The scoreboard has nothing to do with the process. Each possession you look across at the opponent and commit yourself to dominate that person. It’s about individuals dominating the individuals they’re playing against. If you can do this...if you can focus on the one possession and wipe out the distractions...then you will be satisfied with the result.

Nick Saban

For my money, there’s not a better coach in the country at coaching the mental side of the athlete. Enclosed is a portfolio of Nick Saban stories, quotes, and ideas. Enjoy!

-Zak Boisvert, zak@hoopgroup.com
**PROCESS**

- “Focus on the process of what it takes to be successful.”

- “We’re not going to talk about what we’re going to accomplish, we’re going to talk about how we’re going to do it.”

- “We don’t talk about winning championships, we talk about being champions.”

- “I’m tired of hearing all this talk from people who don’t understand the process of hard work—like little kids in the back seat asking ‘Are we there yet?’ Get where you’re going 1 mile-marker at a time.”

- “It’s the stages you have to go through to be successful.” – Alabama OL coach J. Pendry

- “The scoreboard has nothing to do with the process. Each possession you look across at the opponent and commit yourself to dominate that person. It’s about individuals dominating the individuals they’re playing against. If you can do this...if you can focus on the one possession and wipe out the distractions...then you will be satisfied with the result.”

- “He says ‘the grind’ a lot. The things you have to do so you can do what you want to do. Like play for the national championship. All the workouts. Spring ball. All the practices, summer workouts, and things like that.” – Alabama LB E. Anders

- “Focus on the play like it has a history and a life of its own.”

- “Success doesn’t come from pie-in-the-sky thinking. It’s the result of consciously doing something each day that will add to your overall excellence.”

- “You can’t get from A to Z by passing up B.”

- There’s no mention of titles. Instead, his message has been that the way to win a championship is to concentrate on what you’re doing today, and try to build on that tomorrow.

- “It’s not the end result. Don’t think about winning the SEC Championship. Don’t think about the national championship. Think about what you needed to do in this drill, on this play, in this moment. That’s the process: Let’s think about what we can do today, the task at hand.”

- “One thing we need to do differently in motivating players and helping them be successful is not to talk about results. Our goal next year is to be a dominant football team.”

- “The process of our 2004 national title began 400 days earlier with a loss to Arkansas. Every second of that process led us to a championship.”

- “If you don’t get result-oriented with the kids, you can focus on the things in the process that are important to them being successful.”
“The way we teach and the way we coach is not the results that you look at all the time. It’s the process of what it takes to do it right so you have the best chance to get it right.”

DARE TO BE GREAT:

“Being the absolute best isn’t natural. You must bend your entire life around being great. Beat the urge to rest after you’ve achieved a taste of success.”

“Once you get good, you need a total disposition about being better than good. Now the challenge is to be the best and that’s a never-ending process.”

CULTURE:

“We don’t have one individual on our team that can make our team great, but we can have one individual who could destroy the team chemistry by making bad decisions and destroy all the things we’re talking about.”

“Team chemistry begins to surface in the summer. True leaders start to emerge. You start to see the core buy-in that everybody has in terms of how they go about what they do. For the first time, the responsibility becomes theirs instead of somebody else’s. You start to see what the team might be.”

“It’s almost like you’re being brainwashed into, ‘This is how you play the game, how it has to be,’” Peek said. “Those stories, those messages, and how that relates to us are reiterated by the coaches.”

“I don’t want sheeps. I don’t want guys that need to be led.”

“No man stands so tall as when he stoops to help someone out.”

“He does an outstanding job of getting everybody on the same page and making sure that they understand ‘Look, you’re going to buy in or you’re going to become irrelevant.’”

“You’ve got to be responsible and accountable and be able to do your job. There’s a way you have to do it in terms of the effort, the toughness and the intangibles and dependability you have and discipline you have in carrying out your responsibility. And I, quite frankly, think when you have a critical mass of players on your team that think like that, they don’t really want other guys that don’t think that way to be out there with them.”

Five Day-to-Day Goals

- Respect and trust your teammates
- Have a positive impact on someone else
- Dominate your opponent
- Be responsible
- Act like a champion

- ‘He does an outstanding job of getting everybody on the same page and making sure that they understand ‘Look, you’re going to buy in or you’re going to become irrelevant.’”

