

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Gary Barta

CFP Weekly Ranking

BRETT DANIELS: Welcome to the first College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference of the 2020 season. Joining us here tonight are Bill Hancock, executive director of the College Football Playoff, and Gary Barta, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair for 2020. At this time I'd like to turn it over to Gary Barta for some opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Good evening, everybody. Welcome. Well, the first rankings for the 2020 College Football Playoff season are behind us. The committee really enjoyed getting together. Before I talk about those rankings I'm just going to state the obvious. The committee came into this year knowing it was going to be different, knowing that as we were talking the last two days we were comparing teams that had played three games to teams who had played as many as nine. Certainly that challenge, we knew it coming in, but everybody embraced it, and I think that really made it flow really nicely.

At the end of the day despite the unique circumstances, our charge is the same, and that's to rank the top 25 teams in the nation. As you've seen, Alabama is ranked No. 1, Notre Dame No. 2, Clemson is at 3 and Ohio State ranked No. 4.

Like every year, there's some things that haven't changed. We go through the process of checking our hats at the door. We literally have a hat with our name on it and we take it off and check it at the door.

We start with a blank sheet of paper and we really assume nothing coming in. We have a lot of information because we've watched a lot of games, but we don't make any assumptions coming in.

COVID has changed all of our lives, but it hasn't changed our protocol at the CFP. We take a look at each team's win/loss record. We look at the strength of schedule head-to-head, games played with common opponents, and eventually we'll look at those who become conference champions.



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Because this is our first week, I won't go through this every week, but just to get us kicked off for the year, I'm just going to go through how the committee operates. The process, as you know, by design is subjective. There are 13 experts on the committee, some of whom are athletic directors like myself. We have former coaches. We have two former NFL players on the committee and one former journalist.

I can tell you, and this is by experience and also just by the conversation, each of us is watching a lot of video, watching a lot of games. That's always been important. It's always been the case, but with the limited inter-conference play, it's more important than ever before. We do have access to data and statistics and we certainly use that, but in the end each expert uses his or her expertise and makes their decisions and provides their input based on that expertise.

The conversations go deep. You know, we put in a lot of hours. We started early in the afternoon yesterday and went late into the evening, and we were able to then come back this morning and talk more. We slept on it and came back and spent some more time. We talked a lot about how important it was that our deliberations are full and complete. We mentioned to the committee that diversity of thought is critical, and we need to, we want to, and we did hear from all the committee members.

I just want you to know, and I know I speak on behalf of all 13 members, but I'm going to tell you personally from my personal perspective, what an honor this is for me. I love the game of college football, and to be a part of this group is truly an honor.

With that, Brett, I'd be happy to open it up and take some questions.

Q. When you were asked about BYU on the ESPN show right now, you mentioned their schedule. What do you see as the main differences between the schedule they've played that caused them to be ranked where they are and the schedule that Cincinnati has played that's allowed them to be No. 7?

GARY BARTA: Well, to start with, when you look at the



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schedule, look at the teams, as I mentioned earlier tonight, right now BYU's best win is over Boise State, and in that game I think they got down to their third string quarterback.

BYU has played three teams against .500 or better opponents, but when you move over to Cincinnati, they're 4-0 against .500 teams and had quality wins as recently as this past weekend against Central Florida but also earlier against SMU. And Cincinnati is in the top 20 both in scoring offense and scoring defense. Those are some of the differences as we took a look at it.

Q. I'm assuming a factor in Clemson being ahead of Ohio State is Ohio State's schedule, which obviously is not the strongest?

GARY BARTA: I didn't catch the first part of your questions, but I'm assuming you were just setting up -- you wanted to hear why Ohio State was one behind Clemson in the rankings; is that the gist of it?

Q. Yeah, just your impressions of Ohio State, especially in light of the schedule that they've played and will play.

GARY BARTA: Yeah, I mean, first of all, Ohio State has an incredibly dynamic offense led by Justin Fields and so many weapons. I think they're scoring around 45 points a game. So it's clear to the committee that Ohio State is a very good football team.

But as you look at the rest of their schedule, they ended up with three of their wins -- the other three wins other than Indiana, and Indiana is certainly ranked high, 12th in the country, but the other three teams they've played have a combined record of 2-12. That certainly factored in. It was one factor in where Ohio State ended up. But Ohio State is a very good football team, and the committee certainly believes that.

Q. You've got two two-loss teams ranked fairly high, Georgia and Oklahoma. Georgia lost to two teams that are in your top six, Oklahoma lost to two teams that one is fairly close to them, one is farther down. What is it about Oklahoma that you had sort of in that same general area as teams like Georgia, Miami, Indiana?

