

College Football

Saban gambling again with early purge of Kiffin

You can only poke the bear so much.

Lane Kiffin kept running his mouth, and it may have cost him a chance to stay at Alabama for one more week.

But Nick Saban is taking a real gamble here, even more than the onside kick that helped turn the tide in last year's national championship game.

If Alabama's offense performs well against Clemson and helps deliver a fifth national championship in eight years, then Saban will be vindicated in his decision to switch up offensive coordinators a week before the big game.

If the Crimson Tide falters — and, frankly, they didn't look all that impressive offensively in what turned out to be Kiffin's farewell at the Peach Bowl — then Saban is sure to face plenty of questions about the wisdom of carrying out what has all the looks of a Soviet-style purge.

Kiffin, of course, was already set to leave Tuscaloosa at the end of the College Football Playoff to take the head coaching job at Florida Atlantic. He was supposed to stay through the end of the Crimson Tide's season, and indeed was on the sideline last Saturday, flip card in hand, for a 24-7 semifinal victory over

Washington.

Two days later, Saban stunningly announced that Kiffin wouldn't be around for the championship game, giving way immediately to offensive coordinator-in-waiting Steve Sarkisian.

The head coach issued a vague statement that created more questions than it answered, something about the "time demands of managing both jobs" being too much for Kiffin to handle even though this has become a familiar arrangement for assistants moving on to head coaching jobs.



PAUL NEWBERRY
AP Sports

Kirby Smart stayed on as Saban's defensive coordinator through the national championship game last season after being hired by Georgia. Two seasons ago, Tom Herman finished out Ohio State's title run as offensive coordinator before becoming the head coach at Houston and, now, Texas.

Kiffin may have sealed his fate at Alabama with some inflammatory comments in the days leading up to the Peach Bowl. When asked about the happiest moments of his three-year tenure, Kiffin said he only remembered the many times he was chewed out by his boss. Kiffin also said that he thought Sarkisian's personality would be a better fit with the demanding Saban.

Given that Saban



AP Photo/LM Otero, File

In this Sept. 5, 2015, file photo, Alabama head coach Nick Saban, right, looks on as offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin calls a play on the sidelines during the second half of an NCAA college football game against Wisconsin in Arlington, Texas.

extended a coaching lifeline to Kiffin after he was unceremoniously fired at the airport by Southern Cal, those comments surely didn't go over well.

Considering the way Alabama played in the Peach Bowl, passing for 57 yards and getting just 17 points from the offense (one touchdown came off an interception return), Saban had further reason to push up Sarkisian's start date, even if that meant ditching a coach the offensive players are much more familiar with — some for as many as three seasons.

As an analyst, Sarkisian wasn't permitted to have that sort of relationship.

"They're involved in the planning. They're involved in the organization. That's where they make their contribution, in the coaching meetings," Saban said. "They're not really allowed to be involved with the team."

It will be interesting to see how that dynamic plays out next Monday night in Tampa.

Just don't expect Saban to spend any time talking about it.

"I don't know why you all keep asking me what changes we're going to make," Saban said during a previously scheduled teleconference Tuesday, one that he surely would have

preferred to skip.

Then, he added sarcastically that Clemson coach Dabo Swinney "is a good friend of mine. Maybe I'll just call him up and tell him what we're going to do."

Saban got especially testy when asked to elaborate on why it was the best interests of Kiffin and Alabama that he not hang around for seven more days.

"I don't have anything else to say about this," Saban said. "We did what we did for the reasons that I've stated many, many times before, and there's really nothing else to talk about. So there's no why, there's no if, there's no but. It just is what it is. The statement says

what it is. We're moving forward, so let's talk about the game. I mean, it's only fair to the players who have worked hard on both teams to have an opportunity to play in a great, competitive venue, and that's what we'd like to talk about."

Not long before Saban spoke, Kiffin made it sound like it was his decision to leave, which really stretched the bounds of credibility — especially when he also raised the idea of essentially flipping jobs with Sarkisian to stay on with the Crimson Tide as an analyst through the title game.

"This was not something that Nick Saban forced me to do by any means," Kiffin insisted. "If I wanted to coach this game, I would have coached this game. I just thought that it wasn't the best thing for the players."

Saban quickly shot down the idea of Kiffin helping out next Monday.

"It's really not even possible from a legal standpoint for him to do those things," the Alabama coach said. "That's not something that we're interested in pursuing."

