

College Football Playoff Media Conference

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Grapevine, Texas, USA

Gary Barta

College Football Playoff Selection Committee

Chair

CFP Weekly Ranking

BRETT DANIELS: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to thank everyone and welcome you to the final College Football Playoff selection videoconference for the 2020 season. Joining us today is Gary Barta, the College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair. Also available today will be Bill Hancock. He is not able to join the Zoom, but if anybody has any questions for Bill you can follow up with me after this Zoom.

At this time I'd like to turn it over to Gary Barta for some opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Thank you, Brett, and good afternoon, everybody. It's been a terrific weekend of watching football Friday and Saturday and late into the evening last night and early this morning. The committee went through its process and ended up, as you've seen, ranked Alabama No. 1, Clemson No. 2, Ohio State No. 3 and Notre Dame No. 4.

Here's some of the reasons why. The top three teams in the ranking won their conference championship. Alabama was undefeated and has been dominant all season long. They've beaten three top-25 teams throughout the year.

Clemson is 10-1 and their only loss came to Notre Dame earlier in the season, and of course they avenged that last night with Trevor Lawrence back in the lineup.

Ohio State is also undefeated against top-25 teams with wins against Northwestern and Indiana, Northwestern in the championship game last night.

Notre Dame beat Clemson earlier in the season and also beat highly ranked North Carolina team and the committee ranked them No. 4.

I also want to point out in the top six, Oklahoma came in at No. 6. They defeated a higher ranked Iowa State team to win their conference championship to become the Big 12 champion, and significantly included in that, in addition to



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the win over Iowa State, they also during the season beat Texas and Oklahoma State.

Cincinnati came in at No. 8. They are undefeated conference champion. They beat a lower ranked team in a last-second field goal by beating Tulsa for their conference championship, and that's why they came in in the position they did.

As for the New Year's Six bowls, here's who's playing: No. 10, Iowa State will play No. 25 Oregon in the Fiesta Bowl. No. 6 Oklahoma will play No. 7 Florida in the Cotton Bowl. No. 8 Cincinnati will play No. 9 Georgia in the Peach Bowl, and Texas A&M at No. 5 will play No. 13 North Carolina in the Orange Bowl.

Some great New Year's Six match-ups.

As far as -- this is the second year that I've been on the committee. My first as chairman, and it's truly been an honor. Football is such an important part of my life, and the opportunity -- it's a lot of work, but work that I've looked forward to.

This year in particular was special but also unique with the pandemic, and so amazed at our student-athletes, our coaches, the medical personnel, whether it's athletic trainers or doctors, just having the ability in this difficult pandemic to still navigate and play football games. 87 percent of the games in the new schedule that was put together coming into the year were played. 87 percent. Certainly amazing.

And then finally, working with this committee, we have the opportunity to work with some great people. There are four people rolling off the committee this year that we had a chance at the end of our meeting to just thank. We call it Senior Day. And Ronnie Lott, Joe Castiglione, Ken Hatfield and Todd Stansbury and Scott Strickland are all graduating from the committee and are now proud College Football Playoff alumni.

It's been a journey through the season. We're excited about the top four and the top 25 and the New Year's Six match-ups, and I'll certainly at this point be glad to try to answer any questions.

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Q. Gary, why is Oklahoma moving ahead of Cincinnati?

GARY BARTA: Oklahoma had a body of work this season going to last night. They ended up beating a higher ranked team in Iowa State. They had also earlier in the season beaten Texas and Oklahoma State. So they have three wins over top-25 teams. They won their conference championship.

Cincinnati had a terrific season. They won their conference championship last night against a team that was ranked lower than them and won with a last-second field goal. Both great teams, great seasons, but the committee, based on watching the games and based on those factors, ranked them ahead of Cincinnati.

Q. If Oklahoma's win against Iowa State is that impressive, why did they stay ahead of Coastal Carolina, who beat Louisiana, who beat Iowa State?

GARY BARTA: We take into account games that have occurred throughout the season. Talking about Iowa State, Iowa State did beat Oklahoma earlier in the year, and also had another top-25 win against Texas.

