

College Football Playoff Media Conference

Tuesday, November 16, 2021
Grapevine, Texas, USA

Gary Barta

College Football Playoff Selection Committee
Chair
CFP Media Conference

BRETT DANIELS: Welcome, everyone, to the third College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference for the 2021 season. Joining us again tonight is Bill Hancock, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, along with Gary Barta, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair. I'll turn it over to Gary for some opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Thanks, Brett, and thanks, everybody, for joining us tonight. Don't really have a lot of comments. As you saw, this was our third ranking of the season. Georgia No. 1, Alabama 2, Oregon 3 and Ohio State 4. Just want to add my thanks to the committee who just continues to be consuming and watching thousands and thousands of plays each week and comes to the meeting ready to really contribute.

With that, I'd be happy to open it up for questions.

Q. Gary, I wonder if you could just kind of describe Cincinnati's position, how firm it is at 5, like how close maybe Michigan or even Michigan State is from jumping the Bearcats?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, well, when I talk about how firm their position is, this week it's rock solid at No. 5, and I say that because we really don't -- we start over every week. Great discussion about Cincinnati and Michigan and where to place those two.

The Notre Dame, the win at Notre Dame, obviously the committee values that and the fact that Cincinnati remains undefeated. So there's not a degree of closeness, but this week, again, Cincinnati is ahead of Michigan. Next week we'll take a look at -- each of them has a game in front of them, and we'll compare them again next week.

Q. Did the way Ohio State was able to put up points and play against Purdue last weekend at all make you rethink their position with Oregon, or is head-to-head



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still the separator between those two teams?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, there was a lot of conversation this week, really including Alabama. The 2, 3, 4 positions, the committee had a lot of discussion about where Alabama, Oregon and Ohio State should all land. Alabama, the committee still considered the way they've been playing offensively, defensively, Mississippi, Mississippi State wins, and we didn't learn a lot new about Alabama, but they stayed at No. 2.

Now directly to your question, Oregon continues to play really solid football. They had a strong win against Washington State. To your point, Ohio State rolled on Purdue. The offense just continues to be one of the best offenses in the country. So then you compare Ohio State has wins at Minnesota and then against Penn State and Purdue. Oregon has the win at Columbus, and that's a big one. They also won at UCLA and beat Fresno State.

The long answer to your question is those two are compared this past week, and the committee just felt that they were close enough that that head-to-head still ruled the day, so Oregon stayed at 3 and Ohio State is at 4.

Q. What can you share about the conversations around Notre Dame, pros and cons?

GARY BARTA: Well, they have great wins -- they won again this week at Virginia. One of the things the committee did note is that Virginia did not have their starting quarterback, but they're 9-1, they have really -- they have a very strong strength of schedule. They have wins against Wisconsin and Purdue. Their loss, obviously, was to Cincinnati.

We think very highly of them. They continue to play good football. Just put them just after Michigan State, obviously.

Q. To circle back on Ohio State, I know that we parse your words a lot in this process, but on the broadcast you really emphasized that Ohio State was playing some of the best offense in the country and you mentioned that again when you were answering an earlier question. I'm curious, what's the committee's assessment of Ohio State defensively right now, and



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how is that affecting the ranking maybe especially relative to Alabama and Oregon like you discussed?

GARY BARTA: I would tell you that the committee has continued to be impressed with the way Ohio State's defense has improved since the beginning of the season. I really highlight the offense just because they might be playing the best offense in the country. They're not playing the best defense in the country, but their defense is playing impressively.

But in the end the committee still felt that Oregon should be third and Ohio State fourth.

Q. You've got Oklahoma State 9 this week and Oklahoma 13. They now have the same record and their schedules are virtually identical. The only difference is Oklahoma State has played Texas Tech, Oklahoma hasn't played Iowa State. How would you describe the discernible differences in the committee's mind with ranking those two teams four slots apart?

GARY BARTA: Well, Oklahoma -- going into this week Oklahoma was undefeated. The committee recognized that and credited them for that. One of the things that was talked about was that their strength of schedule and the teams that they had beat leading up to last week, they just weren't as strong as some of the other teams we were comparing them to. Had their opportunity against a very good Baylor team and obviously Baylor came out on top.