Saban is rolling the dice again.

Let's see if it pays off with another championship.

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Fewer games? Games on campus? Bowls could get a makeover

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

Meaningless bowls. Too many bowls. Made-for-TV bowls. Shrinking bowl attendance.

There have never been more bowl games, and three years into the College Football Playoff era there are more questions than ever about why these games are being played at all. Especially when high-profile players such as Christian McCaffrey and Leonard Fournette choose to skip the postseason to protect their bodies for the NFL draft.

There is currently an NCAA-imposed freeze on the creation of new bowls that caps the field at 40 through 2019. Over the next few years the people invested in the bowls — commissioners, athletic directors and bowl executives — will consider ways to improve the bowl system and answer the question: What should bowls be?

Chances are there will be fewer bowls, data-driven limitations on how many bowls a conference can lock in and maybe even postseason games played on campus. But for those who long for the days when there were a dozen or so bowls that rewarded only the very best teams in college football, well, you might as well wish for the return of leather helmets.

Neither is coming back.

Everyone seems to agree that while the bowl system is not perfect, it does not need to be razed.

Andy Bagnato is a former sports writer who also worked for four years as a public relations executive for the Fiesta Bowl. He now runs Bagnato Pflipsen Communications, a consulting firm that helped Phoenix land the this year's Final Four and last year's College Football Playoff championship game.

"The question for people in college football is: What's the utility of the bowl?" Bagnato said. "Is it a great trip for your alumni? For your student-athletes? Is it television exposure for four hours for your program? Is it a branding exercise for the school and for a conference? For the communities I think the questions become: Are they tourism magnets? Is the utility of a bowl game the fact that it attracts tourists? All those are factors."

"I don't know there is one reason to have a bowl game."

The main reason is the same as it ever was. "The first thing we want them to be is a reward for the players," said Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby, who also leads the NCAA's football oversight committee.

The problem is that bowls also reward competence, not excellence.



Albert Cesare/The Montgomery Advertiser via AP

In this Dec. 17, 2016, file photo, fans watch during the Camelia Bowl NCAA college football game between Toledo and Appalachian State in Montgomery, Ala.

Once the minimum for postseason eligibility was drawn at 6-6 when the regular season expanded to 12 games, pressure built on conference officials to place each eligible team in a bowl.

Coaches want the extra bowl practices to develop players and the ability to sell a bowl game to recruits.

"Mr. Commissioner, if my 6-6 team stays home I'm going to be your worst enemy," Football Bowl Association Executive Director Wright Waters recalled hearing from one university president back when he was commissioner Sun Belt Conference.

The bowl lineup grew to 40 games as Power Five conferences locked up spots

in most existing games and other conferences such as the American Athletic Conference, Sun Belt and Mountain West worked to create new games — often with the help of ESPN.

The result is that during the last two years 5-7 teams played in bowl games.

"Beginning in 2020 I seriously doubt there will be 40 bowl games," Sun Belt Commissioner Karl Benson, who has previously been the commissioner of the Western Athletic Conference and the Mid-American Conference.

But no conference is about voluntarily shut down one of its bowls.

That's where the oversight committee will come in. Bowlsby said the group has been analyzing data to

determine how many bowl slots each conference can typically fill. When bowl lineups are reset for 2020 and beyond, conferences will likely be limited to a number that matches a five-year average of the eligible teams they have produced.

Benson said when Texas State went 6-6 in 2013 but was shut out of the postseason, the conference broached the idea having the Bobcats play a 13th game on campus.

"It could be a way to navigate when we have too many teams for the number of bowls," Benson said.

Maybe it would help attendance, which dropped 4.94 percent this season from last, according to data compiled by the Football Bowl Association. Average attendance went from 43,018 in 2015-16 to 40,893 this season.

"I think the industry is healthy," said Pete Derzis, senior vice president for ESPN Events, which owns and operates 13 bowls, mostly matching teams from outside Power Five conferences. All but four of the 40 FBS bowl games, plus the national championship game, are televised on an ESPN network.

Derzis called the TV ratings for this season's bowls respectable. Waters said those final numbers were still being compiled. But ratings for one particular

game provide part of the explanation why ESPN is so heavily invested in bowls.

