

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 fourth College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference of the 2020 season. Joining us tonight are Bill Hancock, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, and Gary Barta, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

At this time I'll turn it over to Gary for some opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Thanks, Brett, and good evening, everybody. Well, throughout yesterday and wrapping up this morning, we finished our second to last ranking. The committee ranked Alabama 1, Notre Dame 2, Clemson 3 and Ohio State 4.

I might note that a unique week in that 12 of the 25 ranked teams did not play this past weekend due to COVID or other issues.

I had mentioned before and the committee has talked a lot about in 2020 it's a vexing problem to try to compare teams that have played 10 or 11 games to those that have played five or six, and that certainly has been the case. But in my opinion, the committee has done a very good job of working through that.

At the end of the day, our job is to rank the top 25 teams in the country based on the schedule they play, and that's what we do every week, and no matter who plays, the committee studies the games and spends a considerable amount of time talking through every week in these two-day periods where someone should be ranked. Again, I'm just grateful for all the effort and attention and work that the committee puts in.

I'm looking forward to this weekend, and I know in talking to our committee members, they are, too, in watching 10



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conference championship games that will be played beginning Friday night and through Saturday.

Coming into the weekend, the committee watches its games individually. This is the only time during the year where we all come together, and Friday night and Saturday we'll be in a room socially distanced with masks on, of course, but we'll be in a room and we'll watch all 10 of the championship games together, and it gives us a chance while we're watching to continue conversation.

One final note. I just want to let you know that John Urschel and Ray Odierno participated remotely this weekend and expect them to do the same this weekend. So that's all I have for comments, but I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Q. Gary, a big picture question. When Iowa State loses to Louisiana and Florida loses to an unranked LSU team and those don't play a role in the rankings, what's the point of playing games?

GARY BARTA: Well, the games are important because that's what we evaluate.

You know, certainly losses are considered, and they're an important part of the evaluation, but so are wins. So are the teams -- in Iowa State's case, they beat No. 10 Oklahoma, they beat No. 20 Texas. Both wins and losses and strength of schedules are considered. So the games are obviously important.

Q. Bill, when you talked about the possibility of having the semifinals, you said at this time the game will be -- one will be at the Rose Bowl. What is your timetable for making a final decision on that? What will the factors be? And is there any feasibility of playing both games in New Orleans?

BILL HANCOCK: Well, given the realities of 2020, we always reserve the right to make decisions as late as possible. For example, what happens if the state of California shuts down entirely and doesn't allow any games. So we're keeping our eye on the situation, but we are planning to play that semifinal at the Rose Bowl.



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You asked about New Orleans.

Q. For both games, yeah.

BILL HANCOCK: Yeah, sorry about that. There hasn't been any talk about playing two games in one city.

Q. Gary, could you explain the rationale in an undefeated USC only rising two spots and seemingly being eliminated from consideration potentially of the College Football Playoff? And was there really any hope of a Pac-12 team kind of working its way into that picture if an undefeated USC can't even do that?

GARY BARTA: USC is undefeated, and they've moved up each week in the polls. They've been moving up.

The thing that the committee did note -- and we watch all the games. I think Kedon Slovis is a terrific quarterback. St. Brown the last two games especially has been on fire.

The thing that I will tell you the committee has taken note on -- so there's not a top-25 win in those five games.

The other thing, three of those games against teams that are under .500, in three of those games, USC was behind in the fourth quarter and had to -- and good for them, they made the comeback, but I think this past weekend it was inside of 30 seconds that they had to make a comeback and win.

It's important to win, but the committee watches all the games, and who you play is important and how you win those games is also important.

Q. And in terms of the Pac-12 just in general, if the flagship team in the conference can't make it with an undefeated record, was there any real hope of the Pac-12 being able to work its way into the playoff picture while it's only playing six or maybe seven games?

