

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Irving, Texas, USA

Lt. General Richard Clark

Mark Keenum

Bill Hancock

CFP Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome everyone to the College Football Playoff introductory teleconference to welcome new CFP Executive Director Lieutenant General Richard Clark.

Joining us is Dr. Mark Keenum, president of Mississippi State University and chair of the CFP Board of Managers; Bill Hancock, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, and future executive director, Lieutenant General Richard Clark.

MARK KEENUM: Good morning. Thank you to everyone who has joined us. Today is another very exciting day for college football and certainly for its future.

I'm delighted to introduce to you Lieutenant General Richard Clark. General Clark was recommended by the CFP search committee that consisted of university presidents and commissioners. He was selected because of his leadership, his knowledge of college football and his organizational skills.

He also holds the respect of so many who love this game. The Board of Managers voted, as all know, this past Friday morning to officially offer him the job. I would say that it was a very thorough process, and I'm confident we have found the right person. He is someone who personifies leadership, a leader of leaders at the highest level. A leader of impeccable character and the highest of integrity.

He is someone who will approach his new role as a humble servant leader. As I told someone after the screening interview that I participated in, General Clark has the wow factor. General Clark has served his country with honor, sacrifice, and commitment.

Among the many aircraft that he has piloted in his career, he piloted the B-1 bomber, and given some of the issues in



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college football, you may never know when that might come in handy.

He is a diplomat, having served as a defense attaché during his service in Cairo, Egypt, and as a base commander in Germany. And, of course, as a superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy. He's a colleague and an individual who has his finger on the pulse of college football.

General Clark, this is an exciting time for college football, and I am delighted you will become a major part of it. The qualities and characteristics General Clark possesses, I would say, are very similar to those of Bill Hancock, who has served CFP so capably, with such distinction, for 10 years.

We're deeply indebted to Bill for his service and leadership to the CFP and all of college athletics. We are thankful that he will be with us throughout the next or upcoming season to ensure a very smooth transition for General Clark as he moves into his new leadership role.

So with that, Bill, I will turn it to you for a few comments.

BILL HANCOCK: Well, thank you, President Keenum, for the kind words and also for your leadership of CFP through these years. Much appreciated.

And I want to say thank you to General Clark for your love of this game and also congratulate you again. This is a great job, and you're going to do really well. I'm proud to know you and I look forward to working side by side with you over the next several months. I don't want to say too much today because this is about General Clark.

I have spoken with him previously and then again about this job, and I can tell you that he has a great understanding of what the job entails. I'll also note on a personal level you don't get to meet a general too often who is not only a strong leader but such a humble man. I think General Clark has just the right touch and he's going to do great.

Just so you know, I will remain as executive director through the championship game in January and for a time

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beyond that. The exact timing remains to be seen, but I think much of 2024, let me say it that way, will be a year of transition as Rich gets up to speed on all things CFP. He and I will work shoulder and shoulder, certainly at least until '24 and after that.

Rich will remain a superintendant through June and I will officially retire early in 2025. I have three grandkids, a son and two daughters-in-law and a wife who, I think, are going to look forward to seeing more of me. At least I hope they are. And I certainly look forward to spending more time with my family.

Anyway, I'm happy to introduce to you the second executive director in the history of CFP, General Rich Clark. Rich, over to you.

RICHARD CLARK: Thank you, Mr. Hancock. And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for joining us today. This is a special call, and I've had a lot of great opportunities in my life, but this one is absolutely special, and I am so grateful. I'm grateful to God for the opportunity. I want to thank President Keenum and the rest of the Board of Managers for having the confidence in me to take over this role.

The search committee, especially to them, for going through the process and including me in it and continuing to vet me out to make sure that I have the qualities that they were looking for. So I'm grateful there, and certainly to Mr. Hancock, not just for what he's done already to help me in this process, but really what he's done for college football and the opportunity to take the torch from him is absolutely an honor. So thank you, sir, for what you've done for me and for college football.

This opportunity is, in my view, is just another opportunity to serve. I've been serving in the Air Force for 38 years. I'd like to consider myself a servant leader, and now I get to serve the sport that I love so much. I was a college football player myself at the Air Force Academy for four years as a football player, and now I get to give back to the sport that gave so much to my development and to who I am as a leader.

It means a lot to the young men. The student-athletes who play it. And that's always got to be first and foremost in our mind to make sure that they have every opportunity for success. I get to serve the schools where it's played to make sure that those institutions are able to thrive, to support not just all football and all sports but all students, and that is an especially significant honor for me. And then the fans who love the sport like me, to give them the opportunity to experience it in a way that America has experienced college football.

But with the growth and the expansion of the College Football Playoffs, I think it's going to be a really special opportunity for all of us. And then certainly for the reporters who cover the sport so that you can help bring it to America the way that it deserves to be brought.