We look at the total body of work. Louisiana did beat Iowa State early in the season. Watching Iowa State progress throughout the rest of that season with the top-25 wins that I mentioned brought them to that sixth ranking going into last night. Coastal Carolina had a great season. They're undefeated, and they had two top-25 wins, as well. But when the committee watched the games, and we talked about specifically these two teams, the committee decided and felt that Iowa State was ranked higher than Coastal Carolina.

Q. Can a Group-of-Five team ever make the playoff?

GARY BARTA: Yes. Yes, they can.

Q. How?

GARY BARTA: Their body of work will be evaluated alongside the group that gets into the top 4 every year. Every year is unique. This year one of the things we didn't get the opportunity to see as much of were the cross-conference games.

I look at, and I know BYU is not a Group of Five, or they're an independent, but I look at the schedule that BYU had pre-COVID and they were scheduled to play five Power Five teams in their schedule. Looking at that schedule, if we would have had those five games to evaluate, that

would have been an opportunity.

So the answer is yes. They're always going to be measured, every team is always going to be measured, the games they played, the games they won, how they played, and every team has an equal opportunity to be evaluated based on their body of work.

Q. Gary, can I ask you if you can keep your athletic director hat on for a second here and look at a big picture. You lived through the BCS era, you've lived through and now been part of the College Football Playoff era. Listen, people complain when the selections are made just like they complain with the BCS. Do you feel like we're moving to a similar place where, boy, the BCS just fell under the weight of the complaints and the negativity and ended up having to go to a playoff? Do you think sort of all the complaints and we're getting to a place of negativity with the playoff, that it will inevitably lead to an expansion?

GARY BARTA: I'm not going to predict if it will lead to an expansion. What I will tell you, you're right, I've been around college football for a long, long time, and I remember the BCS, I remember when it was just polls, and clearly we now have the College Football Playoff.

What I can tell you is the reason there are complaints, and I say it with a smile on my face, it's because people care. They care a lot. And so there's always going to be disagreement when it comes down to the final grouping. But I'm really excited about the grouping that we have this year, the four teams that were selected this year, and really I'm not going to look ahead at this point. Just excited to watch the games unfold this season.

Q. I heard you answer a question about Ohio State only playing six games. I don't remember the exact phrase, but you said it wasn't a sticking point basically within the committee. I heard you explain why Ohio State is No. 3, but why wasn't it more of a sticking point that they only played six games, and how do you respond to coaches who are critical of it because they went through a longer schedule?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, I'm glad you asked. What I would tell you is the discussion about number of games played occurred every week, and from the very beginning, within the committee and publicly, we talked about some of the challenges we were going to face in this pandemic season, and two of them, one was number of games played, and that was discussed every week, so if I said or came across that it wasn't a factor, that wasn't my intent. It was a factor. We talked about it every week, not just with Ohio State. We were trying to compare Ohio State, who went 6-0, to

Cincinnati, who went 9-0, to San Jose State, who went 6-0, to Alabama, 10-0, Coastal Carolina, 11-0. So all of those were discussed. That was taken into account.

The other thing we didn't have this year we knew was going to be a challenge, we didn't have as much cross-conference play to evaluate. We didn't get to see Alabama play USC or Notre Dame play USC, which they would have normally or Ohio State go out to Oregon. And so all of that was part of the discussion.

What I meant to say and intended to say and I think said was Ohio State -- putting Ohio State third because of their body of work, because of beating two ranked teams and winning the conference championship last night, there was strong support and consensus for that. But we did talk about every week the differences in games. So I appreciate you asking that.

Q. Gary, on the ESPN show you mentioned that the North Carolina win helped separate Notre Dame from A&M in the 4 versus 5 debate. Just curious was that the deciding factor? Were there other things the committee looked at? And how did the committee weigh the lopsided A&M loss in October to Alabama versus Saturday's Notre Dame loss to Clemson?

GARY BARTA: This is an area that the committee spent a great deal talking about last night into the morning, early morning, and then back again this morning. Those two teams and those two resumes have a lot in common. Their defenses are both terrific. Their offenses are both productive, have quarterbacks that make good decisions.

The body of work -- so you mentioned last night that Clemson beat North Dakota handily and that earlier in the season Alabama beat Texas A&M handily. When you look at the full season, you look at the full body of work, the committee looked to the fact that Notre Dame had two wins over ranked teams, that one of those wins was against Clemson, and that Texas A&M had one win over a ranked team. So there was no single factor. This was something that was discussed at great length within the committee and among the committee members, but when it was all said and done, the committee decided that Notre Dame had earned its way to that fourth spot over a very good Texas A&M team.