GARY BARTA: Well, Georgia, you pointed out that they had a couple of losses early, but the committee really started to talk about the last five games that Oklahoma has played. During that time they beat No. 17 Texas and then last weekend they beat Oklahoma State. The early losses they had were, I think, by a total of 10 points.

And the other thing the committee noted is that Spencer Rattler is playing at a level now that I think a lot of people

thought he might play at earlier in the season, and early on -- I know also the committee does pay attention to who's available in games, and I think their key running back, Rhamondre Stevenson, and one of their D-ends, Ronnie Perkins, was not available earlier in the year.

Those are all the things as the committee placed Oklahoma at 11 that were part of the conversation.

Q. In regards to Clemson and their No. 3 ranking, how much did you take a look at Trevor Lawrence being out? I think you just touched on that with Oklahoma having the injuries, with Trevor Lawrence being out at Notre Dame, even though the backup quarterback played well? And then the rest of Clemson's schedule and how they've played, how much did all of that kind of factor into your thinking there?

GARY BARTA: Well, one of the things the committee noted right away before we talked about the Notre Dame loss is just the domination in the wins that they had and the consistency level of play week in and week out, so that was certainly part of the conversation, the quality win over Miami earlier in the season, and then we talked about that loss to Notre Dame. It was a heck of a football game for sure.

But we do note when a player or some key players are not available for a game, and in that case it was well noted that Trevor Lawrence wasn't able to play, and I think two or three defensive starters were also out for that game.

It's all part of the discussion, but the committee was very impressed with Clemson even in that game without Trevor Lawrence but certainly the rest of the season and their resume up until that point.

Q. You alluded to that it was very difficult for the committee to size up teams based on the total number of games that they've played, but when you get to the final poll, the final rankings and you're splitting hairs, will a team playing 12 games have an advantage over a team that played eight or nine?

GARY BARTA: You know, that is a question we've discussed. We are not putting an absolute number on how many games a team does or doesn't have to play. We're going to continue just to look at the body of work, and I mentioned video and watching games is always important, but maybe as important this year as ever before.

We're going to identify the top four teams and the top 25 teams based on the games they do play and how strong they are, and so we're not going to hold somebody back because they played a certain number of games.

There may become, there will likely become a number of games where it does make an impact, but we haven't identified an absolute number that we would rest on. We want to pick the top 25 teams based on their ability and based on the way they're playing, and certainly the number of games that we're able to watch is going to play at least some factors.

Q. I'm curious on how much the eye test played in for the A&M-Florida match-up and how much of that was simply just the head-to-head win that A&M had?

GARY BARTA: Well, as we kicked off, we look at -- no matter how close teams are or where they're at in the top 25, we look at several factors. Head-to-head is one of the factors for sure, and Texas A&M did beat Florida. Texas A&M's only loss this year was to No. 1 Alabama.

We also certainly talked about Florida. Florida is playing -- Kyle Trask is playing at the top of his game right now. So there was a lot of discussion in this area on these teams, but at the end of the day we just felt Texas A&M earned the No. 5 ranking.

Q. What was it specifically that you guys liked about Georgia on film?

GARY BARTA: Well, to begin with, one of the things, we liked their win over Auburn. Their only losses were against Alabama and Florida, so they clearly had come up against a very tough schedule, and so we took that in mind.

We did note early on and throughout the season maybe some of the inconsistencies on both sides of the ball, including the quarterback position. But the quality win over Auburn, the fact that they've played -- they're 5-2 and their only two losses were Alabama and Florida. They landed in that ninth spot based on those things, and watching the games, as I mentioned.

Q. I had a Clemson question but I don't want to belabor the same issues, but if I could just have you guys look ahead, I know you don't like to speculate about what may or may not happen, but since you've said you've taken into consideration the fact that they were missing Trevor Lawrence and several key players in that Notre Dame loss, if they were to play Notre Dame hypothetically in the ACC Championship game, win that comfortably so that their only loss was with that double overtime team, do you almost treat them like an undefeated team when you're trying to sort out which team should be No. 1 and what the pecking order should be? I know you don't like to talk in hypotheticals, but can you look ahead and try and

figure out how you would make that judgment?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, I understand why you're asking the question, but I hope you understand -- I'm just trying to figure out who's going to get to play this week and who's not. So more than ever before, just the hypotheticals, we work really hard as a committee, I think, to do the committee justice and to do the college football teams justice, we just don't go down that path. Maybe this year is going to be more of an example than ever before. We really can't project because we really don't know who's going to end up getting to play this week or not. I understand why you're asking. I wouldn't have gone there probably in any year, but certainly this year even more so.

Q. Quick question about Marshall: They come in at 21, four off their AP Poll ranking. Is that more of a factor of conference USA maybe not being as strong of a league in football? What's the science behind the ranking Marshall was given?