The Las Vegas Bowl on Dec. 17, in which San Diego State beat Houston 34-10, drew 3.7 million TV viewers on ABC, ESPN's parent network. At the same time, Kentucky and North Carolina, two of college basketball's traditional powers, played a thrilling game won by the Wildcats 103-100. The game drew 3.6 million viewers on CBS.

The ratings for the Rose Bowl, a down-to-the-wire 52-49 victory by Southern California over Penn State, jumped percent 20 percent from last year, but at 9.4 they are still way behind the days when that game would consistently draw double-digit ratings.

Now the playoff draws the most attention and everything else feels more like an exhibition.

Even if the playoff ultimately expands, college football will never have a huge tournament with dozens of participants. Reaching and winning a good bowl game is still a major goal for most programs.

"But I don't think there's anything wrong with ending your season with a victory," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said. "And if we just go to a total playoff, then there's only one team happy."

SCOREBOARD

Local Slate

BOYS' PREP BASKETBALL
Thursday
Mac-Hi at Riverside, 7 p.m.
Echo at Nixyaawii, 7:30 p.m.
Friday
Pilot Rock at Imbler, 3 p.m.
Irrigon at Grant Union, 6:30 p.m.
Dallas at Hermiston, 7 p.m.
Helix at Cove, 7 p.m.
Union at Heppner, 7:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Enterprise, 7:30 p.m.
Mitchell/Spray at Arlington, 7:30 p.m.
lone at Condon/Wheeler, 7:30 p.m.
Joseph at Echo, 7:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Powder Valley, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday
Mountain View at Hermiston, 3:45 p.m.
Redmond at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.
Ontario at Mac-Hi, 4:30 p.m.
Stanfield at Imbler, 5:30 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 5:30 p.m.
Elgin at Heppner, 5:30 p.m.
Arlington at South Wasco, 5:30 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler at Horizon Christian (Hood River), 5:30 p.m.
Sherman at Lone, 5:30 p.m.
Helix at Powder Valley, 5:30 p.m.

GIRLS' PREP BASKETBALL
Thursday
Mac-Hi at Riverside, 6 p.m.
Echo at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.
Friday
Irrigon at Grant Union, 5 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Imbler, 6 p.m.
Union at Heppner, 6 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Enterprise, 6 p.m.
Helix at Cove, 6 p.m.
Mitchell/Spray at Arlington, 6 p.m.
lone at Condon/Wheeler, 6 p.m.
Joseph at Echo, 6 p.m.
Nixyaawii at Powder Valley, 6 p.m.
Saturday
Hermiston at Mountain View, 2 p.m.
Redmond at Pendleton, 2:45 p.m.
Ontario at Mac-Hi, 3 p.m.
Stanfield at Imbler, 4 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 4 p.m.
Elgin at Heppner, 4 p.m.
Arlington at South Wasco, 4 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler at Horizon Christian

(Hood River), 4 p.m.
Sherman at Lone, 4 p.m.
Helix at Powder Valley, 4 p.m.
PREP WRESTLING
Friday-Saturday
Mac-Hi, Irrigon, Heppner, Echo at JoHi Invite (Joseph), 9 a.m.
Saturday
Riverside at Grandview (WA) Winter Classic, 9 a.m.
Pendleton at Brunner Invitational (Dallas), 9 a.m.
PREP SWIMMING
Saturday
Pendleton, Hermiston at The Dalles Meet (at Hood River Aquatic Center), 10 a.m.

MEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL
Today
Treasure Valley at Blue Mountain, 8 p.m.
Friday
Warner Pacific at Eastern Oregon, 4:30 p.m.
Saturday
Blue Mountain at Big Bend, 2 p.m.
Multnomah at Eastern Oregon, 7:30 p.m.
WOMEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL
Today
Treasure Valley at Blue Mountain, 6 p.m.
Friday
Warner Pacific at Eastern Oregon, 5:30 p.m.
Saturday
Blue Mountain at Big Bend, 2 p.m.
Multnomah at Eastern Oregon, 5:30 p.m.

