

College Football Playoff

Media Conference

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Rich Clark

Warde Manuel

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RICH CLARK: Good evening, everyone. This is Rich, and we really appreciate you joining us tonight. Look forward to answering your questions.

I just want to kick off by saying it's exciting. Today, as big of a day as it is - it's election day and we get that - but I think the selection day, it's in there. We're off and running, and the Selection Committee met today for the first time, and I think it's just a good night for college football. Fans everywhere are very excited about the 12-team playoff and the opportunities that we have. We're opening the aperture for more teams to participate, and I think that's exactly what the commissioners had in mind when they developed this new format.

I'll say that next month and this last month leading into the playoff is going to be extremely exciting because teams that before we weren't thinking about going into the playoff are going to have an opportunity. We're still looking at 20 plus teams potentially that have a shot to get into the playoff.

The Selection Committee wrapped up their first ranking today, and you probably have already seen the 25 best teams that they laid out for us, and that's their job, to rank the 25 best teams. That's always been the committee's job for 10 years. It's just this year it's going to lead to a different format for our playoffs, and we're really excited about it.

On December 8th they're going to release the final ranking, and that's when they will then seed the 12 teams that will go into the bracket for the playoff and then we'll be ready to roll from the end of December all the way to the championship game in Atlanta.

It's really an exciting time for us. Having the Selection Committee meet for the first time in this new format was exciting, and I'm excited to turn the floor over to our chairman of the Selection Committee. He's also the



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athletic director at Michigan, Warde Manuel.

WARDE MANUEL: Good evening, everybody. As the new chairman for this year, I'd like to welcome everybody to the first year of the 12-team playoff. While the number of teams that will participate in the playoff has changed, the committee's mission has not. Our job is to rank the best 25 teams in college football based on the protocol which was written by the commissioners who run the CFP.

We began this week with a blank piece of paper just as we do every week. What happened last year does not matter. The conferences teams play in don't factor into our decision, as we don't look at the public polls. Instead, we are instructed by the founders of the playoff to consider teams' records, their strength of schedule, their head-to-head match-ups, and results against common opponents.

We then discuss and debate who we think is best. While we have an abundance of statistics to rely on, the committee is subjective by design.

We consist of 13 experts. Each person on the committee watches the games, studies the stats, debates the merits of each team, and ultimately casts their vote. Our job is to get it right.

The committee has six new members this year. We have seven members who have served on the committee in the last year or two. As we always do, the new members participated this fall in a mock ranking session, and that helped us to hit the ground running. Our rankings are out, and you've seen them.

Undefeated Oregon is No. 1. Their win against Ohio State and their 5-0 record against teams with winning records earned them that spot.

Ohio State is ranked No. 2. They had an impressive win on the road against a strong Penn State team and played No. 1 Oregon down to the wire in Eugene. They've had a good strength of schedule, and they're 5-1 against teams with winning records.

Georgia is ranked third. The committee was impressed



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with their win at Texas, the strength of their defense, and they too have played a tough schedule.

The University of Miami is No. 4. They're 9-0, and the committee was impressed with their offensive explosiveness. They had a good win on the road against Louisville.

I walked you through our top 4, but of course we go deeper than that. Every ranking matters, whether it's top 4, top 12 or top 25. Fans and teams deserve to know that the committee spent plenty of time talking about each team in the ranking. That is precisely what we did over the last two days.

Thanks for listening, and we are happy to take your questions.

Q. I was just curious if you could explain a little bit the gap between BYU and Miami. BYU is a team that has two top-20 victories by your metric; Miami only has one. I was wondering what the huge disparity is there.

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I think both teams are obviously very good, and when we looked at how Miami has played particularly their offensive prowess, they were impressive in their win against Louisville, and they really had a dominating show at the beginning of the year against Florida, came back against Cal in a very late-night contest for Miami.

BYU, as well, is very strong. Impressive wins against SMU No. 13 and No. 19 Kansas in a dominating fashion.

It really came down to more of an eye test as it related to looking at both teams, and the committee as we ranked them saw them in that fashion, and it came out in that order.

Q. Could you evaluate the Longhorns for me. Was their eye test probably the most impressive thing that got them up to No. 5, and is it a fragile hold because they don't have big statement wins over top-25 teams?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I think Texas has looked good all year in terms of how they have played. They have won on the road at Michigan and went to Vanderbilt and won. As we've seen, Vanderbilt is a very good team this year. Their only loss at home was to No. 3 Georgia.

We don't look at it as being fragile or not. We are going to judge each week with a clean sheet and approach it, and we look forward to watching how Texas plays as the season progresses.

Q. How did you evaluate Ohio State in comparison with Georgia, and what ultimately tipped things in favor of the Buckeyes for the No. 2 ranking?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, both are solid teams, as you know. Ohio State's one loss on the road was against the No. 1 team, and they lost by one. They had an impressive win this past weekend at Penn State, and they have been very consistent. Top-5 defense. They have had changes on the offensive line but still performed, as you know, and Will Howard and Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson, those three have really moved the offense.