GARY BARTA: Well, first of all, they're undefeated, and they are playing -- the committee noted they're playing really, really good defense. They've held all of their opponents to 17 points or fewer, and they're in the top seven or eight offensive and defensive categories. They're very well-balanced. But at the end of the day when we look at Marshall and we compare them to the teams above them -- so there's certainly watching the game, and the committee is impressed with Marshall being 7-0, but then we're also comparing them to the teams that are above them, and we just -- as we looked at that and we looked at the teams above them, Marshall just ended up at 21.

I don't know if you can call it a science so much. You know all the factors we consider, and Marshall is having a heck of a season. But when they're compared to the other teams, that's where they landed, at the 21st spot.

Q. You mentioned that you guys were impressed with Ohio State offensively and certainly noted their schedule. I'm wondering what the evaluation was of Ohio State defensively and how much that might have factored them into No. 4 as opposed to being higher?

GARY BARTA: Well, we talk about both. We talk about the loaded offense, and certainly there are so many weapons there. If you look at the scores and you watched the games, we're going to keep an eye on Ohio State's defense. There's a lot of talent there, as there always is, but just so far in the four games we've watched, that's certainly an area we're keeping an eye on. But again, no hesitation to put them at the fourth spot, but that's probably an area we'll keep an eye on in the games moving forward.

Q. Was there any conversation whatsoever about having someone like Notre Dame ahead of Alabama in No. 1, or was it just clear that Alabama was deserving of that No. 1 spot?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, Alabama this year has just been -- they're 7-0, and every area, offense, defense, special teams, I think they've won all their games by at least 15 points, and I think one of the things that was maybe the most impressive is beating Texas A&M ranked No. 5 and Georgia ranked No. 9. That's tough to do. And then Matt Jones, they're averaging almost 50 points a game now. There were just so many things about Alabama that led the committee to put them in that No. 1 spot.

Q. Earlier in the season Louisiana beat Iowa State by 17 points. Iowa State is currently ranked at 13; Louisiana, who's a one-loss team, is unranked, and their only loss is to an undefeated Coastal Carolina who is sitting at No. 20. What is the explanation for the order of these three teams, and why is Iowa State so much higher than Coastal Carolina and Louisiana, especially Louisiana who it has a definitive head-to-head loss to?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, we certainly talked about Louisiana, even though they're not on the board. They've had some impressive wins. Iowa State you asked specifically about them. They beat Oklahoma head to head. Oklahoma is ranked No. 11. Their other loss was to Oklahoma State.

Again, watching the games, Iowa State got better and better as the year went on. I think the committee is impressed with their running game. They have a running back who's one of the best in the country. They have an experienced quarterback.

So like everything, we look at the schedule and who everybody plays. We look at -- sometimes a win early in the season, certainly it's impressive, but as we get to this point in the year where teams have now played seven, eight, nine games in some cases, we have a lot more information to base the ranking on, and that certainly comes into play.

Q. How clear-cut or not was it for Notre Dame to be No. 2, and did Clemson's availability issues in that game come up at all when discussing Notre Dame's body of work?

GARY BARTA: It certainly did. Whenever key players are not available, whether it's this year for COVID but every year, if a particular player is unavailable, that's noted and certainly considered. But more importantly, to Notre Dame's credit, they're 8-0 and they really have improved

on both sides of the ball each week. I look at Ian Book, who now compared to the beginning of the year, as the season goes on, he just looks more and more comfortable with every passing game.

The other thing Notre Dame has done is played some very tough defense. They've held five of their opponents to fewer than 14 points. Notre Dame came in squarely at No. 2, again, partly because they just have the impressive win over Clemson, but also they're just improving with each week that goes by.

Q. I know in the past the committee has talked a lot about game control and controlling a game. I'm just curious how you evaluate it as a committee when there's a game like Ohio State had this past weekend where it was up 35-7 but then the game ultimately ends up becoming a lot closer before the end?

GARY BARTA: Well, we really don't have a specific term that we use -- I look at the fact that Ohio State got off to a quick start. That doesn't surprise me because they have so much firepower on offense. But I also would tell you it didn't shock me that Indiana came back because Indiana is an extremely talented team.

You let the whole game play out, you watch every quarter, and I'm sure Indiana feels bad they came up short, but I'm sure Ohio State -- I think they gave up something like 500 or 600 yards passing. I don't have it in front of me, but I'm sure that's going to be some great coaching opportunity for Ohio State going forward.

Ohio State is a very, very good team. They lost to a very good Indiana team, and the fact that Indiana came back, maybe part of that is on Ohio State but part of that is just that Indiana is a very good team, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, Gary. Thank you again for joining us here tonight and we look forward to being back together again in a week. Have a great Thanksgiving, everyone.

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