

Alabama

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team that was on a mission after losing to eventual champion Ohio State in the semifinals last season. Saban had said that the Crimson Tide had “sort of participated in the game” and wanted to “make a statement and do something special.” The Crimson Tide did that and gave Saban, who won a Bowl Championship Series championship at LSU in 2003, his fifth national title, one fewer than legendary Alabama coach Bear Bryant. Clemson (14-1) was trying to win its first title since 1981 and to become the first Foot-

ball Bowl Subdivision team to win 15 games in a season. The Tigers sacked Coker five times and held several leads but could not hold off the Crimson Tide. “There’s no doubt we’ll be back,” Clemson Coach Dabo Swinney said. “It won’t be 34 years before we’re going to be back, I guarantee you that.” From the outset, the game was a showcase for Heisman winner Henry and Heisman finalist Watson. Alabama offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin had utilized Henry largely as a decoy in the Tide’s 38-0 Cotton Bowl victory over Michigan State. But Henry ran for 128 yards and two touchdowns in 20 carries in the first half. Defensive back Eddie Jackson set up

one of the touchdowns with an interception. Watson passed for two touchdowns in the first half, which ended with the score tied, 14-14, and set the stage for an exciting finish. Coker’s 53-yard touchdown pass to Howard early in the third quarter put Alabama ahead, but a field goal and Wayne Gallman’s touchdown run gave Clemson the lead, 24-21. An Alabama field goal tied it, 24-24, before the game’s key play — the onside kick. Adam Griffith kicked off short and into the air toward the Clemson sideline. Alabama’s Marlon Humphrey leaped and caught the ball to give the Tide possession. “I felt at the time we needed to do something to change the

momentum of the game,” Saban said of the decision to try what he called a “pop” kick. “If we didn’t get it, they’d have got the ball on the 45- or 50-yard line, so it’s not really like it would have been the end of the world, but it was worth the risk I felt.” Two plays later, Coker hit Howard for a 51-yard touchdown and a 31-24 lead. “A huge momentum play,” Swinney said of the kick. Howard caught five passes for 208 yards with two touchdowns, and afterward said, “Coach Saban is going to go down as one of the greatest of all time.” The teams traded touchdowns and Clemson pulled to within 45-40 on Watson’s final scoring pass, but the onside kick went out of bounds.

Patriots

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“It’s a team that’s already won a playoff game. They’re obviously playing as well as any team we’ve played all year, and we would expect this to be the best defense we’ve played.”

Belichick had an unsurprisingly similar assessment of what lies ahead for a Brady-led offense that found the going much tougher down the stretch, although the expected return of Julian Edelman should be a boost for the passing attack. “Collectively, it’s a good defense, not predicated on any one guy, but they all play well together and they have a lot of good players. They’re all problems, really,” Belichick pointed out.

And the New England coach is quick to point out that it’s not like a team can look at a recent Chiefs loss to begin building a game plan. There are no recent Kansas City losses.

“The fact that they haven’t lost in so long, it’s not like you can go to a game and say OK well here is how this team defeated them,” Belichick said. “That just doesn’t exist. We’ve got to figure out a way and there is not a great example on film. There are different things we can point to and different ideas or concepts or a certain part of the game that went well for one of Kansas City’s opponents but overall nothing really that you could say OK well this team found a way to do it because they didn’t.”

But in many ways, Belichick also believes that’s not important, either. Recent and distant history alike are irrelevant. The Chiefs beat up the Patriots last September and haven’t been beaten as a team in months. New England opened the year with the best offense in football and sputtered down the stretch.

Belichick mum on black eye

Belichick showed up for Tuesday’s press conference with a swollen, bruised left eye. He would not say how he suffered the injury. “I don’t think we need to list the coaches on the injury report,” Belichick said, according to ESPN. “But I’m sure if we’re required to do it, we’ll do it.”

Pats scout named Lions GM

Bob Quinn was announced as the Detroit Lions GM Monday afternoon after 16 seasons as a versatile, respected member of the New England Patriots scouting department.

Though not a name with which people are likely too familiar, Quinn more than earned his shot in Detroit and Belichick is clearly rooting for a guy he leaned on heavily over his entire career in New England.

“Of course I’m happy for Bob,” Belichick said. “He’s done a great job for us and really has been kind of one of the foundation blocks from the last decade-and-a-half. He did a lot of things for us, pro and college. But it’s a great opportunity for him. It’s a great organization.

“Happy for Bob. Great opportunity for him. Other than when we see them, which is infrequently, I wish him and the Lions all the best.”

No job interviews for coordinators

Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels and defensive coordinator Matt Patricia are being mentioned as head coach prospects, but neither has been interviewed.

“I think they are both ready and willing to be head coaches,” said Quinn, who came to Detroit after serving as director of pro scouting in New England. He says he has great relationships with both McDaniels and Patricia.

Patricia interviewed for the Cleveland head coaching job over the weekend. McDaniels has not interviewed with anybody, but is expected to do so.

He was was Denver’s head coach in 2009-10 and had a record of 11-17. He has been the Patriots organization and has been defensive coordinator since 2012.



The University of Maine’s Joe Harasymiak instructs players during practice last season at Morse Field in Orono. Harasymiak, now the head football coach, said fans can expect a more multifaceted offense next fall.

Harasymiak added. Even though Harasymiak, a former Springfield College cornerback, has spent most of his first eight seasons on the defensive side of the ball, he believes that perspective can be helpful in formulating an offensive philosophy. UMaine will return two seasoned quarterbacks in Dan Collins and Drew Belcher, and a blossoming group of wide receivers led by Micah Wright, Jordan Dunn, Jared Osumah and Jaleel Reed likely will give opponents an entirely new look. The Black Bears also lose only two offensive linemen be-

cause of graduation and expect to return tailbacks Nigel Beckford and Darian Davis-Ray. “If you were to look on paper right now, you’d say our wideouts are really good in terms of who’s coming back,” Harasymiak said. “We have to be able to use them, as well as develop the running game and stay healthy. “It’s going to be something new for the guys and any time there’s new blood, you need to learn and go from there and use the personnel the right way,” he added. Harasymiak explained he plans to utilize the best of for-

mer head coach Jack Cosgrove’s building blocks for the program while introducing new ideas from a different perspective. Cosgrove’s mantra included the three Ps: prepare, present and perform, which translated to the student-athletes’ efforts on the football field, in the classroom and in the community. “There’s structure here that Cos has in place that works and that’s who Maine is,” Harasymiak said. “We’ll tweak some of the things that maybe a younger eye would tend to see and how kids relate to certain things.”

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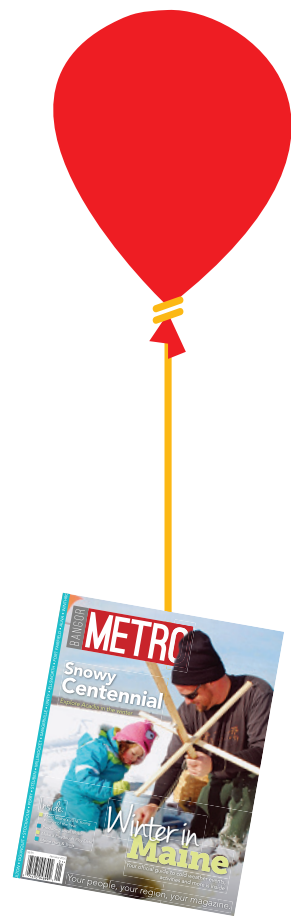
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