So, again, to be able to serve this American tradition is extraordinarily special for me. As we grow into the 12-team playoff format, it's extremely exciting, and again I want to thank Mr. Hancock for what he's done already to plan for that, to move us into that next chapter, and I can't even imagine where college football will go with this new playoff format. But I am so excited to be a part of it.

There's details I still have to learn. Mr. Hancock is already working with me to get up to speed, and I think that by June you'll be ready to really take the torch. But to have his mentorship even after that is very special and meaningful to me. So thank you again, sir.

But I look forward to meeting all of you, getting to know you better over the months ahead. I know you have a lot of questions about where College Football Playoffs are right now.

I'm not in necessarily the best position to answer those, but we will -- and fortunately we have our expert, Bill Hancock, on board with us. So once again, Amy, my wife and I are extremely excited for this opportunity and looking forward to moving head.

Q. What is your grand vision for the role of the College Football Playoff in this next era with so many change coming aboard?

RICHARD CLARK: The grand vision I have at this point is to be able to participate in the growth of college football to take it to the absolute maximum heights that it can go. Those opportunities are endless, and I know Bill Hancock has really fought through this throughout his tenure because he's continued to grow it.

And I will pick up from where his vision leaves off when we actually make our turnover and our transition. So I might turn it over to Bill to talk a little bit about his thoughts on where it goes.

And I know obviously the Board of Managers and the management of the CFP will have a big role in that vision.

BILL HANCOCK: I would just add, the game is on a great trajectory. And I expect it to continue on that trajectory under Rich's leadership.

Q. When you're going through the interview process,



what are the people who just hired you telling you they're looking for? This is a role that I think a lot of people may, as the playoff evolves with it, so I guess what did you hear from the people who just hired you that they want from you?

RICHARD CLARK: The number one thing that I heard from the committee was that they needed leadership. Like they've gotten from Mr. Hancock over the years, they want to continue that, and they want me to not just be a leader in the day-to-day operations but a strategic leader that not only helps develop the vision and where college football can go but to help execute that vision once we have it.

And so I will be working very closely with the board and the committee to develop that vision and then I'll work with our staff at the CFP and all of the leaders in college football to execute it to ensure that we achieve the vision that's set before us.

In the end, if there's one thing, one word to sum it up, it would be leadership. And I will do everything that I can, fully committed to ensuring that we reach the absolute highest level that we can in college football.

Q. First, why would you want this position, number one? And number two, there's been a lot of talk lately about athlete compensation, Name, Image and Likeness stuff. And I'm curious where you stand on that conversation in light of the CFP probably signing a new TV deal worth a lot of money soon. And Bill, if you could answer a question for me about maybe when the next president's call will be to approve some of the format recommendations and things that the commissioners did last week.

RICHARD CLARK: The question about why I wanted to go through this process. I'll be honest with you, it wasn't something that was on my radar until a search firm that was employed by the Board of Managers and the management committee came to me and asked if I would be willing to put my name in the hat. And if I was going to sum that up in three sort of, I think, reasons why: First, at the lowest level, I just love college football. I love what it means. I love what it did for me as a leader and the opportunity to play football, it brought me to the Air Force Academy. I graduated from there in 1986. If it were not for college football I might not be here right now. So it's an opportunity for me to give back.

The most important thing to me is student success and the success of our student-athletes and giving them every opportunity to experience this game in a way that will be meaningful for their whole lives is important to me, and it's something that I think that, like Bill, I can continue to grow

and enhance that lifetime experience that they're going to have in this sport and, more importantly, the development of them as citizens and leaders in our country. So I'm very excited about that as well.

And finally, the big changes that are happening: To be a part of something as big as this for our country, it's unimaginable to me that the opportunity presented itself, but I am honored and grateful for the chance to be a part of it. I look forward to learning more and moving forward to help us achieve those goals.

As far as some of the other changes with student-athlete compensation or Name, Image and Likeness, those are things that I still have to think through, but certainly the governance process that will guide us in those areas is going to be very important.

So I'll be formulating those ideas on how it affects the College Football Playoffs in the future, but there's certainly going to be important issues that we're going to have to consider as we move forward.

But I'll turn it over to Bill to answer some of the other questions you asked.

BILL HANCOCK: No date has been set for the next call of the board. They will meet on the day of the championship game down in Houston. But whether there's a call before then is yet to be determined.

Q. President Keenum, when you were going through the process of considering various candidates, I know you weren't on the committee, but how much is the possibility of this role expanding into something far greater factor in the candidates and for General Clark, we've heard you were considered or going to be on the selection committee before this happened. So will you regret not being able to be part of that committee as well?