- “You’ve got to be responsible and accountable and be able to do your job. There’s a way you have to do it in terms of the effort, the toughness and the intangibles and dependability you have and discipline you have in carrying out your responsibility. And I, quite frankly, think when you have a critical mass of players on your team that think like that, they don’t really want other guys that don’t think that way to be out there with them.”
**PARABLES:**

-“If I put a 2-by-4 on the ground and asked you to walk across it, how many of you guys could do that? You could all do it, because you’d focus on the board. But what if I took the same 2-by-4 and it put it 10 stories up, stretched between 2 buildings? Then it’s hard to focus on the board, because you’re focused on your fear of falling. Focus on your goals. Don’t be distracted by your fears. Concentrate on the 2-by-4 and we’ll get it done.”

-Joe Lipsi is a 17:1 underdog fighting Marvin Hagler. Lipsi kicks Hagler’s ass the first 3 rounds. Hagler sends Lipsi to the hospital with a blow in the 4th.

“Joe, what the fuck happened?”

“I gave him my best shot at the end of round 3 and it didn’t even faze him.”

(Hagler’s mental toughness to take Lipsi’s best shot and the competitive spirit of not showing any weakness made Lipsi quit. So when you’re out there playing and he whups you on a play. What are you telling him? When you get off the ground, what are you telling him with your body language?)

-“This generation is very, very self-absorbed. Their first, second, and third thoughts are “me, me, me”. You have to make it about them. You have to think the way they think before taking action. Example: player gets in trouble at frat party after someone called him the N-word. I wanted to tell him how I felt he should have acted, but I had to stop myself. I thought about him and approached it like this: ‘You want to play pro football right? A criminal arrest is enough to drop a player from the first round to the third round. That’s a difference of $25 million. When the officer arrived on the scene, he had the opportunity to arrest you. You put $25 million in his hands. Do you want him to hold that $25 million or do you want to?’

-After a 22-0 loss that dropped the Dolphins to 3-7, the Dolphin players returned on Monday to a placard in each of their lockers saying, **“IF YOU CONTINUE TO DO WHAT YOU’VE ALWAYS DONE, YOU’LL CONTINUE TO GET WHAT YOU’VE ALWAYS GOTTEN. GUARANTEED.”**

-Everyone acts like people should do the right thing because it’s the right thing when really it’s often because of the fear of consequence. Let me ask you a question: would you agree the road would be safer if everyone drove slower? Ok, now let me ask you why do you drive the speed limit? It’s not because driving 45 rather than 55 is the ‘right thing to do’. It’s because you don’t want a ticket, it’s the consequence, the system that is in place that keeps you disciplined. You can’t expect your players to just do the right thing always, you must put consequences in place that makes it uncomfortable if they choose to not to.

-“In college, I coached everyone the same way. When I got to the pros and Art Modell would come check out my DB drills to make sure his bonus babies were playing I realized that if I couldn’t reach
Everson Wells the way I coached, it was me that needed to change because he was playing regardless—whether I was the DB coach or it was the guy they brought in after I was fired for not playing Art Modell’s bonus babies. Whether he back-pedaled the way I wanted or not, he’s going to play. You can’t coach everyone the same way. Ask yourself: ‘How can I reach him?’

-Drews a straight horizontal line on a chalkboard, labeling one end “0” and the other “80”. “I can’t name 10 guys that played past 30, but let’s say your career ends at 30 [makes a mark at where 30 would be], what are you going to do with the rest of your life?

**DISCIPLINE:**

-“Whatever you take away from the players in term of discipline had better mean something to them.”

