

# College Football Playoff Media Conference

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## Gary Barta

College Football Playoff Selection Committee  
Chair  
CFP Media Conference

BRETT DANIELS: Welcome, everyone, to the fourth 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 his opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Thanks, Brett, and good evening, everybody. Happy Thanksgiving. As Brett mentioned this was our fourth meeting for the CFP Selection Committee this year. You've seen our rankings, Georgia 1, Ohio State 2, Alabama 3 and Cincinnati at 4.

Undefeated Georgia continues to dominate, to just play great football on both offense and defense, so they came in at No. 1.

Ohio State following its incredible performance against a good Michigan State team is No. 2. The committee was certainly impressed by their win on Saturday.

Alabama comes in at 3 coming off a relatively close win against Arkansas. In the eyes of the committee, that result when you combined it with Ohio State's performance against Michigan State resulted in the ranking of those two teams.

Cincinnati was previously ranked 5. They won again. Their victory over a good SMU team combined with Oregon's loss led the committee to rank Cincinnati at No. 4.

Oregon, Michigan State and Wake Forest all dropped in our rankings, and that's probably not a surprise. That's a reflection of how soundly each team was defeated last week in combination with the teams around them winning their games.

We will return next week for our second to last ranking, and



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as always, just appreciate the hard work of the committee. With that I'd be happy to take any questions.

**Q. You described Ohio State's performance against Michigan State as incredible. Were you guys looking more for how they played on defense, or were you more blown away by what they did on offense, which obviously is not the first time they've done something like that?**

GARY BARTA: It certainly gets your attention, though, when they're up 49-0 at half. They had three receivers all over 100 yards for the game, and CJ Stroud played great again. I will say this, though. You mentioned their defense. They were able to hold -- we all know that Kenneth Walker is a great running back, and Ohio State was able to hold him pretty much ineffective.

Some of that had to do with once the score got away, I think Michigan State had to play a little different. But to your point, solid performance both offensively and defensively.

**Q. With No. 5, could you try to give your summation of the committee's consensus about Michigan?**

GARY BARTA: Michigan, we've talked, especially the last several weeks about just them being a complete football team. They're well balanced. Their offense and defense are both ranked nationally in most categories. Their best win to date is at Wisconsin. They also had a good win at Penn State. Very good football team, well-balanced, and obviously looking forward to watching Ohio State and Michigan play this weekend.

**Q. Just wondering what the thoughts of the committee are with all three of the Big 12 teams. They're now bunched up pretty tight, and there's a chance you're going to have kind of a merry go round schedule over the next two weeks. How strong could potentially the survivor of that be?**

GARY BARTA: Well, I don't want to predict how strong the survivor will be. You make a good point. You have Oklahoma State at 7; they've beaten Baylor. You have Baylor ahead of Oklahoma and you have Oklahoma 10-1,



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their only loss to a good Iowa State team. You're right, they're fairly bunched close together. There's games to be played among that group.

I think you know my answer about projecting. I'm not going to project forward other than to say that we get to see some good football ahead.

**Q. And the conference championship, the value on that still?**

GARY BARTA: It continues to be another piece of information, datapoint, whatever you want to call it, that the committee will certainly pay close attention to. Those are generally games against two really good football teams, so it'll be an important piece of the evaluation in that last ranking.

**Q. Just curious, Clemson entered the rankings for the first time this week. Obviously that was in large part due to their three-touchdown blowout win after No. 10 wake, but I'm also curious how much you looked at their losses, all three of their losses being on the road to ranked teams and all three really close, including the 10-3 loss to Georgia with Georgia having blown out everybody in the SEC including a few ranked teams. How much do you weigh those close losses? How much do those factor into your determination of Clemson being ranked?**

GARY BARTA: We definitely talked about it, and we did talk about how Clemson played Georgia in that first game, their other losses against Pitt and North Carolina State. To your point, they played -- they didn't have a bad loss. Their best win was the win this weekend. Prior to that, they really didn't have a signature win.

One of the things, though, the committee has been impressed with, Clemson has been playing really strong defense all year, so even though they haven't been in the top 25, the committee has been watching them every week.

**Q. I heard you say on TV that Cincinnati was viewed with the pod it's in and the one below it, as well, and I was wondering if you could shed some more light on how the committee weighed their strength of schedule which as you say has been a topic of conversation every week with the win at Notre Dame and obviously you said they looked good against SMU. How difficult was that conversation?**

GARY BARTA: I don't want to say it's difficult, but as you know, we have 13 people in the room, and there's a lot of opinions. The discussion goes back and forth.

What I meant, and for everyone listening, we look at these -- when we rank, we look at groups in pods. So we did compare Cincinnati upward with Alabama, Ohio State and Georgia. But then we also had them on the board with Michigan and Notre Dame and Oklahoma State.

The fact is there's only three undefeated teams left, and Cincinnati is one of those, Georgia and UTSA being the other two. The win against Notre Dame at Notre Dame has always impressed the committee.

The strength of schedule is always a conversation with Cincinnati. It still was a conversation this week, but they played an 8-2 SMU team, and not only did they play them, but they controlled both offensively and defensively.

Just a week ago, the committee had Cincinnati ahead of Michigan, and Michigan played at Maryland, they won, Cincinnati beat an 8-2 SMU team. So when we have all the discussion and then eventually there's a vote taken, the vote came out with Cincinnati ahead of Michigan again, 4 and 5.