Q. You've said and previous committee chairmen have, as well, that you don't judge the teams by their conferences, but it's hard to see a three-loss Florida team above an undefeated Cincinnati and not think that has to do with the committee's respect for the SEC and perhaps lack of respect for a Group-of-Five conference. Can you describe if it's not conferences

and especially in this year where the conferences didn't play each other very much, how you evaluated strength of schedule?

GARY BARTA: Last night the committee -- you know we watch games throughout the season, and last night the only time during the year we watched them together is during championship weekend. The example you're talking about really was right in front of us last night.

Florida was playing the best team in the country and brought them down to the very end and had a chance to win that game against Alabama, which the committee believes is the best team in the country, and just continues to have -- they have a Heisman Trophy candidate at quarterback. They have players on offense that he's able to go to.

At the same time we were watching the Cincinnati game. We were watching the American championship against Tulsa, and Tulsa -- so Tulsa was ranked 23rd, I believe, at the time, and it was a really, really good football game, and it took a last-second field goal for Cincinnati to win that game. So both great seasons, both terrific teams, but the committee in watching the games and evaluating -- just asking the question, which team is better, Florida or Cincinnati, the committee believes that Florida was the better team.

Q. So to follow up on that, so that's a very straightforward explanation about that basically is about which team is better and the eye test, but then there are other times where you'll mention a team has had a better schedule or a better resume. When you do, are you guys using a specific strength of schedule metric or ranking system, or is it just kind of looking at the teams, the records of the teams they played?

GARY BARTA: Great question. The committee is provided numerous pieces of information and data, and there are a strength of schedule process and piece of information we normally look at.

I will tell you that this year, in 2020, because of the pandemic, it was really more of the latter, of what you described. We look at the schedule. We look at who each team played, how many ranked teams they played, didn't play. This year we looked at the schedule. We considered the strength of schedule based on teams' records and their ranking, so it was a little bit unique this year compared to most years, and hopefully going forward we'll be able to rely on the combination of looking at their schedule but also some of the statistical data.

Q. My question is along the lines of big picture college



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football. I wonder, you've been on the committee a couple years now, what the level of concern is about the system when there's 28 total spots in the seven years of the playoff and 16 of them have been taken by Alabama, Clemson or Ohio State. Is there concern about that?

GARY BARTA: Not concern from the standpoint of each year when the rankings come out and especially the final rankings but even throughout the year it's based on the teams that are playing the best football, and so whoever it is, whatever the name of the school is that's in 1 through 4, that year it's because -- and in this case it's Alabama, Clemson, Notre Dame and Ohio State, not in that order, but it's based on the teams that have played the best football, played the most difficult schedules and won the most convincingly and who the committee believes are the best teams.

No, I'm not going to say concerned. Just each year going through that process.

Q. Do you think that that keeps it a National Championship?

GARY BARTA: Well, it is a National Championship because the best teams playing college football are involved in the game. And so from that standpoint, yes.

Q. I'm curious, you mentioned this was the first time you guys watched these games all together. Could you take us in that room and what that was like and specifically watching Ohio State yesterday against Northwestern and kind of the up-and-down nature of that game from the first half to the second half, the evaluation of the Buckeyes, the conversations you guys had?

GARY BARTA: This is my second year on the committee, so I now have two experiences to share with you, and they're both very similar. So we go through the whole season and we're watching games individually. I'm at my house and the 12 other committee members are at their houses. We then come together and we compare information, we compare thoughts and we talk. Twice now on championship weekend I've had the opportunity to sit with the group, and one of the changes in dynamics is you can take and have conversations throughout the game and make comments.

Yesterday's game, Northwestern against Ohio State, Northwestern coming in with one of the best defenses in the country, that first half, talking about Ohio State was not playing as well, and that's to Northwestern's credit. They were playing well. They had a great game plan. And then

in the second half Ohio State really took control of the line of scrimmage and started running the ball. For Trey Sermon to have 331 yards, that was an amazing performance. Just the opportunity to talk while the game is going on.

