

Tagovailoa shines, No. 1 Alabama routs Louisville 51-14

ORLANDO, Florida - Alabama doesn't rebuild. The Crimson Tide simply reload.

College Football Playoff hero Tua Tagovailoa threw for two touchdowns and ran for a third in his first college start, helping top-ranked and defending national champion Alabama open the season with a 51-14 rout of Louisville on Saturday night. Essentially ending the debate - at least for now - about whether he or Jalen Hurts should be the Crimson Tide's No. 1 quarterback, Tagovailoa scored on a 9-yard run while also completing 12 of 16 passes for 227 yards without an interception.

"I thought there were a lot of things we did well, and I also think there are a lot of things we need to fix," Alabama coach Nick Saban said.

"The effort of our players ... they executed very well on a lot of plays," Saban added. "I'm really proud of the way they came out and played and executed in the game. But I also think it's pretty obvious we need to do a lot of things better."

Although Tagovailoa came off the bench to lead Alabama to a come-from-behind victory over Georgia in the CFP championship game last January, Saban provided no public indication of the starter against Louisville until Tagovailoa trotted onto the field following the opening kickoff.

Saban said the decision to begin with the sophomore from Ewa Beach, Hawaii, was made earlier in the week, but the plan was to play Hurts, too. Saban said that's also his intention moving forward.

"I talked to the quarterbacks before practice on Thursday and they both knew exactly what the situation was going to be in the game," he said.

"I wanted Tua to play somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 plays and then we we're going to put Jalen in the game. It didn't matter when it was or what the score was," he added. "We wanted Tua to get the experience of running the two-minute (offense) so we put him back in there before the half. We're going to continue to have both these guys be weapons for us on offense because I think they can."

Saban grew a bit testy when he was asked by ESPN right after the win what he had learned about his quarterbacks. He said he liked both players and decried questions that he perceived were designed to draw critical comments about one of them.

Hurts threw for 2,081 yards and 17 touchdowns while rushing for 855 yards and eight more TDs a year ago. He was 26-2 as a starter over the past two seasons.

Saban maintained throughout preseason camp that Alabama was fortunate to have two quality quarterbacks and tried deflect attention from the QB debate by talking about the challenge the Crimson Tide faces in revamping a defense that lost eight starters from last season.

Tagovailoa was sacked on the game's second play, but pretty much had his way against the Louisville defense from there.

Jerry Jeudy had TD receptions of 11 and 25 yards, and Josh Jacobs scored on an 18-yard run and a 77-yard kickoff return for the Crimson Tide.

Hurts played two series in the first half and re-entered the game in the third quarter with the defending national champions up 41-7.

Jawon Pass, who is replacing 2016 Heisman Trophy winner Lamar Jackson for Louisville, completed 20 of 39 passes for 252 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions, including TDs of 12 yards to Kemari Averett and 8 yards to Tutu Atwell. The redshirt sophomore's second interception was return 45 yards for a touchdown by Shyheim Carter

The Cardinals (0-1) fell to 0-4 all-time against teams ranked No. 1.

"The biggest thing we have to do from this is learn," coach Bobby Petrino said, adding that's one reason he played Pass the entire game.

"It was never a question of taking him out of the game. He needed to stay in and get all those reps," Petrino said. "He's going to have a great career here. This was a hard opener, there's no question about that."

Alabama has won 74 consecutive games against unranked teams under Saban. It's the longest streak in FBS history. The Crimson Tide hasn't lost to an unranked opponent since falling to Auburn in November 2007.

Petrino, meanwhile, is 0-5 vs. Alabama. He is 7-2 in season openers with Louisville.

Hurts directed a field goal drive in the third quarter, finishing 5-of-9 passing for 70 yards and no interceptions. He rushed for 9 yards on 3 attempts. Redshirt freshman Mac Jones played much of the fourth quarter for the Crimson Tide.

It was a tough night for the Cardinals, who were limited to just 16 yards rushing while being outgained 517 yards to 268. The good news is it looks as if they have a chance to be as good throwing the ball as they were during the Jackson era.

The Crimson Tide scored on offense, defense and special teams, showing that despite having to replace 12 starters, Saban has more than enough talent to make a run at Alabama's sixth national title in 10 years.

	1	2	3	4	Total
Louisville (0 - 1)	0	0	7	7	14
Alabama (1 - 0)	14	14	16	7	51

	Louisville	Alabama
1st Downs	19	21
3rd down efficiency	4 - 15	10 - 15
4th down efficiency	0 - 1	0 - 0
Total Yards	268	519
Passing	252	297
Completions - Attempts	20 - 39	17 - 26
Yards per pass	7	11
Interceptions thrown	2	0
Rushing	16	222
Rushing Attempts	26	42
Yards per rush	1	5
Penalties	11 - 93	10 - 111
Turnovers	2	1
Fumbles lost	0	1
Interceptions thrown	2	0
Possession	28:51:00	31:09:00