COLLEGE WRESTLING
Friday
Eastern Oregon vs. Embury-Riddle (at Menlo Duals), 6 p.m.
Saturday
Eastern Oregon at Menlo Duals, TBD

Prep Scores

BOYS BASKETBALL
Banks 60, Elmira 41
Beaverton 55, Jesuit 47
Canby 47, Sherwood 46
Cascade 53, Valley Catholic 48

Century 73, Glencoe 49
Corbett 47, Stayton 44
Crescent Valley 69, North Eugene 43
Davis, Wash. 82, Hermiston 59
Fruiland, Idaho 69, Baker 58, OT
Jefferson PDX 66, Cleveland 50
Kennesaw, Wash. 82, Umatilla 50
Lake Oswego 60, Newberg 26
Lakeridge 57, Tualatin 54
Lebanon 58, Milwaukie 50
Lincoln 59, Benson 47
Madison 72, Franklin 47
McKay 80, McMinnville 79
McNary 86, Forest Grove 68
Philmath 72, Centralridge, British Columbia 25
Putnam 47, Southridge 42
Silverton 50, Marist 32
Siuslaw 50, Marist 46
Sisters 54, Redmond 33
Siuslaw 52, Waldport 38
South Albany 64, North Marion 58
South Umpqua 63, Cottage Grove 57, OT
Springfield 68, Sheldon 58
Summit 57, Churchill 54
Sunnyside, Wash. 62, Pendleton 53
Tillamook 55, Gladstone 48
West Albany 79, North Salem 65
West Linn 69, Tigard 54
West Salem 54, South Salem 47
Westview 72, Sunset 51

GIRLS BASKETBALL
Banks 56, Elmira 25
Benson 45, Lincoln 35
Cascade 62, Valley Catholic 47
Century 56, Glencoe 36
Churchill 76, South Eugene 55
Cleveland 74, Jefferson PDX 37
Corvallis 58, Springfield 35
Cottage Grove 38, South Umpqua 27
Crescent Valley 63, North Eugene 49
Franklin 55, Madison 39
Grant 81, Roosevelt 26
Hermiston 53, La Grande 25
Jesuit 56, Beaverton 32
Lake Oswego 58, Newberg 37
Lebanon 46, Milwaukie 43
McMinnville 64, McKay 20
McNary 43, Forest Grove 41, OT
Newport 43, Junction City 29
North Marion 47, South Albany 45
Nyssa 55, Ontario 39
Redmond 47, Sisters 28

Sherwood 45, Canby 42
Silverton 50, Marist 32
Siuslaw 56, Waldport 31
South Salem 72, West Salem 40
Southridge 60, Liberty 18
St. Mary's Academy 54, Tualatin 45, OT
Stayton 52, Corbett 38
Lake Oswego 60, Newberg 26
Lakeridge 57, Tualatin 54
Lebanon 58, Milwaukie 50
Lincoln 59, Benson 47
Madison 72, Franklin 47
McKay 80, McMinnville 79
McNary 86, Forest Grove 68
Philmath 72, Centralridge, British Columbia 25
Putnam 47, Southridge 42
Silverton 50, Marist 32
Siuslaw 50, Marist 46
Sisters 54, Redmond 33
Siuslaw 52, Waldport 38
South Albany 64, North Marion 58
South Umpqua 63, Cottage Grove 57, OT
Springfield 68, Sheldon 58
Summit 57, Churchill 54
Sunnyside, Wash. 62, Pendleton 53
Tillamook 55, Gladstone 48
West Albany 79, North Salem 65
West Linn 69, Tigard 54
West Salem 54, South Salem 47
Westview 72, Sunset 51

Wild-card Playoffs
Saturday
Oakland at Houston, 1:35 p.m. (ESPN)
Detroit at Seattle, 5:15 p.m. (NBC)
Sunday
Miami at Pittsburgh, 10:05 a.m. (CBS)
N.Y. Giants at Green Bay, 1:40 p.m. (FOX)

Divisional Playoffs
Saturday, Jan. 14
Seattle, Green Bay or N.Y. Giants at Atlanta, 1:35 p.m. (FOX)
Houston, Oakland or Miami at New England, 5:15 p.m. (CBS)
Sunday, Jan. 15
Pittsburgh, Houston or Oakland at Kansas City, 10:05 a.m. (NBC)
Green Bay, N.Y. Giants or Detroit at Dallas, 1:40 p.m. (FOX)

Bowl Glance
Monday, Jan. 9
National Championship
at Tampa, Fla.
Alabama (14-0) vs. Clemson (13-1), 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Basketball
NBA
Monday's Late Game
L.A. Clippers 109, Phoenix 98
Tuesday's Games
Philadelphia 93, Minnesota 91
Indiana 121, Detroit 116
Boston 115, Utah 104
San Antonio 110, Toronto 82