As we started to go through the rankings this week, we don't necessarily compare Oklahoma directly to Oklahoma State, but in the grouping, Mississippi, Baylor and Wake Forest all had big wins. Mississippi beat A&M, Baylor of course beat Oklahoma head-to-head, and then Wake Forest had a nice win against North Carolina State. Oklahoma ended up at 13 partly because of the wins that were ahead of them.

Oklahoma State's defense, the committee thinks very highly of the way they've been playing defense, some of the best defense this year. They beat Baylor, and so that certainly resonates with the committee. And then as of late offensively, Oklahoma State has been playing much better the last several weeks.

Q. Obviously Georgia at No. 1, the committee has looked at the Bulldogs weekly. What about them has most impressed the committee?

GARY BARTA: Well, one of the questions that the committee had several weeks ago was Stetson Bennett going to continue on as the quarterback. It looks like he's secured that spot, at least just watching week to week.

The offense is in the top 15 in scoring. James Cook had a big game this past week.

The defense, sort of what I said earlier about Ohio State having one of the best offenses, Georgia has the best defense in the country, but their offense continues to play efficiently and play much better with each passing week. It's just a dominant team on both sides of the ball.

Q. You've spoken highly about Oklahoma State. If they were to finish the season with just the one loss they have and with wins potentially over Oklahoma and Baylor, where would the committee kind of view them against other programs from across the country in different conferences?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, one of the things the committee works really hard at is we don't talk at all about projections. I can't answer that question. They're at 9 this week. You can look ahead yourself and see who they play, but as a committee what we'll do each week is just come back and compare Oklahoma State, who they beat or who they lost to and then compare it to the people around them.

I know that doesn't answer your question, but that's by design because the committee just doesn't project ahead.

Q. I'm curious from your perspective, after going through the exercise this week, how strong is that grip that Alabama has on that No. 2 spot, especially when compared to 3, 4 and 5?

GARY BARTA: Well, this week the committee -- every week we go from top to bottom, and we talk about every team. I can tell you that 2, 3 and 4 was an area where the conversation was a little bit longer. I mentioned earlier, we didn't learn a lot about Alabama this week but continue to be impressed with the way they play on both sides of the ball, but there was good conversation about where Alabama, Oregon and Ohio State should be placed. Ultimately when the vote occurred, it ended up the way it is, 2, 3, 4, Alabama, Oregon and Ohio State. But there was a lot of conversation with those three teams.

Q. Gary, you mentioned that the committee doesn't project ahead, so maybe this question can't be answered, but specifically to Notre Dame maybe in general with injured players, their best player has been out since the end of October, Kyle Hamilton, and he is projected to come back after they finish their season. As you evaluate them down the stretch here, do you evaluate them with the possibility of Hamilton or the probability of Hamilton coming back, or just on their body of work without him?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, you answered your own question. We don't project. We're aware when players are or aren't available in the week that we're evaluating it. For example, I mentioned that Virginia didn't have their starting quarterback. So we're aware each week who's available and who's not available, but we don't project ahead as to who might or might not play.

Q. I know there's been a lot of talk about Oklahoma State; what I wanted to ask you about, how much does the committee look at the way they had started really controlling their games, and sometimes in different ways? The West Virginia game was controlled primarily on the defensive end and was an overwhelming win, obviously the TCU win this week was more balanced but maybe even more toward the offense with a 63-17. How much does the committee take into account controlling wins?

GARY BARTA: Well, each team has a little bit different style, obviously. Controlling wins, if you think about watching games, that's more important than just a team that's just running up the score in my opinion, and I think we talked in the committee, when a team has total control of a game, that might be defensively, it might be offensively, so it's certainly something that we watch, but every team is so different in their style that it just sort of depends on the team.

Q. You've spoken a lot the last several weeks in evaluating Michigan versus Michigan State and Oregon versus Ohio State, how you factor in the head-to-head. Has there been any discussion in the room in any week about whether Notre Dame should be ranked ahead of Cincinnati even though Cincinnati has the head-to-head?

GARY BARTA: The honest answer to that is no, there hasn't. I'm just saying, in the areas in which we're having these conversations, looking at Ohio State and Michigan, Cincinnati sandwiched in between those two right now, there has not yet been any conversation of having Notre Dame ahead of Cincinnati, but again, next week will be a new week and we'll evaluate who each of them play and go from there.

BRETT DANIELS: Thank you, Gary. That concludes this week's Selection Committee call.

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