-“Discipline is not punishment. Discipline is changing someone’s behavior.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Components of Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Engage:</strong> You HAVE to make it about them because they don’t see it like we do. Get over it, youth have changed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inspire:</strong> Why does every coach think that everyone wants to be great? Human condition is to survive, to be average. IT IS SPECIAL TO WANT TO BE GREAT. You cannot expect your kids to want to be great. We’ve had success here at Alabama because we don’t assume people want to be great and we’ve put a system in place that makes it uncomfortable unless they’re choosing the path that will make them great. We don’t assume they will do it on their own. It’s up to us to inspire/put a system in place to make people want it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence:</strong> Thoughts, Habits, Priorities. Influence these 3 (IN THAT ORDER!)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impact:</strong> How do we impact them? How do they impact each other? Peer intervention + peer pressure.</td>
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**ACADEMICS:**

-“You know, we’re always getting on guys when they don’t get the job done academically. I’d like to let them know when they’re doing something good, too. Try to get a note to me whenever a kid gets an A or does something good in the community.”

-“We help our players be successful first as people, second as students—develop a career off the field because that’s the thing that will have the most significant impact on your quality of life. Third, we develop them as a football player. Lastly, we will use all the resources available at the institution to help you launch your career.”
**SYSTEM:**

- Meets with his full staff every day at 11 AM during the season to discuss all aspects of the football program.

- “Nick has unique ability to make everyone in the building single-minded in purpose. There’s nobody in there that isn’t doing something to try to win.” –Bill Belichick

- 2 things that impact winning the most:
  - How you bring players to your team (recruiting/hiring/drafting)
  - How you develop them once they’re there.

- “Best person I know at putting a system into place.” –Kevin Elko, motivational speaker

- “Everything for us goes back to trust and respect. Trust and respect the principles of organization, trust and respect each other.”

- “He puts a structure in place that covers all areas from ankle-wrappers to play-callers. Everyone is held accountable. It’s a system where people know there’s a standard, an expectation that you’re there to meet.” –Major Applewhite

- First day of practice: establish the attitude and mindset you want with the players.

- “Create a culture of expectations, have a vision and encourage behavior that enforces your road map.”

**STANDARDS:**

- “I think it’s important that we’re all on the same page, in terms of what we’re doing, how we’re doing it and why it’s important to do it that way. But also the standard of what we all visualize as good, acceptable, that’s going to help us improve, [and with] growth and development.”

- “You have to challenge people to do things a certain way and it may be more than what they expect from themselves. You have to re-enforce positive performance when they do it, but you also have to confront them to do it correctly if they don’t do it that way. And there’s a balance in there.”

- “Are you defining what you expect? If I walked up to them and asked ‘what does the coach expect you to do here?’ Would he be able to answer? Is what you expect from them defined? How they act, how they dress, the 3 technique…”

- “Everybody has to be accountable to a standard and the question is ‘what is everyone doing to impact the success? What is the standard, both individually and collectively?’”
ATTENTION TO DETAIL:

- #1 thing Florida State Head Coach Jimbo Fisher took away from his time with Saban

- “Number one thing I took away is he spends more time on how to do it than any other head coach in the country. Just obsessed with the details, concerns himself with how to do it rather than just what to do.” – Kirby Smart

- “Programs talk about what they want to do and how they want to do it, but Coach Saban makes sure everything is written down. It’s something you can visualize. They didn’t have that at my old school [Georgia Tech]. They talked about things, but it wasn’t reiterated like that.” – UA TE C. Peek

SELF-DISCIPLINE:

- “At some point you’re going to suffer through 1 of 2 things: the pain of discipline (because it’s not always easy to be disciplined) or the pain of regret (because you’ll always be disappointed what you accomplished if you didn’t suffer the pain of discipline).”

- “Discipline is to do what you’re supposed to the way it’s supposed to be done.”

- “Everything you do, everything you have, everything you become is ultimately the result of the choices you have made. You have the power to direct your life. How will you use it? What’s your choice?”

- “You have to have discipline to do things on your own. There’s not always going to be someone to make you do it. You have to have discipline to do it yourself.”

- “There’s no easy way. I never said it would be easy. Never said football would be easy, I never said school would be easy. It’s going to be difficult—most things worth having are!”

PREGAME

- “Play for 60 minutes. The scoreboard means nothing. Play the next play, dominate the man in front of you.”

- “It’s passion. It starts from down here. Go get what you want, go fight for what you want.”

- At half of national championship: “All we have to do is be us.”

- “Execute the play, do your job!”

- “You start fast and you finish strong.”