We all love college football, and so we were watching games from Friday night -- three games Friday night and six games on Saturday, in addition to some of the other games that were going on outside of the championships. It was an enjoyable day. A long day but an enjoyable day.

Q. You've talked to us previously about Ohio State's dominant passing offense. You've mentioned Justin Fields. It was more of a rushing attack and defense for Ohio State. Did that cement Ohio State a little bit, seeing them win a game in a little bit different way than they had this season?

GARY BARTA: They won their championship. They won it against a ranked team, and to your point they had to find a way to win. They had 22 players out with COVID-19. They were not moving the ball through the air, and I give Northwestern a lot of credit for that. But they then found an adjustment and found a way, again, on the ground to win the game. That was certainly part of the conversation.

In the end, they won their conference championship and they were undefeated, so they moved into that third spot.

Q. The specifics around the eye test I think are where I'd like to pick your brain a bit because you have so many different resumes to look at, teams playing different numbers of games, both how much did the eye test play a factor for the committee this year, and frankly beyond that, how much value was placed this year on winning a conference championship compared to years past?

GARY BARTA: I can't compare it to every year past. I can tell you -- as it relates to conference championships won. I can tell you that throughout our conversations, especially this weekend, it's a focal point. The committee places high value on championships won. The commissioners and the founders of the CFP seven years ago made that one of the criteria. It is only one of the criteria. We also look at head to head, we look at common opponents and we look at games played.

The eye test, I mentioned at the beginning of the year, we talked about how that was going to be so important. It always is important, but maybe this year because of some of the differences I mentioned earlier in terms of number of games played and not as many cross-conference games to evaluate how important it was going to be.

The wonderful thing about the committee is the diversity of makeup of that group. We have multiple former NFL players, multiple coaches, head coaches. We had ADs. We have a journalist. So we have expertise in football. But with 13 very strong opinions. I can tell you that people see what they see and they're not afraid and that's why they're on the committee to express their opinions.

That makes this process, in my opinion, just a terrific process. You take all the information, the data, the statistics, but then you put that up against watching the games and evaluating the games, and I think that's what makes the formula work well.

Q. I suppose just to follow up on that, I'm not sure if you can quantify it, but how much dissenting opinion might there have been this year when thinking about that eye test, someone that may have thought a team like Ohio State really passed the eye test or someone thought Texas A&M looked better?

GARY BARTA: I don't know that it's so much dissent. There's a lot of respect for everybody's expertise, so when somebody brings something, and I'll just use myself as an example. When I hear somebody whose opinion of a game they watched is different than mine, I absolutely listen to them, and I'm actually listening to see why it's different. I've gone back, and again, this is just my personal response, I've actually gone back and watched games over after hearing some opinions that were different than what I saw to make sure I'm seeing it the right way.

I don't know that it's difference of opinion so much as listening to other people who are experts and trying to shape my own thoughts, listening to the great information that I can gather from them watching games, as well.

I think, again, that's what makes this process work well.

Q. How are the venues for the semifinals designated? Did Alabama select Arlington as No. 1 has done in the past? And then my other question is was there any consideration given to Clemson for No. 1 given the way they beat Notre Dame in the rematch and the fact that of course Trevor Lawrence and so many stars on defense were missing in that double-overtime first meeting?

GARY BARTA: Well, let me begin with the first part of your question. The No. 1 ranked team does not select the location, but the committee does want to give consideration to any advantage that the No. 1 seed might get.

In this case it wasn't necessarily geography-wise. If we

looked at the four teams, the geography collectively didn't make a big difference. But in this case Alabama as the No. 1 seed, because of the fact that there are restrictions in number of tickets, there are 16,000 tickets that are going to be sold in Arlington and 3,000 tickets that are going to be sold in New Orleans.

Taking everything else into consideration, the committee believed that it gave the opportunity for Alabama families and fans to have more tickets available, and we decided that that was an advantage that Alabama deserved. But they don't choose which venue, we just try to give them any advantage we can.

Clemson ending up in New Orleans was obviously just the opposite site of Alabama.

Q. Was there any consideration given to Clemson for No. 1 or any discussion on that matter?

GARY BARTA: Fair question, but the answer is no. From the beginning, looking at Alabama, at their resume, they beat three top-25 teams. They've dominated in every game. Clemson has had a terrific year. That's why they're No. 2. But no, the committee has felt strongly throughout the season that Alabama was the No. 1 ranked team.