Dallas 113, Washington 105
Phoenix 99, Miami 90
Sacramento 120, Denver 113
L.A. Lakers 116, Memphis 102
Today's Games
Atlanta at Orlando, 4 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Charlotte, 4 p.m.
Milwaukee at New York, 4:30 p.m.
Chicago at Cleveland, 5 p.m.
Memphis at L.A. Clippers, 7:30 p.m.
Miami at Sacramento, 7:30 p.m.
Portland at Golden State, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday's Games
Brooklyn at Indiana, 4 p.m.
Charlotte at Detroit, 4:30 p.m.
Utah at Toronto, 4:30 p.m.
Atlanta at New Orleans, 5 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Houston, 5 p.m.
Phoenix at Dallas, 5:30 p.m.
San Antonio at Denver, 6 p.m.
L.A. Lakers at Portland, 7:30 p.m.

NCAA
Men's Top 25
Tuesday's Games
No. 3 Kansas 90, Kansas State 88
No. 6 Kentucky 100, Texas A&M 58
No. 7 West Virginia at Texas Tech, 6:15 p.m.
No. 13 Wisconsin 75, No. 25 Indiana 68
No. 14 North Carolina 89, Clemson 86, OT
No. 24 Florida 70, Mississippi 63
Today's Games
No. 1 Villanova at No. 18 Butler, 3:30 p.m.
No. 2 Baylor vs. Iowa State, 5 p.m.
No. 8 Duke vs. Georgia Tech, 4 p.m.
No. 9 Louisville at No. 23 Notre Dame, 6 p.m.
No. 10 Creighton at St. John's, 5:30 p.m.
No. 11 Virginia at Pittsburgh, 6 p.m.
No. 15 Oregon at Washington, 6 p.m.
No. 21 Virginia Tech at N.C. State, 6 p.m.
Thursday's Games
No. 4 UCLA vs. California, 6 p.m.
No. 5 Gonzaga at San Francisco, 6 p.m.
No. 17 Arizona vs. Utah, 7 p.m.
No. 19 Saint Mary's vs. BYU, 8 p.m.
No. 20 Purdue at Ohio State, 4 p.m.
No. 25 Southern Cal vs. Stanford, 8 p.m.

Women's Top 25
Tuesday's Games
No. 11 Ohio State 94, Northwestern 87

Today's Games
No. 1 UConn vs. East Carolina at the XL Center, Hartford, Conn., 7 p.m.
No. 2 Baylor at No. 17 West Virginia, 7 p.m.
No. 3 Maryland at Nebraska, 8 p.m.
No. 15 Texas at Kansas, 9 p.m.
No. 20 Oklahoma vs. Kansas State, 8 p.m.
No. 22 South Florida at Tulane, 8 p.m.
No. 23 DePaul vs. Creighton, 8 p.m.
Thursday's Games
No. 4 Mississippi State at Arkansas, 8 p.m.
No. 5 South Carolina at Auburn, 7 p.m.
No. 6 Florida State at North Carolina, 7 p.m.
No. 7 Notre Dame vs. Wake Forest, 7 p.m.
No. 8 Louisville at Virginia, 7 p.m.
No. 13 Duke at Georgia Tech, 7 p.m.
No. 14 Miami at N.C. State, 7 p.m.
No. 24 Kentucky vs. Missouri, 7 p.m.

Hockey
NHL
Tuesday's Games
New Jersey 3, Carolina 1
Buffalo 4, N.Y. Rangers 1
Washington 6, Toronto 5, OT
Columbus 3, Edmonton 1
Winnipeg 6, Tampa Bay 4
Montreal 2, Nashville 1, OT
Los Angeles 2, San Jose 1, OT
Today's Games
Winnipeg at Florida, 4 p.m.
Montreal at Dallas, 5 p.m.
N.Y. Rangers at Philadelphia, 5 p.m.
Colorado at Calgary, 7 p.m.
Arizona at Vancouver, 7 p.m.
Detroit at Anaheim, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday's Games
Columbus at Washington, 4 p.m.
Edmonton at Boston, 4 p.m.
Nashville at Tampa Bay, 4:30 p.m.
Carolina at St. Louis, 5 p.m.
Buffalo at Chicago, 5:30 p.m.
Detroit at Los Angeles, 7:30 p.m.
Minnesota at San Jose, 7:30 p.m.