



2013 DISCOVER BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME JAN. 3 PRESS CONFERENCES

ALABAMA

Offensive Coordinator Doug Nussmeier & QB AJ McCarron

JOHN HUMENIK: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the inaugural press conference for this year's Discover BCS National Championship game. Questions, please.

Q. I've got two questions, and if you could both touch on them that would be great: Coach Nussmeier, how would you describe your personal handprint, if you will, on this offense this year, in your first year in this program?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, first of all, I want to say that on behalf of my family and I know our players feel the same way, it's great to be here representing the University of Alabama and have this opportunity to play in the Discover BCS National Championship game. Thanks to the Orange Bowl Committee and the people of South Florida for the welcome we had yesterday. It was great. I know my kids really enjoyed it.

As far as the offense goes, really proud of the opportunity that our players have created for us, moving into this game. As far as the handprint that I personally put on the offense, when I got here at the end of last year and Coach hired me, it was very important for me to really dive into the offense that was here, obviously that had success, and look at the things that our players had done and done well, and then find things that maybe I had done in the past that I could bring to help fit into this system, so to say.

And then as any other system, every year you go back and you look at where you did well, you look at what you need to improve, and maybe you look at different ideas outside of your program. That was our goal as a staff was to sit down and kind of mesh it, put it together, look at some other ideas and then move forward.

AJ McCARRON: I personally think Coach Nuss has had a big impact on our offense. He's brought a bunch of different plays, also a different type of mindset to this offense than we had last year. But I know personally he's helped me tremendously. I was actually talking to my dad the other day, and it was kind of crazy, I have less pass attempts than what I did last year, but better numbers all the way around, and I think that shows a big part of his coaching ability and the way he's helped me grow, not only as a leader but as a quarterback this year.

Q. A.J., could you talk about when you leave here what you hope people say -- or after this year what people say will be your legacy next year, and then when you hear about a quarterback who manages an offense, what does that mean? And do you think that at all lessens your importance to an offense when you hear people say things like that?

AJ McCARRON: To answer the first part, legacy, I never really -- I'm not the type of guy to really think into it. As long as my teammates know that I'm a good leader, my coaching staff knows that I'm going to go out to win every game, I take everything serious. So I mean, that part of the question I haven't really given it too much thought. But hopefully at the end of the day they can at least say I was a winner, that the team I was part of was a winner.

And then what was the second part? Oh, the game manager. You know, that whole -- that saying right there is kind of funny to me. I think game manager can be -- I've said it a million times. I think you can throw the ball 50 times a game and lead your team to victory by throwing it, or you can hand it off 30 times and only throw it 20. I think game manager can be so many different things, and I think people try to label it as a guy that doesn't really do much for his offense, just kind of takes care of everything, takes care of the ball and tries to get everybody in their right position and get the team in the right position on plays.

But that's my personal outlook on that label.

Q. A lot of people watched the second half of that championship game, SEC Championship game, and said why doesn't Alabama run the ball even more than they do? Why is that not an accurate assessment of your offense? And how did you feel about the run/pass balance you guys had this year?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, obviously the goal of any offense is to put your playmakers in position to make plays. Scoring points, having balance, those are things you focus on. Sometimes as the flow of the game dictates, you do certain things and you start to do them and you do them well and you stay with them.

Specifically regarding that game, as the flow of the game went, we were able to create big, explosive plays in the running game, and there was really not a need to do anything else at that point in time. So we're going to have a balanced game plan. We're going to go into every game with the ability not only to run it but to throw it, have play actions that come off our runs, all those type of things.

But as the flow of the game goes, we're going to aggressively try and take advantage of whatever part of our game we think is going to be the most successful.

Q. AJ, could you take us way back when you decided to go to Alabama, what drew you to the school and what it's like being a quarterback in the fishbowl that is Alabama?

AJ McCARRON: You know, I grew up a big Miami Hurricanes fan. I love the U, but I just felt like at the end of the day, it was the best situation for me to stay in the state, play for Coach Saban. I felt like it was the best opportunity for my parents to come watch me every weekend close to home, only three hours away. I mean, that was my thinking behind the whole decision.