Q. I had a question specifically about Indiana. Did Michael Penix's injury kind of factor into the committee's evaluation of Indiana? Obviously I know a lot of Indiana's best wins kind of came before his injury. I didn't know if that maybe changed the committee's perception of Indiana kind of in the final reckoning.

GARY BARTA: The committee really appreciated watching the Indiana team play. Obviously we pay attention whenever a student-athlete isn't available, and in Michael Penix's case, high-profile student-athlete, but Jack Tuttle came in and performed very well. Their only loss was to No. 3 Ohio State. They're 6-1. So we certainly are aware of it. We used that as part of the evaluation.

But I would just tell you that I personally and the committee collectively was impressed with what that team was able to do with their second-string quarterback, as well, in Jack Tuttle.

Q. This might be more of a logistic question, but of course COVID has impacted every step of the way this season. Bouncing off of the Rose Bowl, can you talk about the decision process to relocate from you guys' standpoint? I know you spoke to giving the Bama-Notre Dame game the most fans because Bama is the No. 1 seed, but can you talk about was AT&T



Stadium always a backup venue? I know the Cotton Bowl is two days prior. Can you talk about the decision process with the Rose Bowl?

GARY BARTA: The Selection Committee is not included or involved in the decisions on where games are played. The Selection Committee's role, the 13 people that I mentioned and the group of which I'm a chair, our sole job and our sole purpose is to pick the top four, rank the top 25.

The commissioners make the operational decisions, so we were aware that that conversation was going on. We were kept informed while we were here over the last couple of days. But the decision was made by the executive director Bill Hancock as well as the commissioners, and so I really can't speak to the details of exactly how that went, other than that we were aware it was going on.

Q. We heard obviously you and past committee chairs talk plenty about body of work and body of work, and given that, how much or little was the timing of the loss or the blowout loss for Notre Dame and Texas A&M a factor in those teams' final seedings?

GARY BARTA: I mentioned earlier that a great part of our discussion late last night and this morning, early this morning and then again this morning coming back, was related to those two resumes.

We do talk about recency and what has changed in between then, but we also evaluated that both teams had losses to the No. 1 and No. 2 team in the country, and it was one piece of information that we considered. It wasn't -- it certainly wasn't the do-all and end-all.

I don't know if that answers your questions. We do recognize when a loss occurs, but we also look at so many other factors and did so comparing these two teams, as well.

Q. Coastal Carolina and Indiana had really good seasons; what was the criteria of leaving them out of a New Year's Six bowl?

GARY BARTA: It wasn't a matter of leaving them out as much as it was evaluating the teams that were ranked above them and going through that process. I spoke I think it was earlier in this call about the process that went into Iowa State getting that spot, and the body of work that they have. They had beaten Oklahoma earlier in the year, they had beaten Texas earlier in the year, and their body of work and the way they were playing, just it landed them at the 10th spot, and then that eliminated Indiana and Coastal Carolina from getting in.

So it wasn't so much about their lack of opportunity as opposed to someone else showing the committee that -- the committee believed that there were people ahead of them.

Q. Cincinnati was one of those teams that kind of had a couple of games postponed and stuff. Did that hurt them overall or was it just because the teams above them played better teams in the rankings?

GARY BARTA: The pandemic interrupted all sorts of things, and there was that period of time that the committee wasn't able to evaluate more information on Cincinnati, and while that was going on, there were other games being played. There was more information going on, and that's just -- that's unusual.

Obviously there are bye weeks built in, but that's one week as opposed to what we were dealing with in terms of varying numbers of games.

Yes, I think it impacted, but I also think it impacted that we didn't have the opportunity to see cross-conference games, which again in a normal season we would see more of that across all of the teams. So I think it had an impact, and it was pandemic related, which certainly wasn't anybody's fault, but as a committee we evaluate what's in front of us, what comes to us, and there were those weeks where we didn't have information to evaluate.

Q. To go back to what a few other people had asked about, the Group of Five, this is obviously the third time now we've had a well-publicized team, Cincinnati this year, Central Florida twice before. What do you say to these teams when you begin the year and everybody supposedly has a shot but these teams have done everything they could do to get to the playoff and they're just not included? You consider what college basketball has where Cinderella is very much involved in determining a national champion, college football doesn't really have that element. Do you think that is an issue?

