

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Gary Barta

College Football Playoff Selection Committee
Chair

Bill Hancock

College Football Playoff Executive Director
CFP Weekly Ranking

BRETT DANIELS: Welcome, everyone, to the third College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference for the 2020 season. Joining us tonight are Bill Hancock, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, and Gary Barta, the College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

GARY BARTA: Thanks, Brett, and good evening to everybody on the line. I'll be brief. Our work is done, and as you've seen, same top 4 as last week: Alabama No. 1; Notre Dame is 2; Clemson is No. 3 and Ohio State is No. 4. I'll keep it brief. I'll be happy to take some questions.

I will add one thing: John Urschel, one of the committee members, participated in our meeting remotely this week, so I just thought I'd let everybody be aware of that. With that, I'd be happy to answer your questions.

Q. I was just wondering as you guys evaluated Ohio State this week and the fact that they were down five starters and I think it was 17 scholarship players in total, how did that factor into how you viewed them as you got another chance to look at them this week?

GARY BARTA: Well, we certainly took that into account, to your point, and the fact that three of them were offensive linemen, that certainly got our attention, so watching Justin Fields do what he did, just really took command of the offense. I've been saying the last few weeks, all the different weapons that Ohio State's offense has this week, it was Olave going for 140 yards and then Fields rushing for two and throwing for two.

It was important to see another game from Ohio State because they were at four games, now they're at five, but the 52-12 win against Michigan State was impressive. But we certainly did consider the fact, as we do with every team when there's unavailability and this year when it's



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related to COVID.

Q. Bill, obviously here in the Big Ten but also in some other conferences, the COVID-19 situation is still pretty dicey. Teams are cancelling, pausing activities. Can you give us any updated clarity on what COVID protocols are going to govern the safe participation of teams in games, how that will be decided, and are there contingencies set up if one of these testing spikes prevents a team from being able to play?

BILL HANCOCK: Yeah, thank you for asking that. There will be protocols, safety protocols for the games. Our games will be conducted very similarly to what the conferences have been doing during the season. It's of interest to me that there have been any documented cases of any transmission of the virus during athletic competition. So for our games, we'll certainly keep track and keep doing what the conferences were doing during the season.

We'll be ready for whatever comes down. I don't want to get into hypotheticals, but we will be prepared for whatever we have to deal with as far as the games themselves go.

Q. I've got a little bit of an odd question for you. Please don't make this sound like I in any way am questioning your integrity here, but it does seem to be --

GARY BARTA: That's a good setup to a question.

Q. You know, it totally is. Gary, please, I really don't mean it that way, but I do want to ask this question.

GARY BARTA: No problem.

Q. You are leading the playoff committee, and tomorrow you're going to take part in a meeting with your colleagues in the Big Ten, where obviously there will be -- I don't know the exact agenda of that meeting, but there will clearly be some discussion about, hey, what do we do here with Ohio State, with our games minimum rule, and a lot of that discussion is based on how best to position teams -- how best to crown a champion, and also in some ways position team to get

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in the playoff. That just seems like an awkward position for you to be put in. How will you sort of engage in that meeting when your colleagues can sort of look at you and say, so Gary, what do you think the committee is going to think about 6-0 Ohio State or 6-1 Northwestern. I understand that is sort of outside the scope of the Selection Committee, but I just am very interested to ask.

GARY BARTA: Well, I don't take offense to your question. It's a reasonable question. I have not seen an agenda for -- we have a regular ADs' meeting at least once a week and sometimes twice a week. Tomorrow is a regular ADs' meeting. I have not yet seen an agenda. I haven't spoken with the commissioner or anyone in the Big Ten nor to any of my AD colleagues. I'm not going to speculate exactly what's going to be discussed tomorrow.

What I will tell you is I am going to go into it the way I try to go into everything, and that is I'm going to do the right thing, what I believe is the right thing for college football, for the CFP, and certainly as we have since the beginning of COVID, the right thing for student-athlete health and safety.

I know that's as direct as I can give you an answer because I'd be speculating beyond that what the agenda is going to include.