So for us, it was the consistency. Georgia, very good team, great win against Texas, a win over Clemson. Consistency in terms of their offense. They've had some inconsistencies there, but they have great defense, and they're allowing only 17 points per game.

It was a close analysis, but in the end we just felt that Ohio State was a more consistent performer at this point in time, and their loss to the No. 1 -- their only loss is to No. 1 Oregon, and that's how the committee came out with the decision.

Q. You mentioned about Indiana on the show, how dominant they've been, winning games by two scores. You could possibly make the case to move them higher, but ESPN also showed that they have the 103rd ranked schedule which some would think would be a reason to drop them lower. How did they end up in the spot that they did?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, you really gave the answer to the deliberation that we had. Their strength of schedule was not very high in comparison to some others, but the way that they have played in those games and the dominance that they have shown in those games, winning by an average of 33 points a game, has been really impressive to the committee. So we couldn't ignore that.

As it related to where they are ranked and how we saw them, even though strength of schedule is important, we also have watched those games. The only game they've been behind was last week against Michigan State by 10, and they came back and I believe went on a 47-point run to win that game.

Very impressive team, well-coached by Curt Cignetti. They are just a formidable opponent. That's what we saw.

Q. When Rich did a call last week, we heard that not all wins and losses were created equally, and tonight I think Warde made a reference that the conference teams play in don't factor into the decision. I'm asking

for some clarity there. I know there's a schedule strength ranking. Do conferences' strengths also factor into this decision, and could you clarify -- I know this is a bit of an issue, but if wins and losses aren't created equally, then wouldn't conference strength also factor in?

RICH CLARK: Yeah, thanks for the question. We don't factor in conference strength. We look at each game individually, and that's what the commissioners do. They put that work in to watch those games and evaluate them on their own.

When I said that all wins and losses aren't created equally, what I meant was I mean sometimes -- let's just take the Ohio State loss to Oregon. It was one point on the road. That was an impressive game, and their performance was very strong against the No. 1 team in our ranking, as compared to a loss by Georgia to Alabama. It was on the road, but it didn't have the same, I'd say, impressiveness that the Ohio State loss did because Alabama is ranked 11 in our poll.

Now, both losses are still -- it says something about the team, but they're just not the same, and the committee saw it that way.

There's a lot of different examples throughout where some wins are better than others and some losses are also better or worse than others.

The committee really does evaluate each game on its own merit and not looking at irrespective of the conference that they're in.

Q. Given what the committee did to Florida State last year, do you see there is incentive or disincentive to teams, programs, coaches, regarding a disclosure of injury information over the next month, and how will the committee take any ambiguity regarding injuries into account when it comes to the final seeding given its actions a year ago?

RICH CLARK: Well, I would say that the committee is going to look at a team's merits, and if there is a loss, the committee -- a loss due to injury, the committee is going to look at the team's performance without that player. They're going to see, just like they did last year, they're going to see how a team performs with the loss of a key player, and they're going to evaluate them on that merit, and if they know that player is not coming back, they know that that's the team moving forward that they're going to rank for the future.

Whether a team discloses their injuries or not, the

committee is going to see how they perform without a player, and that's how they're going to evaluate them. I don't know if you have anything to add to that, Warde.

WARDE MANUEL: I think that's correct, and obviously we don't look back at decisions that were made in the past, and we're going to deal with things that happen this year. It has nothing to do with injury disclosure. It has to do with are they -- we recognize when key people are missing from a game, whether it's disclosed or not, so we can evaluate, as Rich said, and have that as a part of the decision as it relates to a team's performance in that particular game on that particular week.

Q. Warde, do you not see that as a potential disincentive then for some -- if it comes a month from now, that a team may be disincentivized from disclosing a longer term injury out of fear of either being moved out of the seeds or knocked out of the field entirely?

WARDE MANUEL: No, we don't look at it in terms of penalizing teams. We look at performance. If the performance is there, the performance is there. It has nothing to do with whether or not an injury is disclosed or a key player is out. It's how did that team perform in those games when that person is not available or not participating in those particular contests.

Q. I'm curious when you look at Penn State, what went into them being in the 6 spot, especially ahead of Tennessee and ahead of BYU?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, Penn State lost to the No. 2 Ohio State Buckeyes, and it was a game that went back and forth, and obviously a game that could have gone the other way. It was back and forth.

In that, they have wins over Illinois and Southern Cal in overtime, an opening win at West Virginia, which is difficult to play. So we looked at their body of work.

Tennessee has an impressive win over Alabama at No. 11 and wins over North Carolina State and Oklahoma, 4-1 against teams above .500. The loss at Arkansas was something that we discussed a lot.