GARY BARTA: I would just say that when the year starts out, everybody has the same opportunity to be evaluated. There are only four spots, and so those four spots are filled up with the teams who have the strongest strength of schedule, the most wins, appear to be -- Alabama was a great example. Somebody asked earlier. When you watched Alabama they dominate in every game that they play.

No matter the name of the school or the name of the conference, the committee watches the games and fills

those four spots with what the committee believes, based on all those factors that I just mentioned, are the best four teams in the country.

This year, as I mentioned, we didn't get the chance to see cross-conference games. I used BYU as an example just because I know what their schedule was before the season started. They were going to play -- I don't remember all the names of the schools, but they were going to play five Power Five schools in their schedule. Had they played that schedule and gone through that schedule undefeated, it would have given the committee so much more to evaluate and compare them to the teams that ended up in the top four.

Every team has the opportunity. There are four spots available, and when the season ends, the committee goes through its process and names those top four.

Q. You had mentioned just now that Cincinnati was hurt because there were some games they weren't able to play. Ohio State was not hurt for the same reason.

GARY BARTA: I didn't say -- I'm sorry to interrupt you. I didn't say they were hurt. What I said was those were weeks where we didn't have more information to evaluate on Cincinnati.

Every opportunity we have to evaluate adds to a body of work, and the question was asked -- maybe it was asked did it hurt them, and my response was it just gave us less information to evaluate.

Q. How come for Ohio State that doesn't seem like it was a factor?

GARY BARTA: Ohio State, their body of work had fewer games, and I've talked about that, that this year was unique in that we have teams that played six, seven, eight, as many as 11 games, so that was certainly a problem for the committee, and we had to deal with that. But we still were evaluating the body of work.

So when the committee watched they beat No. 14 -- Ohio State, to your question, beat Northwestern in their conference championship, they beat Indiana, who at the time was ranked in the top 15, and when you watch the games, when you watch the team and how they play, that was all considered. Ohio State was deemed based on those factors to be the third best team in the country.

Q. Like I asked, there really is no -- Cinderella has never been invited to this playoff. You see what college basketball has with upsets and it's really something college football doesn't have. Do you think

that's a problem?

GARY BARTA: I didn't say that.

Q. Well, I'm asking you.

GARY BARTA: No, it's not an invitation. It's a process of identifying the top four teams in the country. It's only an invite if the committee decides that any team in the country, based on that resume, based on that body of work, is one of the top four teams in the country.

Q. But I guess kind of what I'm asking, though, is do you think it's a problem that the little guy really has never been involved in determining the national champion, that it's been the power schools every single year?

GARY BARTA: Every single year the top four teams are evaluated and placed in the top four. That's the process we go through.

Q. When it comes to availability, I know you have mentioned before that the committee takes into account the availability of players in games. When it comes to Trevor Lawrence and some of the key players at Clemson was missing in the first game against Notre Dame, I'm wondering if that impacted how the committee viewed the first Notre Dame-Clemson game after seeing what yesterday's result was between the two teams.

GARY BARTA: You're right, we know -- we don't always know every player, but we generally know when players are missing. Either in this year it's unique because it's pandemic or COVID related, but in any year when someone is injured and the committee deems that they may have had an impact on the game. So it was noted in that game. Going back to that game as I'm sure you recall, it was an exciting game that went into overtime. Trevor Lawrence's backup played extremely well, and Notre Dame was able to come away with the win against a very good football team.

This week in the championship game last night, Trevor Lawrence was back, as were some of the defensive players that were out, and that was noted and evaluated.

But beyond that, it's noted, it's evaluated and it's included in the evaluation. I don't know specifically -- if you were just asking is it noticed and part of the evaluation, the answer is yes.

Q. I guess what I'm asking is does it cause the conversation to reevaluate the first match-up because

of what you saw yesterday.

GARY BARTA: It can create discussion, but the committee still evaluated and gave credit to the game that occurred with the people that played. Notre Dame played a very strong football game in that first match-up, so we noted who was missing, but we also noted how the game was played, what Notre Dame was able to do, what Clemson did.

So the answer is yes, it's noted, but games are still evaluated game by game with the information that comes to us.

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