But playing quarterback at the University of Alabama, everybody knows it can be tough, but I think when they expect so much out of you, I think it also brings the best out of you as a player because you never really want to let anybody down, especially your teammates, because you go out every Saturday expecting to win.

I think in the end, it helps you as a player grow and actually become a winner and know how to win.

Q. Doug, in your first year are you the kind of coach when you look back on the season the first thing you think of is maybe the sequence of play calls against LSU that worked so good, or are you the kind of guy that looks at the few plays at the end against Texas A & M, and that's the first thing that jumps out at you?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you evaluate every play call throughout every game, and when you look at the big picture of things, you can't get lost in the result. You have to look at the process and what got you to that point. You know, as in every game, we go back and review every game, and at the end of the season, obviously in preparing for this game, we go back and look at cut-ups of what we've done, certain calls in certain situations, all those type of things, tendencies, all that stuff. We're always self scouting, always evaluating. Any time you make a call, you come out of a game, God, I wish I had that call back. I wish could call that again. That was a pretty good call, that situation. You can do that. And the ones that work are always good ones, the ones that don't are always bad ones.

Q. When you guys first met this past off-season, what was that interaction like, where was it, and how much did you guys know about each other at that time?

AJ McCARRON: (Smiling) I was kind of let down I had to work with him -- no, I'm just kidding.

Coach has always been, like I said, he's been outstanding to me. He's helped me grow as a quarterback more than I ever thought I really could. Like I said, I never look at stats, but the other day I was talking to my dad about it, and he kind of blew me away just on how few pass attempts I've had and my numbers compared to last year. I think he's helped me grow in the aspect of learning when to throw the ball away a lot more than I did last year. I mean, like I said, he's helped me. It's been an honor working with Coach Nuss. I can't say enough about him. He's always helped me.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: I've said this several times: When I first got here, the biggest thing for me was to go back and look at AJ, and kind of how he'd gotten to where he was, and if you go back and look at his body of work, where he started at the beginning of last season and where he ended the season, you look at that growth, and then to meet him, try and get to know the person, and then watch how hard he works and how important football is to him and his willingness to spend extra time, the stuff that you don't see. Like I said, you talk about you can be

result-oriented or process-oriented, and he's very process-oriented. He spends a great deal of time when people don't know what he's doing, and he's studying extra.

To watch what he did through 15 practices in the spring, and to watch where he started this fall, and just to watch the continual progression, and he deserves all the credit for that because of his hard work and effort. His ability really, I think, to bring our offense together.

Q. You guys have seen some pretty good defenses this year. What stands out about Notre Dame's defense when you see them on film?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: To me the biggest thing is they lead the nation in scoring defense. They've given up 10.3 points a game, they do a great job of keeping you out of the end zone. The goal of the game is to score points. I think that right there, their red-area defense is really, really good.

AJ McCARRON: Like Coach just said, they do a really good job of making big plays on the defensive side. You've got to kind of -- most of the time your thinking going into the game is to win the offense from big plays, but their defense makes a lot of big plays, too.

And then like Coach just said, they do a really good job in the red area. I mean, they're first in the nation in almost every category on defense, so they're really good. We're just going to have to bring our "A" game.

Q. AJ, I apologize if you've been asked this at some point, but a lot of Alabama quarterbacks have won one National Championship. You've got the opportunity to win two. Is that something you've been made aware of by all the avid fans at Alabama? And talk about the historical significance of doing that.

AJ McCARRON: Yeah, growing up in the State of Alabama, you definitely hear about all of that, so I probably definitely heard that a little bit more than what I want. But you know, it's a great honor to be in that category of quarterbacks that have played here. But I think it's a tremendous honor to play with my teammates. I think it shows the will that they have to win. I mean, it's not about me. None of this would be possible without them.

I definitely want to thank them for everything they've done, for us having this opportunity and for myself to have this opportunity.

Q. Doug, usually offensive coordinators are in the booth and defensive coordinators are on the field. Is that Coach Saban's preference or yours? And is there an advantage or disadvantage to being in the booth rather than on the field?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, our structure that we have in place in our organization when I got here Coach McElwain had been up in the box, so it was an easy transition, and I'm very comfortable up there. One of the things that you gain by being up there is you have very good vision of what's going on and seeing the field. The thing that you lose is you don't have great feel for the game because you're not on the sideline with the players and you really have to rely on -- our coaches do an outstanding job on offense on the sideline, making adjustments, and giving me feedback of the feel of the game and how our players are feeling because you can't get that feeling, and the emotion play is a big factor in the game of football.