MARK KEENUM: Chris, obviously college football is going through a lot of change, and there are a lot of issues, important issues, for our future that are to be determined. So that's why, going back to what General Clark mentioned, we were looking for someone who could bring strong passionate leadership. That was the core of the process that we went through is trying to find someone who could be an outstanding leader.

Like I said, there are a lot of things that we're going to have to work through. It's not just CFP, but it's all of collegiate athletics for that matter, not just football. But where football is concerned, we want someone who can be strong, be an effective spokesperson, be a strong advocate

for the sport of football, because it is such a vital part of the American fabric of who we are and has a strong fan base and means so much to our respective universities, to this institution that I serve. So it's important.

And so that was the process, of finding someone who could be a strong, effective, capable leader, and how thrilled I am that we were able to identify General Clark and he was able to bring his abilities to provide the leadership that we so need, so greatly need.

RICHARD CLARK: You asked about me being disappointed to not be on the selection committee. I will tell you, when Mr. Hancock called me and let me know that I was going to be on that, I thought, oh, my gosh, this is probably the greatest honor I could have ever had. I was so excited. He told me I couldn't tell anybody until January. So I had to keep it under my hat.

And I couldn't imagine that there would be a bigger honor than that until now. And to be able to do this and be a part of College Football Playoffs and collegiate athletics at this level is an even greater honor. So yeah, I'm a little disappointed I can't be on the selection committee, but I think it's all made up for by this position because it's again unimaginable that I'm talking to you right now about this. The honor, it surpasses even the honor that I have from the selection committee.

Q. President Keenum, so obviously the first CFP director had a very long history in college football, Bill Hancock. And General Clark is coming back to football after a little bit. I'm curious how that played in your decision and kind of, without sort of the football backing that you kind of have seen before, what really kind of drew you to General Clark?

MARK KEENUM: As I've mentioned, his leadership skills. He's obviously someone who has played the sport, very familiar with the sport. He's serving as the superintendent of the Air Force Academy, which is the president of that university. And football is very important to the Air Force Academy. So he has a keen appreciation for the sport, but his leadership, his passion and his vision for his approach to leadership were just tremendous in the interview. You could sense his passion.

And just his experience. As I mentioned in my statement, this is a gentleman who has served this nation at the highest level. He is a leader of leaders at very high levels in our national defense of our government. He understands what leadership is about. He's almost sitting there -- again, I was not in the search interview. I was in the screening interview.

We have a screening committee that interviewed all of our candidates, and I participated in that. I asked Greg Sankey to represent SEC on the search committee, and I asked Father John Jenkins at Notre Dame to chair that committee.

I knew we had a strong force with our presidents and chancellors and commissioners that made up the search committee, I knew that they would hone in on the right person.

And again, having someone with General Clark's integrity, his character, his leadership skills -- and I'll just share this with you. When I was participating in the interviews during the screening process, and when General Clark was going through his interview, I wrote one word down by his name. And that word was "wow." Very impressive, powerful interview. Just extremely impressive. And when I said in my statement, he has the wow factor, he has the wow factor.

From where I'm coming from, I want someone who can be a strong advocate for the sport. Yes, leadership, as I mentioned, is critical, but someone who can be an advocate, a spokesperson, be the image and the face of college football. And where we go in our future, I don't know, but I know that when General Clark walks in the room to sit down and represent the College Football Playoff and college football, we're going to have a strong, effective, capable leader and spokesperson to represent us.

So at the end of the day, I was beyond thrilled when the search committee came back and said this is who we want to lead the CFP.

Q. I know that your position will not necessarily be in the policymaking, but as someone who represents a group of five institutions, going forward how important do you feel like it is that the group of five is assured of at least one spot in the playoffs? And also for Bill, how flattering is it that it took a person of General Clark's stature to replace you?

RICHARD CLARK: I want to turn that second question that you just asked that the tables need to be turned. I'm flattered to be able to try to fill the shoes of Bill Hancock. You've been a legend in college sports for a long time. So the honor is mine. That's where the flattery comes. But I've got big shoes to fill. I just wanted to say that.

As far as having a group of five team have the opportunity to move into the playoffs to me is huge. And my school right now, the Air Force Academy, certainly falls into that category. But what it gives a team is hope. It gives you

that opportunity for you, your fans, the rest of your student population, to be involved in college football at the highest levels.

So I think I always have this saying, if I got a shot, I've got a shot, and I'll take every opportunity to move into that position. So I appreciate the fact that Mr. Hancock and the rest of the team that made this possible considered the rest of the college football community, especially the group of five to have that opportunity. So I think it's vitally important for the whole sport that that opportunity is there.

BILL HANCOCK: It's enormously flattering that someone like Rich will step into this chair. Golly, not only a man with a distinguished military career, but also a university president. Yeah, extremely flattering, and let me just say this, as you all get to know Rich over the months and years ahead, you'll know what I mean.

