All them play a role. All them are really fast off the ball, too. They're really good in dissecting things out, really good at coming down and playing the run and dropping back into coverage when they have to. Really good lateral movement, stuff like that. They're really good at chasing the ball and really rallying

around the ball.

They're really well-coached, though, on the defensive side. Their secondary is good, DBs. All them guys can play, so it should be a good game.

I'm assuming you guys have the mentality that no matter how good the run defense is you face that you can run the ball. Can you just kind of describe what that mentality is?

Yeah, I think our offensive line is playing really well. Really we have a game plan that's set from our coaches and we follow that game plan. I feel like we have weapons everywhere.

So I guess you could say that we can run the ball, but that's not really what our focus is. Our focus is what — is really balanced, I guess you could say.

They have a really good run defense, so it's not going to be easy. They have a really good pass defense, so it's not going to be easy.

So we just try to balance it as much as we can and try to look for weaknesses.

Just wondering, what do you hope the legacy of this team will be?

You said the legacy?

Yeah. How do you hope this team is remembered?

You know, a team that doesn't quit. A team that doesn't give up. A team that shows real integrity. A team that fights and a team that plays as one.

Obviously we hope that we can win it all and go undefeated, but we worry about the small things first and then work up to the main event, and that's playing Monday.

Right now we're just worrying about practicing, getting to the game on Monday, and then from there we can just — like I said, we hope to be victorious and be another undefeated team, but like I said, we worry about the small things first to build up to Monday, and hopefully Monday's outcome will be victorious.

You've played on numerous College Football Playoff teams at Alabama in the past. What would you say is different about this year's team than previous years?

Yeah, like you said, I have played on a lot of playoff and championship teams. I think what separates this team really is really all the distractions that we had outside the program, of course, with the coronavirus and social injustice happening and not being able to play or not, and we all just came together really and grinded it out throughout the summer, throughout the year, not knowing if we'll play or not, having a game postponed, having a game canceled.

You look out in the football world, some conferences not being able to play. You wonder really if we're going to be like that.

So really the — just really us bonding together more and more as a team and knowing that every game we're going to get the best of everybody and that we have to just really play to our standard, the

Alabama standard.

I learned personally when I was a freshman and I was on the team, I wanted to play a lot. I wanted to play a lot, and I didn't really have the opportunity to play until, I guess you could say, the National Championship really.

But me being here now, I've got the young guys behind me, so sometimes I kind of get out the game early so I can let them guys play so they can get experience, so they can get more reps, so they can get game reps so when they get in the game, God forbid I get hurt of something like that, they can be able to — there won't be no drop-off or anything like that.

And those guys being Jase (McClellan), Roydell (Williams) obviously, Keilan (Robinson) all them boys. For them to get as much game reps as possible, get enough game experiences, really that helps out.

So I think you could say just bonding together a lot and knowing that we need each other.

You talked about the talented rush defense Ohio State has. When you have an opportunity to go against a group that you know is going to challenge you, does the excitement level increase a little bit with you guys, the offense as a whole?

Yeah. For me 100 percent it increases. 100 percent. The best thing that can happen or the best thing you can do to get me excited is say, look, this is going to be the best whatever we play against, the best run defense, the best pass defense, the best talent.

That's one thing that really excites me in the game of football really is just knowing that across the ball is good competition, great competition, people that's going to be on the next level, people who won all these awards, stuff like that.

For me to have the opportunity to play against these people, there's nothing really more exciting to me. I love competition and I love stuff like that. For me personally, yes, that gets me excited because I know that it ain't going to be easy. It ain't going to be no big runs like that. It ain't going to be like no — I guess you could say the hurdles and stuff like that or any, like, explosive plays.

It's going to be their best against our best, and then I've got to make the most of it, and that's what I like.

This past offseason Alabama had a big change in philosophy in the strength and conditioning program, and obviously some staff changes there. How did you think that change happened for you as a student-athlete in terms of what they did, in terms of how you train, but also how have you seen it help you on the field this year?

Yeah, so obviously Coach Coch [Scott Cochran] left us to go to Georgia. It was his time, I guess. Shout out to Coach Coch who was a great mentor to me for the years that he been here mentoring me.

But we got in Dr. (Matt) Rhea and Dr. (David) Ballou, and we got Dr. Rhea and Coach Ballou, and they came in here and they've brought different things that they had with the program that was out — like you said, the velocity things, measuring how explosive you are, different type of workouts to complement the athlete that needed to get worked on that specific thing.

For me it was a lot of speed and explosiveness, agility, I guess you could say. I work with Dr. Rhea on

tat a lot still to this day. He helped me out a lot, though, like I say, still to this day. He has a workout specifically for that athlete, and that's what you need, because not all athletes are the same.

So you need a program that will help that athlete in what he needs to improve on, and that's what they do a good job of finding out. They know all their players, so they know, okay, this person needs this, this person needs that. So that helped out all of us really this whole off-season.

And us having a short off-season — there was no spring practice, right? Am I tripping? There was no spring practice, right? So being no spring practices we didn't really get to see their whole program, but the little stuff they had, it helped us out a lot.

So I'm excited for what they have next year for other guys to see what else they have to provide to better the athlete.

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