GARY BARTA: As I mentioned at the outset, this year we knew it was going to be a challenge to evaluate teams that have played five or six games against teams that have played 10 or 11 games, but we have done it, and as part of that evaluation, USC, I just mentioned they didn't have a ranked win, and in three of the games they played teams that were under .500 and they had to come back and win in the fourth quarter. They were behind in all three of those games.

13 is where USC is at. They played five games. They are undefeated. The committee thinks very highly of their skill, their players on offense and defense. But as I just

described to you why they're at 13 and not higher is based on those things that I laid out.

Q. You talked about a couple weeks ago comparing Ohio State against Texas A&M because they were one spot apart. Now that Texas A&M and -- I'm sorry, I was mentioning Ohio State versus A&M. Now it's A&M versus Iowa State, 5 and 6. Can you talk about maybe the gap or lack of a gap is between them and how you compare them?

GARY BARTA: Neither team played this past week, so there wasn't new information to evaluate. Texas A&M has a win over No. 7 Florida. Ohio State has two wins over top-25 teams. They have the nation's leading rusher. They do have one extra loss. They have two losses instead of one.

So good discussion. Iowa State was idle this week. They moved up more because of Florida losing than, obviously because they didn't play, anything they did. Not really any discussion about flipping Texas A&M and putting them 6 and Iowa State at 5. It came out the way it did, and with both teams being idle, that probably had something to do with that.

Q. If I could follow up with Florida, a lot of people are surprised they didn't fall further after the home loss to LSU. How much of it was the fact that Georgia is sitting there and that they have the head-to-head over them?

GARY BARTA: Well, you definitely hit on one of the factors. The committee this last two days spent a great deal of time talking about the grouping of Iowa State, Florida, Georgia and Cincinnati, and inside of that you had Iowa State who was idle, Cincinnati that was idle, so a lot of conversation about Florida and Georgia, and I can tell you it was back and forth, a tough loss for Florida. We did note that Kyle Pitts was out and the committee recognizes when a player is unavailable.

So it was back and forth. Georgia on the other hand, ever since they added J.T. Daniels at quarterback, their offense has taken off. Watched them, they're averaging over 40 points a game now in the last three games since Daniels came in, but Florida beat Georgia head-to-head. So when it came down to it, you had Georgia moving up, Florida moving down, and they came in at 7 and 8 probably because of that combination, but with Florida having the head-to-head.

Q. Bill, I saw your statement about that decision that might be made. Is the families not being allowed in the stadium in Pasadena -- I guess the way I would frame



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it, is that a deal breaker? In other words, if that is not allowed, will the game be moved?

BILL HANCOCK: As we said, and I think I may have mentioned to a couple people yesterday, that's very important to us, and we're going to continue to monitor the situation. We do plan to play at the Rose Bowl, and we're just hoping that the state will allow the families to attend.

I realize that may not exactly answer your question, but that's where we are.

Q. Would Dallas be -- it's been talked about, my colleagues have done some good reporting on this, Dallas would seem to be a logical place to put the game. Would that be -- what are the chances of Dallas being sort of the backup host?

BILL HANCOCK: Well, as you may have imagined, I'm not going to speculate about that, but I'll just suffice it to say that we will be prepared.

Q. Bill, particularly if it's an Ohio State-Notre Dame match-up and given the issues at the Rose Bowl, would playing that game at another site, Indianapolis being an obvious choice, would that be an option?

BILL HANCOCK: We have long-standing agreements in place, and I may be old fashioned, but I think it's important to honor agreements. We are planning to play the game in California, and we're hoping the state will fix the situation and will allow the families to be there.

Q. Gary, how much consideration, if any, would be given to avoiding a Clemson-Notre Dame semifinal match-up considering it would be a third this year and obviously a back-to-back one?

GARY BARTA: Well, my sincere answer to that is we'll come back and we'll pick 1 through 4. We won't try to match them up. I've only been on the committee one year, but I'm sure Bill can contend, the committee does not come in and rank based on the match-up. We're going to pick 1 through 4 in the order as a committee we believe is the best match-ups -- excuse me, not the best match-ups, the best teams.

