

# College Football Playoff Media Conference

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## Warde Manuel

CFP Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome everyone to the second College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference for the 2024 season. Joining us tonight is Rich Clark, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, along with Warde Manuel, the College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

**Q. Warde, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how the committee looks at early losses and early wins. For example, does a team have a chance to distance themselves from a bad loss or even distance themselves from a really good early win if they look like a different team later in the year?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, that's a good question. We first start every week with a clean slate. We look at the body of work up until that point of every team that we are considering, and obviously we can see when a team loses early or wins a big game early or loses late or wins a big game later in the season. We deal with it as it comes.

But there's really not a time where we give more credence to an early win or early loss over everything. We look at them as they come and judge them for where they are based on the body of work.

With that, obviously teams can, as they play later in the season, if they win or lose, we factor that into how we evaluate them at that time. But I would just say we recognize it, but we take it and evaluate it by who they lose to, where is it in the season. Obviously we see that, but we look at it individually.

**Q. Warde, obviously Georgia fell pretty far after losing on the road to Ole Miss. Looking at different analytics about schedules and such, I pretty much see that Georgia is No. 1. I wonder how much of a factor strength of schedule is. Where does that factor into your decisions and your discussion mode about each individual team?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, we look at strength of schedule



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in every comparison that we do. For each team, we see where different datapoints and strength of schedule is always there. We also look at the games, obviously, and see how a team is playing, see the results of the games, and how teams play.

We take it into consideration. It's one of the things we look at each and every time early in the deliberations as we review teams and compare them to others.

**Q. Warde, did Texas advance as much as it did mostly because of the losses of Georgia and Miami, and even though they haven't beaten a top-25 CFP ranked team, do they get credit for scheduling and beating defending national champion Michigan?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, we judge them based on how they play, who they play in their season, but obviously, yes, both Georgia and Miami lost ahead of them. They had a decisive win against Florida this week. So part of where they landed at 3 was a combination of their play but also who lost ahead of them and how we looked at the entirety of ranking the top 25.

**Q. Following up about Georgia, they dropped nine spots, and obviously you said that you guys start with a blank slate each week. I'm wondering when you had that conversation about them this week, how much was it about the Ole Miss game and how much was reevaluating their season as a whole?**

WARDE MANUEL: I think it's a combination of both. Their offense hasn't been consistent. The committee discussed that. They've struggled with some turnovers.

Defense has been solid, although in the loss to Ole Miss, we felt that that plays a factor into with the offense struggling, their defense was on the field quite a bit.

But they have just lacked some consistency on the offensive side. So when you look at where they're ranked and how they dropped, in terms of the teams that are in front of them, both Alabama and Ole Miss beat them in the head-to-head, and so obviously as we went through the rankings and looked at everyone, they obviously fell to 12, but it's based on who won in front of them and then head to



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head and everything that we look at in terms of the body of work.

**Q. Indiana and BYU both moved up after close wins. Tennessee stayed put with a double-digit win. Can you just distinguish between those three teams? Did the injury to Tennessee's quarterback play any part?**

WARDE MANUEL: I can say no to the injury to Tennessee's quarterback. It had nothing to do with it. It really came down to the play last week of both Indiana and BYU, both winning big games on their schedule.

Tennessee, the offense has struggled some the second half of the season, not being consistent early in the year, and we just felt as a committee that at this time Indiana has been playing very well, a close win against Michigan, but other than that, they've dominated everyone they've played.

BYU, obviously undefeated, two wins against top-25 opponents, at SMU and against Kansas State. In looking at it, as we assessed all the teams, we just felt that Indiana and BYU earned the 5 and the 6 slot, and Tennessee stayed where they are.

**Q. I'm curious, when you guys are debating teams' strength of schedule when that's a key factor like an Indiana and Penn State, how in the weeds do you get debating individual opponents instead of just kind of aggregate strength of schedule? Do you look at how good a Nebraska team is that Indiana beat versus an Illinois team versus Penn State and evaluate those individual opponents? How much discussion goes into that?**

WARDE MANUEL: We do have a metric that looks at each individual opponent, and so we do analyze every opponent that they play and their strength of record as it relates to that opponent.