There's advantages and disadvantages to both.

Q. Coach Nussmeier, occasionally we've seen Alabama come out, no huddle, and kind of spread things out a little bit with a high tempo right out of the gate, and Nick Saban said postgame that we were looking to get the fatigue started early. Obviously you can't comment on what the plan is for this week, but can you just remark on the value of coming out at up tempo, no huddle?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, I think if you look at college football in general, that's a growing trend, no-huddle offense, speed, hurry-up. As any game you play, the ability to change the tempo of the game offensively or defensively can create a competitive advantage for you, if it's useful in the game you're playing.

Q. You've had I think five quarterbacks drafted in the NFL. Is there any sort of overarching philosophy from your background that makes you well equipped to kind of handle and develop quarterbacks?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Yeah, I coach good players (smiling).

No, I think that I've been very fortunate is the reality. I've worked with some very, very good players, and they've been great people, and AJ being one of those. Just guys that every day give their all. You know, I think if you've got the ability and you're willing and you put in the time and the effort, like I said, I think so much is placed on

the position, when you look at results and you say this guy played well, well, he probably played pretty good because the guys around him played pretty good, or he probably played not as well as people think because the guys around him didn't play as well. It's one of the hardest positions in all of sports to play.

When you're playing the position I think it's very important that you stay even keel; you don't get too high and you don't get too low, and realize that you're probably not playing as good as people say you're playing and probably not playing as bad as people say.

I feel like I've been really fortunate to coach some really, really good players. Like I say, AJ's ceiling is so high. I feel like he's just starting to scratch the surface of where he's going to go as a player.

Q. AJ, I want to talk about your relationship with Barrett Jones a little bit. How often do you guys disagree on protections? Who usually wins those disagreements? And on a serious note, were you concerned at all that he would be able to finish the Georgia game? Most people say he played the last three quarters on one leg. Were you concerned he'd be available for this game? And how important is it to have him out there?

AJ McCARRON: As far as us bickering, Coach Nuss can tell you we go at it in practice, but I usually win that battle just because I tell him, listen, I'm the quarterback, you're in my huddle, so let's hush on this one.

No, we go back and forth. Me and Barrett have been really good friends for a long time, ever since I came here in '09. He's kind of taken me under his wing and just taught me the ropes and everything. He's helped me tremendously. I can't say enough about him. I really do love him. He's a great friend to have.

Protection-wise, we go back and forth on it, and we'll both probably say that we've saved each other a couple times. But I think that's the relationship the quarterback and center need to have.

Actually I did not -- to answer the last part, I did not know that he was even hurt during the Georgia game, so that should let you know how he played.

But I'm not concerned at all about him playing this weekend.

Q. I know you took a red shirt and were maybe a play away from making a debut in the Rose Bowl a few years back. Talk about T.J. Yeldon and his emergence as a true freshman. It looks like he has not missed a step in that transition.

AJ McCARRON: I think first off, a lot of people don't realize T.J. is a good kid off the field, and I think that's big to have while you're playing every Saturday, to have him in the huddle. You don't want just a good athlete out there, you want a person that you can always count on and trust to do the right thing. And he's one of those freshmen that come in and already have the right head on their shoulders and knows what it takes to win, and he's great to have in the huddle. He's a freakish player. I know that.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: T.J. has outstanding maturity. He grew old early. And sometimes offensively as a coaching staff, we have to remind ourselves, especially early in the season, he has such a great presence about him, and like I said, he's so mature that we had to remind ourselves, this really -- he is a true freshman, and after having those 15 practices in the spring, he really came into the fall with a really good understanding of what we're trying to do. And as with any young back, you worry about protections, the intricacies of is he seeing the right reads, in the running game. To the naked eye you could say, well, he's running to the right, and obviously reads and those type of things.

I really think that he's really grown and grown very quickly, maybe faster than we anticipated at the start, but done a tremendous job for us.