Q. Sort of a philosophical question. You've said something that has been said every year as a committee. It was said long before we had a committee. You said it's important teams win but it's also important how you win. Why is that?

GARY BARTA: Well, because if it wasn't for that, if it wasn't for watching the games and assessing how good a

team is, then we could just do it with statistics and records. But the whole purpose of bringing together 13 people who all have expertise and dedication to football and knowledge of football is so that we can watch the games -- you know, there's a big difference between reading the box score and actually watching what happens. So when I say how you play, that's what I mean by that. You can make a determination -- well, the example I'm going to use, because it's real, we have two 5-0 teams, one in Ohio State and one in USC. And the question has been asked, they both have 5-0 records; how can they be apart in the rankings. And it's because we've watched the games, we've watched how each team plays and has controlled the games.

There is the win over Indiana, also, a ranked team, but I hope that answers your question. It's so important to watch the games and assess how good a team really is.

Q. Is that because you are tasked with such a sort of an unwieldy assignment, picking between teams that have no common opponents, playing on different sides of the country, limited schedules, even in a good year, much less a pandemic year? In other words, we don't really do this anywhere else. In the NFL nobody is sitting around talking about how did you play; they care you had one more point than the other team. Is it just a case of the scheduling and geographic differences in college football require this?

GARY BARTA: Well I'm going to go on my soapbox. I've been in college sports now for about 33, 34 years, and there are differences between college and pro. They're both great. Pro and college are both great. But one of the differences is the way we put together our football championship and our basketball tournament, and it's based on how you play, it's based on who you play, it's based on your record, but it's also selected by a committee that evaluates those things in addition to just statistics.

It is unique, but I would say it's unique in a wonderful way.

Q. Gary, what about Iowa State's resume is better than Coastal Carolina's?

GARY BARTA: Well, the body of work as it pertains to they did lose two games, but they also beat No. 10 Oklahoma and they beat No. 20 Texas. When you watch the games, their defense has gotten better and better every week, and they have the leading rusher in the country. I didn't double check that this week because they were idle, but one of the best runners in the country for sure in Breece Hall.

Then look at Coastal Carolina. They're undefeated, and

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they're having a terrific year. They have two wins against top-20 teams. BYU, I said last week, that BYU game was one of the most exciting football games of the season. They played a game this past week against an under .500 Troy team, and it took them until the last 30 -- they were behind, and I'm sure you watched the game. They were behind with 35 seconds left and Grayson McCall made a great play and threw a touchdown pass, but they struggled against a 5-6 Troy team.

So every week we watch every game, and when it comes down to it, we rank our teams, the 13 members rank our teams, and Coastal Carolina came in at 12 this week.

Q. I know that's true, but Coastal Carolina was behind Iowa State even before the Troy game. But when Iowa State moves up while not playing, when Cincinnati moves down while not playing, when Florida loses to a bad team, drops by one, Coastal Carolina has two top-20 wins and can't crack the top 10, a lot of people think the system is unfair to the Group of Five and that they will never have a chance. How is this system fair when a team like Coastal Carolina has that resume and can't make the top 10?

GARY BARTA: Well, again, a committee of 13 evaluate it and have them at 12. You mentioned Iowa State moving up. Iowa State moved up even though they didn't play because the team ahead of them lost, and so the committee determined that there wasn't someone else to jump to the sixth place, so Iowa State moved up.

Coastal Carolina is right behind Indiana and right ahead of USC. So the conversation -- and Oklahoma is ahead of them. We evaluate the teams in groupings, and when it came to that conversation, the 13 people evaluated them and had them at 12.

Q. I was wondering what else it is about Cincinnati besides its strength of schedule that's holding it back behind those two-loss teams?

GARY BARTA: Well, compared to their resumes, those teams ahead of them have had a chance to play more -- when Cincinnati came out and our committee had its first evaluations, we had information to put them where we put them. We haven't had a chance to see them play since November 21st. Other teams around them have been playing and have been adding to their resume.