In terms of strength of schedule, we have overall strength of schedule but we also have individual strength of records for each team, and that's part of the analysis that we do and part of the discussion amongst the committee as we evaluate each team.

**Q. Just curious the committee's thoughts on Boise State's most recent performance.**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, you know, obviously they won against Nevada, and they've been having a great season. I think when you look at it as it relates to where they fell back one, that's more related to how teams played that were above them. Then you look at what Ole Miss did and

their ranking ahead of them this week.

It really wasn't anything against -- it wasn't that Boise State did not have a good win. It was more around in the analysis of how everything fell, where teams ahead of them were and who slid in different directions, and then obviously Ole Miss had a great win versus Georgia and moved ahead of Boise State based on the committee's evaluation.

**Q. Army and Tulane at 24 and 25 there, curious the committee's assessment of the AAC title race down the stretch with those two teams being where they are in the rankings.**

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, they've both had successful seasons thus far. Strength of schedule is not as strong as others. But we do realize that Army has won consistently up until this week. I think this week was the first time -- even though they won in double digits, that they didn't score over 20 points in the game, but they held a very good North Texas team to only three points. I think they were one or two in every offensive category in the conference. We were impressed by that.

Tulane moved into -- they had a very impressive win against Temple, and obviously a team as we analyzed them that is really playing well since their early losses. They have consistently won, I want to say off the top of my head, seven games in a row.

We've been watching them and obviously looking at Army the entirety of the last two weeks that we've been meeting. In our deliberations, they earned being in the spots that they're in, and we'll keep monitoring their progress, and it may come down to the championship game.

**Q. I was just wondering, you have South Carolina ahead of LSU despite LSU beating South Carolina in Columbia this year. I just wanted to ask whether you guys factored head-to-head in, especially with those early season games like that?**

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, it really came down to the committee felt that since that game, South Carolina and LSU have gone in different directions. South Carolina has had some wins in that time frame, and LSU has had two consecutive losses. So the feeling was we do look at head-to-head. We obviously consider that closely. We look at that in our evaluation and determine when a team -- we take a good hard look when teams play head-to-head and the outcome of the game.

But in this particular case, we also looked at the body of work and where those teams are, and so the discussion

amongst the committee really came down to factoring in everything, in particular, where those teams were since that game was played, and obviously LSU struggled the last two weeks, and South Carolina has really performed admirably since that loss to LSU.

**Q. I wanted to get your thoughts on Ole Miss moving up pretty big, five spots. How big was winning by a lot in that decision, and what's kind of the outlook for them to keep moving on up?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, it was an impressive win. We watched the game. We discussed it. It was really an impressive win for them, dominant on both sides of the ball against Georgia. They also had that win against South Carolina.

The close loss against Kentucky was something that we discussed, as well, and then losing to LSU in overtime. But the reality is they beat a very good Georgia team, who, while struggling and inconsistent offensively, is still a great team. Georgia may have one of the best wins of the year by going to Texas and winning the way they did.

It was impressive, and the committee was very impressed with what Ole Miss has done in their body of work this year, and particularly looking at how they played in that particular game.

**Q. What do they have to do to keep moving on up? Obviously not too strong of games left against Florida and a struggling Mississippi State team.**

WARDE MANUEL: All I can say is there's a lot of games left to play in the season with three weeks and a conference championship in four weeks from now. There's a lot of ball to be played. Every team in America is going to realize what I'm saying when the best thing that people can do is continue to win and then let everything fall as it may in terms of the rankings.

We're just going to be watching week to week at how teams perform and ranking them as we see them.

**Q. What was the defining justification for keeping Boise State and SMU kind of out of the top 12 knowing that their only losses are to undefeated teams that are essentially in the Top 5 as opposed to a couple two-loss teams and even a Bama who lost to Vandy and Vandy who almost barely beat Texas? How did you juggle the reasons for why Boise and SMU are pretty much on the outside looking in right now?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, one, they both are having great seasons. They have lost to two teams that are ranked

ahead of them, one being the No. 1, and with BYU this week being a No. 6. So we recognize that.