Q. I wonder if you could talk about Manti Te'o and the challenge you have in planning for him and in what way or ways is he the most dangerous.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, the thing that stands out to me about Manti is he always seems to find the ball, as do all great players on defense. You look at the interceptions, the tackles, he always seems to be around the ball. He has great natural instincts. Obviously he's a phenomenal athlete. It's going to be very important that we know where he is at all times.

AJ McCARRON: Like Coach just said, he's always around the ball. He's a great player, makes a lot of plays for his defense, and is the heart and soul for them. He's going to be a big key to the game, like always.

Q. What does it tell you about Barrett that he was able to play basically three quarters against Georgia on one foot? And are you happy with where he is conditioning-wise going into this one?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, it doesn't surprise me. I think AJ hit on it just a minute ago. You talk about quality of character, you talk about the kind of person that Barrett is, and nothing would surprise you.

As far as the injury goes, obviously he's back practicing. This is great. Moving forward we expect him to continue to be ready.

Q. You mentioned Miami before, what attracted you as a youngster to Miami, and just where were they and how close was it in terms of where you chose to go?

AJ McCARRON: What probably attracted me the most is, just like whenever you're a little kid, the team that's winning the most is probably your favorite. No, they had one of my favorite players of all time, Ken Dorsey, and they had Willis McGahee, Andre Johnson, Kellen Winslow, all those guys. I was always just a big fan growing up.

They ended up being in my top three with Alabama and Oklahoma right before I decided.

Q. Doug, I'm just curious, what's this whole last year been like for you? And have there been any big surprises about joining the Alabama staff?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Pleasant surprises. Working with the group of coaches we have on offense has been an outstanding experience, great, great coaches, a lot of experience. Working with Coach Saban, the way he structures everything, the attention to detail, you just can't say enough about it. Everything is process-oriented, like I touched on before.

As far as coming and being a part of the University of Alabama football program, it's been an outstanding experience. You can anticipate what it's going to be like, but I don't think you ever really know until you're there. This place is really special, and I just feel very fortunate that we've been able to be a part of this.

Q. AJ, how did you feel about some of your guys hijacking your Twitter account last night?

AJ McCARRON: (Laughing) Well, that's the one and only Kenny Bell. Me and him are always great friends, and we've always been ever since we came in together. But yeah, he likes to play jokes on me. We go back and forth, but yeah, he got me last night?

Q. And also, Amari Cooper, his freshman year, did you see this coming from him when he came in?

AJ McCARRON: Like I said, one of those freakish freshmen that you get in every once in a while in a class. You can't say enough about Coop. He's been an outstanding player for us this year. He's helped our offense grow a lot in the passing game, and being able to, I guess, spread the ball out all the way across the field. He's helped us tremendously.

Q. When you look at the tape of Notre Dame's defense, how does it compare to the top defenses in the SEC?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, I think it's very, very comparable. This is as good a front seven as we've seen. They do a great job jumping in and out of their odd defense and going from an odd to a four-down front, and they've got big, physical, fast players. They run well on the back end, very well coached. They're just a really, really good defense.

AJ McCARRON: I would say the same thing. They do a really good job of trying to confuse you as an offense, jumping from one thing to another. Like I said earlier, we're going to have to be on our "A" game.

Q. I wonder if you could talk about the adversity that you faced when you were a real young kid, what happened, how severe it really was and maybe how it's shaped you?

AJ McCARRON: You're talking about the WaveRunner wreck?

Q. Yes.

AJ McCARRON: I mean, it's all pretty crazy. I'm a big believer in the Man above, God has a plan for you, and everything happens for a reason. I felt like it was my second chance at life.

I think me and my mom kind of promised each other since I got that second chance that I'd take full advantage of it, and try to make all my dreams come true that are possible. It's kind of just wake up every day and kind of think about that and let the day play out.

Q. Some of your teammates are saying that you brought a lot of shoes to this event. Kenny and you kind of have a competition, a fetish Eddie Lacy called it. Explain that, what's with the shoes, and how many did you bring?

AJ McCARRON: Well, I brought a whole bagful. I've got a lot of shoes. I've always been that way ever since I was little. I figure you can wear the same outfit and change the shoes and it looks like a totally different outfit.