So looking at the resume, looking at what we've seen, the offensive performance, their tight end Tyler Warren is a dominating force on offense. So I just think Penn State, in terms of their body of work and what the committee saw in terms of their body of work, that came to the ranking of Penn State at 6 and Tennessee at 7.

Q. I'm curious about you guys' evaluation of

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Washington State. Obviously with unique circumstances in not having a conference and the strength of schedule being affected because of that, how would you describe your evaluation of Washington State?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I mean, we looked at them in terms of what they've done this season. Their only loss was to Boise State, who's ranked 12th, and they have four wins against teams above .500, but the best win was their win over Washington 24-19. While they're playing consistent football, offense is putting up 38 points per game, we still felt as the deliberations occurred that at the present time the committee ranked them based on their body of work at 21 with a lot of football obviously left to play, and we'll continue to monitor what all of these teams do as we progress during the season.

Q. You mentioned it a little bit when you were describing why Ohio State was over Georgia. But you also mentioned some of the injuries to the offensive line. How much did that contest maybe move the needle for you guys when you were having discussions of Georgia and Ohio State, maybe one playing at a little bit more full strength than the other one and still what they've been able to do?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I think it goes to the question earlier. We notice when linemen move around, when people are not in games that have played in games before. To us, and we have two NFL and college Hall-of-Famers on the offensive line who also are on the committee and recognize and discuss the play in the line - I'm a former defensive end - so you tend to notice those things. It was impressive with the movement that Ohio State really moved the ball against Penn State, protected well against their rush.

It did factor into it as it relates to how we saw Ohio State and their performance against Penn State last weekend.

Q. On Boise State, just curious if you could give sort of a summary of the committee's evaluation of their season to date.

WARDE MANUEL: Well, the summary is Boise State is an impressive team. They go to No. 1 Oregon at the beginning of the season and lose by three. Ashton Jeanty, I think he's rushed for more yards against Oregon than anybody else in the country, if I have that correct. They're just an impressive team. Their quarterback is really developed and been a strength of their team. Impressive win at UNLV. They're a very good team. And their win against No. 21 Washington State.

So the committee is very high on them as it relates to their performance. Their last win by 22 points -- or 32 points, I think, against San Diego State, they're just an impressive team all around.

Q. You touched on in terms of Indiana, strength-of-schedule stuff, but with the one-loss teams, you have some ahead of them like Penn State and behind them like Notre Dame. What were the datapoints that separated those teams for you guys?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I think the play and who they've played thus far, the performance of the teams ahead of them and how the committee evaluated them. Look, we think highly of Indiana. Again, dominant, dominant wins against the teams on their schedule, so we recognize that and also understand that they can only play who's in front of them and who's scheduled.

Top-10 scoring defense only allowing 14 points per game, top-20 offense. They are just an impressive team.

It does go into an evaluation of what we see but also who they play, and we look forward to seeing how they perform as the season progresses in the next four to five weeks.

Q. Mr. Manuel, I was wondering what the committee was most impressed by to put Pitt at No. 18.

WARDE MANUEL: Well, seven wins to open the season, to start out with, including a win at Cincinnati and their win against Syracuse in a dominant fashion. Their first loss of the season was last week against No. 13 SMU. That freshman quarterback I think is Eli Holstein, has been impressive, throwing over 2,000 yards and 15 plus touchdowns. It's just an impressive team that Pat Narduzzi has put together.

We look forward to seeing how they play. But their opening run was really impressive to the committee, and even with the loss, the loss that they have is to No. 13 SMU.

Q. Warde, I wanted to ask you about your evaluation of Notre Dame. I know that might have been an interesting one given the highs and lows on their resume. What was the logic behind placing them at No. 10?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, the logic was they opened the season with a great win at Texas A&M, also against No. 22 Louisville. Their performance against a Navy team that was ranked at the time -- didn't have a loss and going to Navy and winning in a dominant fashion we felt overcame what was a troubling loss to Northern Illinois.

But they've won six straight games since that loss, and Riley Leonard is really coming on into this offense, not only passing but actually running. A very good runner.

Their defense is in the top 10. They're a very solid team.

I'd say troubling because we all thought it was not the Notre Dame team that we've seen when we looked at what happened against Northern Illinois.

Q. I'm curious how much of a gap the committee views in terms of two-loss Alabama compared to the other two-loss teams in contention, especially in the SEC. Is it mostly based on strength of schedule? Is it for that Georgia win? What's the committee's view there?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, we obviously view them as the highest ranked two-loss team at this time, but you really touched on it. The home win over Georgia was impressive. What they just did against Missouri, a 24th ranked Missouri team. The loss to Vanderbilt on the road at Vanderbilt was something that we also looked at as well as the road loss at Tennessee, but Tennessee is ranked No. 7.

But they're top 20 in scoring. Obviously their defense is always solid, holding teams to less than 20 points per game. Those things impressed the committee, and in balance we felt it came out that they were ranked 11th.

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