Q. Bill, is Warde Manuel participating in the deliberations this week?

BILL HANCOCK: Yes.

Q. Wanted to ask you a little bit about the process and timeline. You mentioned being contacted by a search firm. What was the genesis of that and how quickly did this kind of come together at least on your end and what was sort of the interview process like?

RICHARD CLARK: I'll say overall the interview process happened very quickly, but it was just the experience of that, whether I got selected or not was an incredible experience.

The search committee, the screening interview, everybody was so respectful and kind throughout, but it was like a who's who in higher education, in college football, or I should say college athletics, because you have the commissioners and presidents there, but it was a really great experience.

The first step of it, though, was getting a phone call from the search firm and asking if I'd put my name in the hat. And first I had to make sure it wasn't a joke from one of my friends because I couldn't believe it.

It wasn't a trick question. So I absolutely was willing to put my name in the hat. I wondered, honestly, if I even had an opportunity because I had read some articles about speculation of the kinds of people that were going to be considered, and I just didn't think I matched up. But here I am, and I can't tell you how excited I am.

But after I put my name in the hat, I went through the

screening interview on Zoom. And again it was about an hour-plus-long interview, lots of questions, in-depth questions. I thought they were very thorough and made it to that next search committee interview, in person.

Again, I met all of the members of that committee, amazing group of people. They asked questions but it was really more discussion, and we just talked about some of the issues and the things that they were looking for.

Then a day later, I found out I had been selected and the Board of Managers agreed to me becoming the next executive director. All in all, the process just took a little over three weeks from when I first put my hat in the hat and when I was called and told that I would be the next executive director, and I'm still on cloud nine.

Q. Given the state of affairs, your position and/or the CFP, they end up running college football or at least FCS, I think it's pretty much assumed that the next contract for the CFP may be the largest in college football history. What uniquely qualifies you for those responsibilities?

RICHARD CLARK: Well, I'll say that you bring up a great point. There's a lot of things that are going to have to happen as college football grows and where the CFP goes. Some of those decisions are decisions that I will be working very closely with all the stakeholders who are involved in that growth, which is one of the skills I think I've developed over the years as a person who collaborates and really helps to pull a team together to move forward with big decisions like this.

As far as what uniquely qualifies me for the kinds of agreements that are going to have to be made -- I throughout my career in the organizations I've been in, I've had to work with Congress. I've had to work through the Pentagon. If you have any familiarity with the Pentagon, there's a special skill that you have to have to get anything done there because it is a large organization with a lot of stakeholders.

And then just another job that I've had. I've had to be able to collaborate, to be a listener, and then to help pull together all of the ideas and thoughts to drive us to a decision.

Making decisions specifically on the kinds of agreements that we're going to have to make, I have some learning to do. And again I go back -- I'm very happy that Mr. Hancock is going to be there to help me to understand that in the months ahead so when those decisions are mine, to help direct and guide, that I'll be able to build that experience.



I've always considered myself a lifelong learner. Every job I've ever gone into in the Air Force over 38 years, I'm usually pretty new at whatever that mission was, and I had a lot of learning to do, but I rely on my team around me, I rely on my mentors who are supporting me and seek out the experts that can help me with some of the complex issues that surround these decisions.

So I've been doing this kind of work generally for a long time but not specifically with college football, but I will bring those skills to bear on this, and I'm excited to do it.

Q. Specifically, how much input and influence will you have in relation to the CFP's next College Football Playoff contract? And how much or what is your experience as relates to media rights contracts and deals?

RICHARD CLARK: The upcoming contract for CFP, again, Mr. Hancock will still be in place all the way through into '25. So depending on the timing of those contracts, that's going to drive how much influence I'll have. But what I will say is, regardless, I will be -- like Mr. Hancock said -- shoulder to shoulder with him as we go through so that I can first build the experience in it, but then understand his thought processes and how he goes through making these kinds of decisions. So that will be very helpful.

I am confident that when the time comes for me to be the one that is leading us through these decisions, I'll be ready. I know Mr. Hancock is going to help us get there.

I don't have a lot of experience with media rights agreements, but I, on the periphery as a Mountain West Conference board of directors member -- we've had discussions on these things and I've been involved in them over the last three-plus years on where we were going to go as a conference.

So not completely new territory, but in this role, it's going to be new and I have a lot of learning to do, without question. But I think I'm up to the task, and I know that Mr. Hancock is ready to help me to figure out my way forward as I get ready for this challenge. But I'm excited. I'm passionate. And I'm ready to get after it.

Q. What's your preference through the way you like to be addressed? Lieutenant General? General?

RICHARD CLARK: I like to be addressed by Rich. I'm excited to actually -- when I retire -- that people can just call me by the name my mom gave me. Although she named me Richard. My wife calls me that. Everyone calls me Rich. I'd appreciate that. Thank you, ma'am.