You know, I'm just big into shoes. Me and Kenny kind of go back and forth and kind of compete and see how many each of us have. But yeah, I definitely brought a lot.

Q. Coach, in the world of assistant coaches, what does the Frank Broyles Award mean to you guys?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Oh, I think it's an outstanding award. Any time you can be honored as the Assistant Coach of the Year, it says a lot about what your team has been able to accomplish and your unit specifically when you talk about an assistant coach.

Q. AJ, you talked about your love for Barrett Jones, what do you do that gets under his skin so badly? And does he ever get under your skin? And Doug, for you, talk about Amari Cooper if you would, too.

AJ McCARRON: You know, Barrett is such a smart guy. He talks so much sometimes, so that's probably what gets under my skin is I've got to tell him to be quiet sometimes in the huddle.

But probably what gets under his skin so much is when I prove him wrong. He hates to be wrong, so I always love it when I do that.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: As does AJ now.

Q. Does it happen often?

AJ McCARRON: It does. Every practice.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Yes, Amari obviously, AJ touched on it earlier, has had a very, very good season for us. You know, when you get a wide receiver of his caliber, and to have the big-play capability he has, obviously the big challenge early on is not to give him too much to where he's playing slow. So we really started with a small package for Coop, and it's kind of evolved as it's gone, and now he has the ability to do a lot of different things for us. And that's just any young player getting into a system, learning, but obviously his ability to create big plays in the passing game for us this season, it's been a huge part of our success.

Q. We talked to AJ a bunch about the benefits of having the freedom to change plays before the snap. From your perspective what is the benefit to that? And being so high up in the booth, are there any moments of anxiety to have it in his hands?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: No, because I know how hard he prepares, and going into the game, we're talking all the time about, hey, thinking about calling this in this situation, here's what we can expect. This is this, this is that, getting a feel for how he's feeling the game and the game plan. I think that's very important. There's really no anxiety from that standpoint.

I think that when you have a quarterback that has the ability to see defenses AJ does and spends the amount of time studying, understands the game, it gives you flexibility, and it gives you the ability to do that.

Q. AJ, can you talk about your relationship with Starla Chapman, and how does she maybe help you keep things in perspective, and your own accident as a child, how much did that make you want to get more involved?

AJ McCARRON: I always loved giving back. I think my mom has done a tremendous job of raising me in that aspect of life. She's always taught me to kind of give back to people a little less fortunate. I've been blessed enough to be in a position to kind of touch people's lives, inspire them in certain ways, and she was a blessing to me.

Just kind of met her on that Christmas Eve, that day at USA Women's and Children's Hospital, and our relationship has taken off from there. Her family named me her godfather a couple months after that, and I still wear her bracelet today. I never take it off. I'm always thinking about her. She's a special girl.

Q. This question is for either or both of you: Sometimes a lot is made of the timing aspect after a layoff, but Alabama has been through it a few times successfully. Can you talk about what some of those specific challenges are of having such a long layoff for an offense?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, as in any game, ball security is an issue, and I think a lot of it is you don't spend a lot of time in live tackling-type situations, especially for the ball carriers.

You know, you have such a long layoff before you play that it's almost like a new season. And the preparation, you prepare the way you prepare, and ball security is an issue. And then just getting back in the flow of playing football in a game-type environment.

Obviously our players, Coach, have been through this before, so the process from when we started our preparation after the SEC Championship was well planned out. We had a calendar from day one, and we're very excited to get out and play.

Q. Doug, what in particular does Louis Nix do that's so effective against the run? And what do you expect to see from that Jones-Nix match-up?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, he's a big, physical player, very athletic. One of the things you can say about their defense unit as a whole is they do an excellent job of getting off blocks. They set blocks and get to the football. Obviously there's a lot of key match-ups in this game, and obviously he's a very, very good player.

Q. What does it say about what we can expect to see and the style these two teams play that we're focusing so much on a center and a nose guard?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, they do a great job in the 3-4 scheme, and then they'll go to some even fronts out of it like I mentioned earlier, so they'll play both type of fronts.

Q. For both of you, the perception of the Alabama quarterback job description through the years is one thing. Barrett Jones is saying it might be selling AJ short to call him a game manager, the way people assume the Alabama quarterback should be in either order. And how does AJ fit the perception of the Alabama quarterback?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: Well, you know, I don't know what the definition of game manager is. I know what AJ does for our offense, and he does a lot, and it's much more than just managing.

