



Photo: Kent Gidley

Internally Driven

Nick Saban and his staff expect the 2013 Crimson Tide to shed external factors and focus inward to achieve success.

By Paul Markgraff

As head coaches move through their day-to-day lives, they are beset by responsibilities that can overtake their lives. What's the team meal going to look like? How are the strength coaches holding up with the players in the weight room? What time does practice begin and end, and how much study can I squeeze in before and after? And, oh yeah, make sure to make time for the family.

At times, these external factors can define a coach.

For the players at the University of Alabama, head coach Nick Saban wants nothing of the sort.

"If you're not affected by external factors and you really are trying to be as good as you can be, who you play shouldn't affect that," says Saban. "The score of the game shouldn't affect that.

Your record shouldn't really affect that. You should strive to be all you can be as a football player as well as a football team."

Saban knows of what he speaks. His team's Bowl Championship Series (BCS) National Championship win vs. the University of Notre Dame last January set the stage for a fan and media frenzy the likes of which has probably never been seen in college football. Like it or not, two consecutive championship wins by the Crimson Tide will have the world of college football asking every single week, "How did Alabama do?"

A New Season

Saban and his players will no doubt remain cool, collected and professional. As always, he will have a laser-like focus on the process, rather than the results,

holding true to the firm belief that if his players also focus on the process, they can't help but achieve success.

"What we try to do with our players here is get them to be thinking about doing what they need to do to be all that they can be," he says. "The things that it'll take for them to be successful, the kind of passion and commitment and work ethic they need to have, when guys don't have those things, they don't have quite as much success. That's how – big picture – we try to do it."

Saban and his staff will once again define expectations for their players.

"Personally, academically and athletically in terms of what the expectations are, what does it really take for a guy to do his job relative to his responsibility to the team?" he asks. "Individuals have to be motivated to have a sense of urgency about what they do, to have a sense of immediacy about what they're doing, and motivation to be an intelligent player, be smart and do your job."

Saban says he and his staff help his players understand that what it takes to be individually successful can also help team chemistry and help the team succeed. By showing individual players how to be the best they can personally be, they will undoubtedly help the team perform at a higher level.

"I don't really think you can separate those two things," he says. "Most people are self-absorbed and they are going to think about things relative to how those things are going to affect them. But I think you can show them that how these things affect them is better for them, as well as the team.

"It's the intangibles we're trying to get at," says Saban. "It's effort, toughness and responsibility to do your job. And accountability to the principles and values of the organization and the team. Those are the types of things that we're really trying to get established."

External factors will weigh upon the coaches and players at the University of Alabama all season long. However, the anticipation, what-ifs and the pressure of expectations for the team will likely not affect the Crimson Tide's players, if Saban has his way.

He says it simply: "We try to get our guys to lock on to the right things." 