- “This is an opportunity to create an identity for this program.”
-“Go out and dominate your opponent. **Make his ass quit!**”

-“You’re going to have go out there and change how they think. Every play, wear them down.”

**MOTIVATION**

-“We’ve had to live with this loss for 365 days, and we’ll have to live with it for another 365 days if it happens again.”

-“**How much capacity do you have for success? How much do you believe in yourself? What do you expect to accomplish?**”

-“Big thing you worry about after success is how players will focus on process of improvement and how complacent they will be with what they accomplished.”

-“I don’t care what you did yesterday. If you’re happy with that, you have bigger problems.”

-“The power of losing: “Losers are more willing to polish their techniques, to practice hard and do whatever it takes, even into the wee hours, to become the absolute best.”

-“A loss can be a thunderbolt. A tremendous negative that can serve as a turning point.”

**RECRUITING**

-Mission statement: “To create an atmosphere and environment for everyone to be able to succeed.”

-“The kind of personal development that you have really affects everything you do. Our mission statement here is that we want to help you be successful as a person, a student, an athlete. We want you to be more successful in life having been involved with the program. And if you don’t have the right character or attitude, then probably none of that is going to happen.”

-“**Personnel evaluation is an inexact science because of one thing: it’s very hard to figure out what’s in somebody’s head,** what kind of passion for whatever they do. How important it is to them, how much they’re going to work if you invest time in them. Those are the multiples you try to work with, and you try and do it by talking to coaches and the people around them and get to know them.”

-“I base everything off what I did with Nick [Saban],” Muschamp said. “We really identify the critical factors of each position. We are looking for size and speed on film, character and work ethic. All of these
Intangibles are part of the evaluation process for each position. We know exactly what we want to fit into our scheme in that mold.

-Saban sets a standard at each position, identifying key characteristics within each position with the offensive and defensive systems that he runs. Each prospect who is recruited, depending on the position, has to meet certain measurable (height, weight, speed, etc.), among other criteria. Rarely will Saban deviate. “Often they take some heat publicly because there could be a big-time guy that may not meet their critical factors. It doesn’t mean he’s not a great player. It just means he’s not the right fit for Alabama.”

-4 prongs of development: Character, Academic, Athletic, and Career.

With the help of motivational speaker Kevin Elko, Saban charged the Alabama players with task of putting together a team affirmation—a positive assertion repeated by players to keep them focused on all the small things needed to achieve the long-term goal of a national title.

- TEAM: 100% effort and accountability
- OFFENSE: Be capable of an explosive play on any given snap
- DEFENSE: Never give up an inch

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

-“Mental toughness is a perseverance that you have when you can make yourself do something that you really don’t feel like doing. You don’t really feel like getting up, but you get up. You don’t feel like practicing today, but you practice. And, even in difficult circumstances and difficult surroundings, you can stay focused on what you need to stay focused on. So it really is a mental discipline to be able to stick within whatever circumstance you are in and continue to persevere at a high level and not let other circumstance affect how you perform.”

-“You make a choice in playing a play as hard as you can or not. It’s a choice- are you going to run 10 yards as fast as you can or not?”

-“I will not allow my players to put their hand on their knees or show in their faces they are tired going into the fourth quarter. If they do, they are going to get their butts whipped. If they do that, they are showing the other team they can be beat.”

-“There’s not one person in this room who feels like doing what we do EVERY SINGLE DAY he wakes up. It’s just not possible, we demand excellence and that’s hard and there will be days you wake up and you don’t feel like doing it. It’s important that you make yourself do it because it’s the path to getting what you want.”
“The mental toughness training was geared toward showing players that their minds were as important to football success as their bodies.”

“We often stated to them [Alabama football players] that you could place two athletes side by side at the pro level and the only difference between them is how they think.” – Alabama staffer

“To wear a player down, everybody wants to play hard in the beginning of the game, it takes a long time to wear a player down, so you have to have a tremendous amount of mental toughness to be able to do that, to sustain it yourself.”

“The difference between my first 2 Alabama teams wasn’t talent or ability, but the psychological disposition in terms of confidence and believing in themselves—knowing they could do it and FINISH it. There was an expectation that second year that if we did things a certain way, we could beat anyone in the country.”