AJ McCARRON: Like Coach just said, I think game manager can be so many different things, but I feel like my coaching staff and my teammates know what I do. That's all that matters to me.

Q. What is the job description of the Alabama quarterback to you through the years?

AJ McCARRON: I mean, are you talking about like through the history of Alabama?

Q. The whole thing, being Alabama quarterback.

AJ McCARRON: I mean, it's a tremendous honor, first off, because you know, of all the legends that have played this position at this university. So to follow in their footsteps is definitely a great honor, and I'm just trying to keep it rolling.

Q. Your O-linemen in the other room were talking about Notre Dame's execution in the red zone on defense and how effective they are and how unusual it is that they are that consistent. Is there a way that you can -- I don't know whether a grade or a scale is at every play. What defines a good execution from a defensive front?

DOUG NUSSMEIER: The thing that stands out to me, the most, they're keeping people out of the end zone, giving up 10.3 points a game. But they've created a lot of loss-yardage plays in the red zone, and when you get behind the sticks and you get out of rhythm down there it's very difficult because obviously the field shrinks. They've done a tremendous job of creating their loss-yardage plays for their opponents.

Q. For those of us who don't know AJ, how would you describe him? How have you gotten to know him?

AJ McCARRON: (Laughs).

DOUG NUSSMEIER: You get the exterior very fun-loving guy, but he is very competitive and very driven. He has that outward, outgoing personality, can mesh in any type of environment with any type of people. But behind that all is a very competitive and driven young man.

Q. Pretty much all the questions about their defense have been about the front, between Manti and Nix and everything else. Can you guys just both talk about what you've seen from the back end of their defense.

AJ McCARRON: I think Coach Nuss will say the same thing. I think they do a really good job of disguising certain coverages and try to confuse you in the later part of the play before the snap. They deserve a lot of credit, too. I know their guys up front get talked about a lot, but trust me, they make plays back there. It's not just the guys up front that have them labeled the No. 1 defense in the nation.

DOUG NUSSMEIER: They do a very good job, like AJ said, from a coverage disguise standpoint. They run very well at the corner position, they tackle very well at the safety position. Motta does a great job, it shows in the statistics that he gets to the football and makes plays. The focus, like AJ said, has been the front, but that's a very, very good defensive unit top to bottom.

OL Chance Warmack

On Notre Dame's defense

"Watching the film, they are a real physical team and get after it on defense. They are disciplined out there and don't make many mistakes. The whole defensive front has played a big role in the success that they have had this season to go with the linebackers and secondary. They have done a tremendous job in terms of stopping the run and in coverage as team. Everyone I have seen on film has done a great job of playing good, sound defense."

On whether playing in BCS National Championship before helps

"I would be lying if I didn't say experience was a good teacher helping us play in this game. However, this is a totally different game, different atmosphere. Notre Dame is a good team and we have to be ready for them."

On if Alabama would be a dynasty if they won Monday

"I don't think me or any of my teammates are thinking about that right now. We are just thinking about playing Notre Dame, they are a real good team. That is the task at hand right now."

On the development of QB AJ McCarron

"He is a lot more comfortable playing the leadership role and making the right calls, checks. He has done a great job keeping everyone confident. He has played a number of big games in his career and we have confidence in him as the quarterback."

On RB Eddie Lacy

"He is an exceptional running back – people don't give him a lot of credit, but he has been working hard to get to this position. He has made a name for himself and brings a lot of energy to the offense. On run plays, he is always ready to go and can score a touchdown on any play. I think we all saw that in the SEC Championship."

On the discipline of Notre Dame's defense...

"In order to be disciplined on defense it takes tremendous focus week in and week out. That is a hard thing to do. For them to do it for a whole season, you can tell they are very well coaches and play smart football. I have a lot of respect for them. They are as physical as anyone we have ever played and you can tell that on film."

WR Kevin Norwood

On whether or not it is different this time around in the national championship game

"Actually, it is because it is a different mindset and it is against a different team. But at the same time we're preparing the same and we're working hard. We feel like we deserve this so we're going to go out there and play our best."