We also looked at their body of work as it relates to who they played and how they played those games during the season, Boise with the win against Nevada by seven, and then obviously SMU was idle.

We really judged it based on the performance overall as well as how other teams ahead and behind them performed in terms of ranking, and a lot of the discussion was in that grouping, actually. We spent a lot of time yesterday and today discussing about six or seven teams within that grouping to make sure that we were fully evaluating every team and looking at them against where others were ranked.

Ultimately as we voted, they came out in 13 and 14 this week, and we'll continue to evaluate them as the season progresses.

**Q. I was wondering about Miami and Georgia, two teams that lost last week. What was sort of the comparison between those two teams, Miami and Georgia, and having them where they're at?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, the obvious is the first loss for Miami and the second loss for Georgia. That obviously played a factor into it.

Georgia Tech is coming on. They now have both their quarterbacks playing in the game. They were on the road. Georgia's losses were both on the road, as well.

So it came down to factoring in those games, a close game that Miami lost to Georgia Tech and then a decisive win by Ole Miss against Georgia Tech away. So we just factored everything in and took a look at the competitiveness.

Both teams are very good from our perspective, but based on the season as well as what they did last week, that's how we made the judgment of how they fell.

Georgia, obviously with two losses, having lost both to Alabama and to Ole Miss, both with two losses, they obviously in the mind of committee, Alabama and Ole Miss were going to be ahead of Georgia because of the head-to-head and the similar record.

**Q. What is the differentiator when you look at Miami and SMU, with Miami's one loss coming to an unranked Georgia Tech team, where on the flipside SMU's only loss is to BYU which is ranked No. 6 in your poll today?**

WARDE MANUEL: It's a great question because both of the teams are very similar teams, and we obviously have factored in who they played, who they've beat throughout the season, and so we just felt that in looking at Miami and SMU that Miami -- their offense is very dominant in terms of how they've been winning. Haven't been as consistent defensively. So is SMU. They've won very good -- they were playing two quarterbacks at the beginning of the year. Great speed, a physical team. So we've been impressed by both.

Just based on their body of work, the committee had the discussions, the feeling was that Miami was ahead of SMU in terms of their performance this year.

**Q. I'm looking at the rankings, and I know that it's very much a season-by-season thing, but it strikes me that none of the top six teams are from the group of SEC teams that won four of the last five national titles and had 10 of the 20 playoff teams during the four-team playoff era. When you do the eye test, do you ask yourself who would win head-to-head in the order of these teams? I understand statistics, but obviously teams play a large majority of their games against teams in their own conference. Just to dial it back, do you consider who would win head-to-head when you do the eye test and say yes, an 8-1 Penn State or a 10-win Indiana would beat all those teams below them?**

WARDE MANUEL: No. It's hard to do. If you look at this season and who some teams have lost to, I don't think anybody on this call would say -- would have predicted some of these teams would be losing to the teams that they lost to.

We have to evaluate based on the performance on the field that we see. We can't determine who would hypothetically win a game on paper. That's not any of the things that we do. It's not a part of our protocol to try to predict what would happen in the future. So we don't have any conversations about that as it relates to how we rank the teams.

**Q. How do you apply schedule strength to that if a team has a No. 1 schedule versus a team with maybe a schedule considerably lower? Does that not play a role in perhaps how they're playing?**

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, it does, but we also factor in wins and losses in terms of who you play and how you play in those particular games. A team with a weaker schedule, how they perform as well against the opponents that they play. So it's an evaluation that takes into consideration strength of schedule but it also evaluates how you play

against those teams that are on your schedule, whether it's a strong schedule or a weak schedule and the performance of the teams on the field week to week and in totality when we look at what they have done over the season up until the point that we're evaluating.

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to thank everyone for joining us on the call this evening. This does conclude tonight's teleconference.

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