**Q. You described Michigan earlier as a complete football team; what is it specifically in that cluster with the other one-loss teams, Notre Dame and Oklahoma State, that has so consistently allowed Michigan to be ranked ahead of them?**

GARY BARTA: I think the win at Penn State has gotten the committee's attention. Michigan has also been a well-balanced team pretty much all year, so it's been a consistency for most of the year. Notre Dame started out a little bit slower. They've certainly come on. But they're also -- their last three games, they totally manhandled Georgia Tech.

Georgia Tech, Navy and Virginia were their last three wins, so they haven't had the strength of schedule that they had earlier.

Oklahoma State, their defense has been terrific. They have a great win against Baylor. Texas Tech couldn't do anything against Oklahoma State's defense this past weekend.

Their offense shows signs at times. They do enough, Spencer Sanders and that group do enough, but they're more defensive-minded. They have the loss on the road at Iowa State.

So all of that is considered, and that just gives you a sense of some of the things we talked about among those three teams.

**Q. I'm curious about the top three teams. I know you mentioned on TV that you looked at Cincinnati with Alabama and Ohio State, but how close are those three? Obviously Georgia being undefeated, but where do those stand and the differences between the three as the committee sees it?**

GARY BARTA: You know, we have conversations, and you can get a sense through conversations and people's opinions and their questions kind of how people feel about each team. Georgia is undefeated, and I just said a minute ago that there's only three undefeated teams left, and for Georgia to be 11-0 and against the schedule that they play continues to get the committee's attention.

The defense that they play, they have the best defense in the country, Jordan Davis and company, and their offense is still a top 10 type offense. They do have wins against Clemson and Arkansas.

When we voted, Georgia came out on top. There was more conversation between Ohio State and Alabama. I went through that a little bit earlier in terms of why the committee put -- ended up putting Ohio State ahead of Alabama this week, but both are considered to be great teams, not just good teams.

All three of those teams received great conversation. Ohio State offensively is considered to be the strongest in that group, but Ohio State's defense is better. Georgia may be the best defense there, and Alabama both offensively and defensively. It's just exciting to see those teams continue to get better every week.

But when it came down to the vote, Georgia, Ohio State and Alabama in that order this week.

**Q. With Oklahoma, what did the Iowa State win do for them, really their best win of the year? And with Oklahoma State from the way you're talking, it sounds like they've elevated themselves in terms of the pod that they're being analyzed with. If you could talk about their situation a little bit more.**

GARY BARTA: Oklahoma only has one loss. You've heard us talk previously about the strength of their schedule not being as difficult as some of the others. The Iowa State win was a heck of a football game, first of all. The fact that they were able to hang on and win that game, the committee certainly considered that. Their only loss is to a really good Baylor team.

There's never a discussion about separation; right now it's 7, 8, 9 and 10. When this week occurs, obviously

Oklahoma State and Oklahoma play each other, and that will be a piece of information that will be important to add to the conversation.

**Q. Has Oklahoma State elevated themselves where they're getting looked at as part of that group with the teams ahead of them, as well?**

GARY BARTA: To say yes because they're ranked No. 7, and their defense continues to be strong, they certainly get included in discussions with people above them, with Michigan, but you are where you're ranked. Right now they're at 7, and as I said earlier, they have a big game coming up that can add to their resume.

**Q. I know everyone on the committee is going to have different preferences, but just from your perspective, Oklahoma State is a team that dominates defensively. They've put up big numbers on that side of the ball, not so much on offense as you've referenced, just doing enough to get by. Do you notice one or the other more? Does a big number offensively jump out rather than a shutout, for instance, or does that not come into play with Oklahoma State and their resume?**

GARY BARTA: You know, last week I said the committee watches every team is a little bit different in their style, and the committee watches every team and starts to recognize their style.

I know this, and I'm not saying this to be smart-aleck; if you win 23-0, if you don't let the other team score, you're going to win. Defense wins championships and all those things.

The challenge is can that defense hold up against a dynamic offense, a much more dynamic offense. If they end up continuing to win by playing great defense, the committee will recognize that and rank them accordingly.

I only say that their offense hasn't reached some of the levels of some of the offenses because if you're a complete team you have both sides of the ball. They've earned the right to be No. 7 because they're only giving up about 13 points a game, at least in conference play, and so they're a terrific team. We'll just have to see the rest of the way out how it plays.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about the team or the school that you represent, Iowa, being ranked 16th. I know it's been discussed that you figuratively leave a hat outside, I guess literally outside the room, but who advocates for Iowa when you're not in there, and what kind of discussion has been generated about the Hawkeyes that you're aware of?**

GARY BARTA: Well, you know, as you know, not only do I put a hat on the door, we all do figuratively and literally, but I'm not in the room when Iowa is discussed. So when I come back in, what I'm told is how the ranking turns out.

In terms of advocate, there's really not an advocacy for anybody. There's 13 teams, 13 individuals having discussions, 12 when I'm not in the room for Iowa, having discussions about how they feel about each team. There is a conference representative, so each conference has people on the city who talk to the conference on a regular basis to get the conference feedback, but there's really not an advocacy. It's people's individual opinions on how Iowa plays, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are and where they think they belong, in this case 16th.

**Q. What kind of feedback have you received about Iowa being 16th and not, say, 12th where Michigan State is?**

GARY BARTA: I think one of the things the committee talks about with Iowa and one of the things I certainly recognize watching them every week is defense is certainly a strength, and some wins over Iowa State and Penn State and Minnesota and no bad losses and having won three in a row. But beyond that, I don't have a lot of conversations one-on-one about why Iowa is here or why Iowa is not there.

BRETT DANIELS: This concludes this week's Selection Committee call.

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