On Notre Dame's front 7

“Well we’re preparing for them like we prepare for any other team; we don’t see them any different. They do have a great front seven and they also have a good back four, so we’re preparing for them like we prepare for any other team.”

On Notre Dame’s cornerbacks

“They have some tremendous athletes; their corners are physical and they move around a lot. They are quick to get in and out of their breaks and stuff like that so it is going to be fun.”

On whether or not it is easier to not let the hype get to them since they have been here before

“Most definitely. Coach (Nick) Saban always preaches to us that we’re here for one thing and that is to take care of business. We’re not leaving until we get what we want and it is just going to be a challenge for us.”

On the length of the time off from football

“The time off has given us a lot of time to recuperate from the season and allow our bodies to heal. But at the same time it has given us a lot of time to focus on this one game and given us time to prepare.”

OL Barrett Jones

On this national championship game compared to last year’s national championship game...

“It’s a lot different. I think last year it was really a kind of weird national championship because it was a team we already played. It was kind of another SEC game, it was in the South, and it just had a very SEC feel to it obviously. This year is much more like the 2009 game for me. Obviously playing an opponent that not only we have not played them but no one we have played has played them, so you don’t really have an exact measuring stick. I’ll tell you what; Notre Dame is a really good team. They have a lot of very talented players and they are very fundamental with their schemes. That’s what makes a good defense and we have a big challenge ahead of us.”

On the preparation for a national championship game and for Notre Dame...

“There is still a lot of preparation. I think certainly probably there is a little more preparation than it would’ve been. For LSU we did a lot of preparation the first time. We didn’t really change much the second time, we just executed better. We certainly have done a lot of preparation, but at the end of the day I think this game will come down to who executes better because really neither of our teams are teams that try to trick you. We are really just teams that line up, run the ball a lot, and say here is what we’re doing, stop us. I think it will come down to who executes better in the game.”

On being able to run the ball against Notre Dame’s defense...

“I don’t want to be redundant but execution. They don’t make mistakes. That’s the thing you see on film, they don’t make mistakes. They don’t slant the wrong gap and leave huge holes where they’re going to give you easy touchdowns. They make you earn it. We’re going to have to execute, use our hands well, and do it that way.”

On the advantage of having experience in national championship games...

“I think that’s probably a little overplayed to be honest. I think certainly if it helps at all it’s probably from a preparation standpoint. I think the coaching staff has a very good idea on the best way of how to prepare with a long layoff. As far as the actual experience, once you get there it’s about who plays a better game, not even who the better team is, just who plays a better game. I think that’s a little overdone.”

On trying to balance having fun and getting ready to play the game...

“This is a business trip, and that is what we’ve said all along. We didn’t come down here to have fun. We came down here to win a game. Certainly we can have a little fun on the way, but our main purpose of

being here is for a business trip. That's going to be our main focus with everything. We have pretty early curfews also. I know the 11 o'clock curfew's got a lot of attention, but we have pretty early curfews too. We're just really focused on winning the game."

RB Eddie Lacy

On being in Miami for the National Championship

"It's a great place, I like it. I like the beach part [and] I like to look at the water. I can see it from the balcony and it's pretty cool."

On being on the cover of SI

"I liked it because it's my first time ever being on the cover of anything. I felt like it was a big accomplishment for me personally."

On following up Trent Richardson and Mark Ingram

"I wouldn't say so much pressure, but there's a standard. They left a high standard here so coming into this season I didn't want to shoot straight for their standard, I just decided that I would play the game that I know how to play and whatever the outcome may be let it be what it is. It ended up pretty good and I'm pretty much up there with those guys."

On playing Notre Dame

"We just look at it like another opponent. We know they have a great defense [and] they are going to come out and be physical just like a lot of teams in our conference. That's the approach we're taking and they have a great red zone defense so it's probably the best we've played all season long. So we take that as a challenge and we are just going to embrace it and look forward to playing it."

On Mant Te'o

"Te'o is a great linebacker. He's big [and] physical, [he has] great lateral movement and when it comes to taking off blocks, he keeps his hands inside and gets off the block to make the tackle. He's a very explosive player for that defense and we are just going to have to do the best we can."