



Will Dabo Swinney come home?
By: Austin Rader

Coach Saban's timetable on his retirement is unknown. Fans around the country debate about this topic every day. How much longer the greatest coach of all time will roam the sidelines in Tuscaloosa? The answers vary from "until he wins one more national championship," to "3-5 more years" and even "7-10 more years."

The truth is we have no idea.

Coach Dabo Swinney, from Pelham, Alabama, was born and raised an Alabama fan. He grew up watching the Crimson Tide with his dad and brother. He idolized Coach Bryant and on Sundays he, his brother and his dad would watch "The Bear Bryant Show." Dabo attended the University of Alabama and walked on the football team as a wide receiver. He was on the 1992 championship team coached by legendary coach Gene Stallings. That team represented something that we haven't seen in college sports.

After coach Bryant retired, Alabama football became inconsistent and wasn't competing for championships on a yearly basis. After coach Curry left for Kentucky in 1989, the Alabama AD hired Gene Stallings to fill his shoes.

In just his third season, Gene Stallings built the program back up with a powerhouse defense and a serviceable offense that got the job done. An undefeated season with a pummeling of Auburn set up the classic SEC championship showdown with rival Florida. Antonio Langham's game winning fourth quarter interception return for a touchdown was the clutch play that ended the instant classic and set up the National Championship with top ranked Miami in New Orleans.

In what would be one of the biggest upsets in a college football championship game, Alabama pummeled Miami 34-13. Back in the 90's, Miami was the team to beat in college football while Alabama was more of a "little ole Clemson." Going into the game, the Canes were trash talking

the Crimson Tide, whether it was in the French Quarter or an hour before kickoff on the field. Some of the Crimson Tide coaches said they've never heard such trash talk before a football game. But Alabama's defense shut down the Heisman Trophy winner Quarterback Gina Toretta and held the offense to only 6 points (the lone touchdown came on a punt return in the 4th quarter). Dabo Swinney was a starter for this game.

The 1992 season was special. It had been 13 years since Alabama had won a national championship and people were starting to think that it wasn't going to happen after Coach Bryant retired. What this proved was that Bama didn't need Bear Bryant to win a National Championship.

Fast forward to the present day. Coach Saban has led Alabama to five national championships in the past decade. That's never been done before. Coach Bryant retired when he was 69 while Coach Saban is a young 67 years old. With every football season passing, the short list for replacements have been getting bigger and bigger. (or, is it getting shorter and shorter?).

The two names that have emerged the most to replace Coach Saban are Dabo Swinney and Jeremy Pruitt. While they both are head coaches, Dabo Swinney is undoubtedly the top guy on the Alabama AD Greg Byrne's list. Dabo has beaten Nick Saban in two national championship games and is only 49 years old. How amazing would it be if Dabo could bring the 1992 magic back to Bama?

Whoever replaces Coach Saban when he retires will have similar expectations that Saban had due to the culture being "Championship or bust." With those immense expectations that no other team in college football has, I believe it won't be enough to lure Dabo Swinney to Tuscaloosa.

Dabo has already won two national championships and is beloved at Clemson. He has led Clemson to their best ten year span in school history. What makes you think he will bolt for Alabama once Saban retires?

I believe that Dabo Swinney will become interested if the next head coach post-Saban crashes and burns in Tuscaloosa. The new coach will have to win a national championship within his first five seasons if he wants to get an extension. If he is unable to accomplish that, then an older and wiser Swinney would be more intrigued in the offer to coach his childhood team in a similar situation that Gene Stallings came in and brought Alabama back to the promise land in '92.

The chance to come home and coach for his favorite team growing up will be a tough decision for him and his family to make. But something that won't be mentioned is the thought of Dabo Swinney being the Gene Stallings of the modern era. He has a chance to be the guy that will bring his home state team a national championship after the greatest dynasty of all time ends. That's what made the 1992 team so special.

That's why I could see him coming to Tuscaloosa after his ten year contract is up. However, there isn't a buyout if he wins now or later in his career. There is even a buyout clause if he wants to leave for an NFL job.

Coach Swinney has done amazing things at Clemson. He has won two national championships and is coming off an NCAA record 15-0 season. Clemson is the team to beat for the upcoming season. How can you leave all that?

Well, when the time is right Alabama natives will be praying that Dabo will come home and roam the sidelines like he dreamt about as a kid growing up in Pelham, Alabama. The campaign for Dabo has already begun.

They always come home.

Just ask Coach Harbaugh and Urban Meyer. It's too hard to say no.