I mentioned a little bit earlier Georgia when they changed quarterbacks. Now they're averaging over 40 points a game since they made that change. Florida moved backward just one spot, but they have a win over Georgia.

And even Kyle Trask had a tough first half, but he still threw for almost 500 yards and two touchdowns in the loss.

The decision of the committee was that those two teams, Florida and Georgia, were still better than Cincinnati, and you started off by one of the factors, so I didn't start with it, but they haven't -- they don't have a win against a top-25 team, and that factored into it.

So the committee has been going back, even though Cincinnati hasn't been playing, the committee has been going back and watching the games over, watching their last game against Central Florida, and in the Central Florida game they struggled, if you remember or recall. They were behind, I think, in the third or fourth quarter and had to come back.

It's a complete review every week and looking at the teams and deciding -- the committee decides who's the seventh best, who's the eighth best and who's the ninth best, et cetera, and those are some of the factors that played into it.

Q. Gary, just curious if in a week where you don't have some of these teams or as you pointed out most of the teams at the top playing, when it comes down to having a conversation about Ohio State and Texas A&M, for instance, head-to-head, how does that happen in a week like that, and do you get to give maybe further scrutiny to a conversation that's already there or do you kind of move past it because there isn't new information?

GARY BARTA: I can tell you I shared earlier that a great deal of time was spent talking about that grouping from Iowa State to Cincinnati. On the flipside of that, not as much time -- we look at every team, whether they play or not, but not as much time was spent discussing any change between Ohio State and Texas A&M.

Q. You've mentioned a few times the how-you-win factor in all of this, and you've also talked about how teams like Ohio State and some of the teams who have played fewer games, this week is important, another data point in the conference championship game. How much does the how-you-win factor, the sixth data point in Ohio State's case and conference championship games matter this weekend?

GARY BARTA: I'd love to clarify one thing. I did say how you play matters. What I mean by that -- I'm not saying just running up the score is important. What I'm saying is watching how an offensive and defensive line play and watching the skill positions, watching the defensive backs and their ability to cover one-on-one man-to-man. That's

what I mean by watching how a team plays, not just the score differential. Score differential certainly is looked at.

When it comes to championship weekend, one of the reasons -- all the games matter, but one of the reasons championship weekend creates a lot of important game evaluation is because in most of those cases, not every case, but in most of those cases it's a ranked team versus a ranked team. So that adds a whole bunch of games that are important to the evaluation because they're for a championship, but they're also in most cases two ranked teams squaring off against each other.

Q. I'm assuming this is going to be more for like what is your group, two and three teams. Have you begun having discussions about the other four New Year's Six bowl games, or will that come around, I guess, after the games are played, saying hey, we might like this team as a possible representative for the Peach Bowl, something like that?

GARY BARTA: What we do is the process of events, first we rank the teams 1 through 25 and don't have any regard at that point for match-ups. We're looking for 1 through 25, and that takes us through I don't know how many games, how many teams that would be to get us to the New Year's Six bowls, but we rank them first.

After the ranking is done, there are some contractual bowl obligations that we make sure we fulfill, and then the final step I think is what you're referring to, and that's where the rest of the bowls are slotted in based on several factors but match-ups and trying to give the higher seed whatever would be perceived as a better situation, whether it's location, distance, perceived advantage, then we match them up that way.

Q. If you don't mind just following up, have you begun starring some teams -- I'm just throwing a name, for example, and I don't mean specifically them, but like an Oklahoma, have you said, okay, we like Oklahoma, we want to see them in a possible -- have you begun starring those teams, or is that conversation taking place, I guess, after you've decided who are locked in to the top four?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, we don't star any teams in advance. We rank our top 25 this week, today. We'll come back after Saturday night and we'll do it all over again, and nobody is starred. We go in and we'll say, now, what are the top 25, and once we have that done, then we'll go in and start doing the New Year's Six bowl match-ups. After the first four, the playoff group, and then we'll pair up the rest.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone, for joining us this evening.

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