Q. This is more kind of wanted to get your idea or thoughts on this: When you guys are looking at a possible playoff, is the committee considering that there's a chance that some teams who played less games could have an advantage over a team who's played more games from an injury and availability standpoint given the grind of a longer season?

GARY BARTA: Well, I have a smile on my face because I'm going to try to attempt at humor, but Bill is sitting across from me at the table. We're not going to try and have a playoff, we are going to have a playoff.

But now to your question. I mentioned last week that this year was unusual, and the difference in number of games played is a problem when you're trying to evaluate teams. But we are taking that into account.

What you see in front of you 1 through 4 and 1 through 25, certainly the committee has taken into account and talked a lot about the differences in games, but at the end of the day, to be over-simple about our job, it's just to identify the teams, the best 25 teams in the country and for the playoff the best four.

Q. Gary, last week you made it clear that Ohio State

was No. 4 but not by a big margin. Did they make themselves more secure with that win over Michigan State, for now at least?

GARY BARTA: Well, I don't recall giving a margin difference. I clearly shared that the committee believes that Ohio State last week belonged in the No. 4 spot. I mentioned a little bit earlier, it was important for the committee to see Ohio State play again, and the more we can see Ohio State play, the better, because they've played now five games. But when we get ready to rank, there's not a variance -- we don't have a degree of variance between 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and beyond, so for this week the committee felt confident putting Ohio State at 4.

Q. I'm curious about Indiana and their spot at No. 12; obviously behind a few two-loss teams. What do you guys see in the Hoosiers, and what is it that is keeping them back behind some of those two-loss teams?

GARY BARTA: Well, the committee has really thought highly of Indiana. They only have one loss, and that's to Ohio State. They started off slow in that game but came back. Their defense has been strong. And then you always wonder when a team loses their leader, their quarterback, how will a team react to that, when they lost Michael Penix but Jack Tuttle came in and really did a nice job. The committee feels good about Indiana. They are 6-1 now.

When you look at some of the people that we compare around them, they don't have any top-25 wins and none of their wins are against a team with a winning record. So that certainly was considered as one of the variables.

Q. Just curious what went into the decision to put Cincinnati at 8 and have Iowa State jump them and if Cincinnati's conference being a non-power conference or strength of schedule had any factor on that.

GARY BARTA: Well, a few things to start with. First of all, just Iowa State ended up at No. 7 based on several things. I mean, they're in first place in their conference. They've beaten No. 11 Oklahoma and No. 20 Texas. The last two weeks especially, it's been building over the course of the year, but two weeks ago they beat No. 20 Texas and then this week really came out strong against West Virginia. Their defense held them to six points. They now have the nation's leading rusher in Breece Hall. Brock Purdy was 20 out of 23. So when you take all those things, Iowa State ended up at No. 7.

I just would tell you my take on it from the committee's standpoint, it was less about moving Cincinnati down and more about just the committee being impressed with what

Iowa State has been doing.

Q. At the risk of looking ahead, we already know, though, that Texas A&M has had a game cancel for the weekend against Ole Miss. Ohio State has had its game against Michigan canceled, as well, not just merely postponed. How has the committee looked at these situations, not just mere postponements but actual cancellations so far this year kind of as a benchmark in kind of weighing their evaluation of teams?

GARY BARTA: Well, if you'll just give me just a second, I'm going to start by saying as someone who's around student-athletes in my AD's capacity, first of all, all the student-athletes who lose opportunities to play, that just breaks my heart, going way back to March when our basketball teams and then our spring sports and now football specifically and basketball, and then the second thought I always have is I hope everybody is okay. Whether it's Cincinnati's team or it's Tulsa or Michigan, whoever it is, I'm hoping that everybody is okay.

Now to your question, at the beginning of the year, the committee talked about the fact that 2020 was going to be a unique year, and so we were going to have to make sure that we were evaluating teams based on the information we had, that it would be a lot about watching all those games. It always has been. But even more important than ever before, watching games and evaluating teams, knowing that we're going to have to evaluate some teams that have different numbers of games played.