**PRACTICE**

“We need more guys to finish and compete and be responsible. We can’t develop the attitude that we’re going to endure practice. That’s a dangerous place to go when you just start enduring practice instead of going out there with a purpose and improving on things you need to improve on.”

“Every day you come out here, you get better or you get worse. You’re not going to stay the same and it’s all going to start with how you think. How you think will determine the mental intensity you play with. Without that mental intensity, we cannot

**FOUR FINGER SALUTE**

The four-finger salute held up by UA football players at the beginning of the fourth quarter. Each finger stands for discipline, commitment, effort, and toughness. The thumb is pride.

**INTANGIBLES**

“I think that intangibles are probably really important to being a good competitor and I think most people who have passion for something as important to them is what gets them to commit to something, and your mind kind of does whatever you tell it to do. So once you have the passion and the commitment, at least you’re going to be moving in the right direction when it comes to work ethic, discipline, trying to make good choices about what you do and what you don’t do. The effort, the toughness and the discipline to execute are probably the key ingredients to any sport...I think those part of your character and who you are, and I think the same ingredients would be necessary to be successful in anything.”
“There are 3 intangibles that take no athletic ability that aids a player in being responsible for his own self-determination. Those 3 intangibles take the most time in coaching in my opinion. Those intangibles are effort, toughness, and assignment.”

“I think the things that it takes to be successful are the same regardless, whether it’s passion, commitment, hard work, investing your time in the right things, perseverance, pride in performance, how you think in a positive and negative way, the discipline you have personally—you have to make choices in your decisions.”

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

“If your stud makes isn’t going hard or screws up an assignment, don’t run and hide because he can run 4.4 and he’s a future 1st rounder. The best players are the guys you better confront because if the studs are doing it right, you won’t have any other problems.”

“You can’t have a good program if you don’t work to dominate your opponent.”

“We’re 42 hours away and for the next 42 hours I want you thinking about one thing: we’re going to beat their ass.”

“He doesn’t obsess over national championships, he obsesses over trying to push people to be better. He thinks if he can do that, the wins will come.”

“You don’t dominate someone the first play, you do it the 70th play. You need to sustain.”

“Make all your decisions based on winning.” (#1 thing Saban learned from Chuck Knoll)

“The problem with young players is that they’re so sensitive. They get upset every time you say something to them. We’re not evaluating you when we correct you, it’s called teaching.”

“What’s going to Florida’s passion? What’s going to be LSU’s passion? Tennessee’s? Ours? That’s what will determine what is going to happen—passion, purpose in what we want to do, what we want to accomplish.”

-Locker room sign: “Don’t Come Back Until You’ve Improved”

“Be relentless in the pursuit of your goal and resilient in the face of bad luck and adversity.”

“The one thing our program is based upon is finishing. Finish games. Finish your reps. Finish your running. Finish practice strong. Finish the fourth quarter.” –Alabama OL Will Vlachos

“Don’t look at the scoreboard. Whether you’re ahead or behind shouldn’t affect how you participate.”

“What I would like for every football team to do that we play is to sit there and say ‘I hate playing against these guys. Their effort, their toughness, relentless resiliency, go out every play and focus, play the next play, compete for 60 minutes in the game.”
- Will challenge his players by stopping practice and illustrating a playground game before asking, “Would you pick you? Would you pick you to be on your team?”

- “You must work together before you win together.”

- Chuck Daly’s 24 hour rule: both coaches and players, you celebrate or grieve only for 24 hours then you move on.

- Body language: “What are you selling?”

- 3 I’s: Intelligence, Immediacy, Intensity

- “There’s a difference between wanting something and being committed to it.”

- “Practice wasn’t as bad as I acted, but it’s a good thing they [the players] think it was.”

- “You don’t get what you want, you get what you deserve. YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.”

- “I think it’s an identity that we’ve always tried to create. Be aggressive, physical, play with a lot of toughness. Strike them, knock them back. Be aggressive and relentless in your style of how you play and how you compete.”

- “It was such a pivotal game because that was the first game in which our guys sensed that if they put in the buy in and do it the right way, they could accomplish significant things.”

- “Teaching is the ability to inspire learning.”