The other thing that was different this year is there wasn't as much inter-conference play, so we don't have that comparator. It's all included in the evaluation, and I've said a couple of times publicly, that has created problems, trying to evaluate teams with different numbers.

But I'm proud of the committee, the way everybody has invested the time and put in the evaluation efforts, and so far, so good.

Q. You touched base earlier about Indiana being 0-1 versus top-25 and zero wins against .500 and above ranked teams. My question from you is from the No. 13 point of view, Coastal Carolina, they have two wins versus top 25 and four wins over .500 or greater schools. What more do they need to do to make that next jump in the conference's opinion?

GARY BARTA: Well, each week is a new evaluation, and obviously this week Coastal -- we had a data point, a game to watch, and I would just tell you that as a college football fan, watching that Coastal Carolina-BYU game was

exciting. What a thrill. They were ranked lower than the team they beat in BYU, and they moved up several spots as a result of that victory. They were able to run the ball. They were able to contain -- slow down BYU's offense. Nobody can stop it. And they won the game. The committee put them at 13 based on that performance and the performance leading up to that, and I won't project further than that. We'll just wait and see next week what we have to evaluate.

Q. Question for you about Colorado and USC. I'm just curious what you liked about Colorado and kind of what you see as the difference between those two teams that has them six spots separated.

GARY BARTA: Well, both of them are 4-0, so the committee is impressed certainly with that. Both of those teams are in that category that we've been talking a little bit about, and the challenges of evaluating a team with less games played. I can tell you the committee early on in the season was impressed with USC and all the different skill positions. Kedon Slovis is an impressive quarterback. The defensive backfield has really been playing well. I think they played this past week without their starting two linebackers, and yet they looked very impressive against Washington State. When you add it all up, that's how they moved into the 15 spot. The other thing -- so that's kind of my take on USC.

Colorado had not been in the top 25, so they're in now. They've been talked about in the past because they were off to a 3-0 start. They beat Arizona. Obviously very impressed with Broussard and running for over 300 yards. A little bit more one-dimensional than USC offensively, so maybe that was one of the difference makers, and then again, that Washington State performance on Sunday impressed the committee, as well.

Q. Just wanted to ask in regards to if Ohio State doesn't play this week and it only plays six games for the season, how much of a concern would that be if you're making a final selection and having to evaluate a team that's played just six games?

GARY BARTA: Well, I understand why you would ask the question. That's a fair question. But from the committee's vantage point, we just -- we really resist -- every week we talk about we resist looking ahead. We've seen Ohio State play five games. Based on that performance, we put them in the fourth spot, and we'll just wait and see. Next week is another ranking opportunity, and then we'll have that final ranking opportunity.

I understand why you're asking, and as a fan, fans want to know, but the committee just works very hard to not look

ahead.

Q. The Cincinnati Bearcats have one game left on the schedule and they're ranked No. 8 and they have a perfect winning percentage right now. You talked earlier that you liked Iowa State over Cincinnati earlier this week, but what more could have the Bearcats done to surpass the one and two-loss teams ahead of them like Texas A&M, Florida and Iowa State in order to be higher up in the playoff picture?

GARY BARTA: Well, I don't know if I can talk about what more they could have done. The committee looks at each team's body of work, and when you look at Cincinnati, they certainly -- they're 8-0, and that's a fact, and it's certainly considered. They don't have any top-25 wins, so I think that was -- I don't think. That was one of the discussion points of the committee. And as I mentioned earlier, Iowa State having a win against No. 11, Oklahoma, and No. 20 Texas and just the last few weeks the way they've been playing just put them at 7, and then going up to Florida, they're 8-1 and their only loss is to No. 5 Texas A&M and Texas A&M's 7-1 and their only loss is to Alabama and they beat Florida. Each team is just considered based on what they've done, and so when you look at Cincinnati, those are some of the comparators that has Cincinnati at 8.

BRETT DANIELS: We'd like to thank everyone for joining us tonight.

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