

# College Football Playoff Media Conference

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## Warde Manuel

CFP Media Conference

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

**Q. Can you just give a little insight into the gap between Texas and Georgia? Obviously they had a head-to-head meeting, Texas doesn't have any top-25 wins, Georgia does, yet the gulf between them is seven spots. I was hoping for a little insight there.**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, obviously Georgia has a very good win at Texas, but as the committee analyzed the body of work of Texas versus where Georgia is at the present time with two losses, even to top-25 teams, we came out that Texas was still a very strong team deserving of a 3 seed. They have a top-5 defense. Quinn Ewers is leading one of the top passing offenses in the country.

We just looked at them and thought -- and came out, I should say, with them at 3. It's nothing against Georgia. Georgia is a great team, but they did struggle against Ole Miss at Ole Miss but had a great win this past week against Tennessee. We will continue to monitor both teams and see how it goes in the next few weeks.

**Q. Was there discussion of moving Georgia up further based on those analytics, based on the fact just because you have Texas where you are, so that is a top-3 road win based on that, and all the other ranked teams they've had to play in comparison to all those teams ranked above them not playing many ranked games, was there discussion trying to move them further up than where they are right now, which they wouldn't host even a campus home game if it were to finish like it is now.**

WARDE MANUEL: The answer is yes. We really had a long debate as a committee about Georgia and Mississippi, Miami, Alabama, those teams and really all the teams as



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we went through. But we really had intense conversations about those teams, and there was a lot of consideration about where teams were ranked and why and a lot of conversation about it.

It was very, very thorough. We're dealing with very small margins in terms of the different things that we're looking at and comparing, so I can assure you the committee went through it intensely in the last couple of days.

**Q. I wanted to ask you a little bit about BYU. Obviously a pretty big drop after just one loss, about eight spots there. What went into that ranking, and how much of it was also not just the loss but the fact that BYU had some great escapes over the last couple of weeks, as well?**

WARDE MANUEL: That is the answer. They had a close win against SMU. They had a great win against Kansas State but then a close win over Utah, a close win over Oklahoma State, and then they had a tough loss against Kansas at home. It was just something the committee had been monitoring all along.

Look, we give a lot of credit when teams win, and so we don't penalize teams for winning close or winning too big in other words, but we do value wins, so that's where we saw BYU. But given some of those games that they played and the close wins that they had, it just was an indicator that some of the teams that were below them in the rankings last week should move ahead of them is how the committee assessed BYU.

**Q. When you have two teams playing that are highly ranked such as Ohio State and Indiana this weekend, do you have certain things that you look for specifically going into those games? Obviously one of those teams is going to lose but both will remain in the conversation, so do you look for specific things that may help you rank those teams, especially the loser, later down the road?**

WARDE MANUEL: You know, it's a great question. We're looking at a lot of variables. We're looking at how the offenses play, how the defenses play, what are the strengths, is there dominance in one half versus another.



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We are taking a look at the entirety of the game and the performance.

We will then get together and assess and have conversations about what we saw in the outcome of the game, no matter who wins or loses, and assess then how to rank the teams. The team particular to the question who loses and how that impacts the rankings for next week, that is to be determined.

But we don't have any one thing that we look at or one key, but we do look at the entirety of the performance of both teams when we're making our assessment.

**Q. There's four SEC teams that are all 8-2 that have beaten each other head-to-head, Alabama, Georgia, Ole Miss, Tennessee. My interest is specifically in Tennessee; they're fourth of those four. What's the weak point does the committee think is in Tennessee's resume that they would be fourth of those four teams?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, one, they just had a loss to Georgia, and they had the loss at Arkansas. It's really splitting hairs. They have great offense, great defense. They play hard. The committee just had a hard time. You're talking about four really good teams, when you look at Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Tennessee.

I think the committee, we debated it, as I said earlier, quite a bit as it came down to how we saw those teams. But they have beaten each other at different times. So we have to look at Alabama the last three games, particularly the two before they played Mercer, they won in dominant fashion, and we were really impressed with their win at LSU two weeks ago.

It is close. There's a lot of conversations. We'll continue to monitor the performance of all these teams as the season progresses towards the end.

**Q. I wanted to ask about Ole Miss. Obviously they didn't play a game but still moved up two spots. What went into that, if you could get into that?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, part of it was the loss by BYU and Tennessee that were ahead of them. The other part is they really did perform -- they had a great performance against Georgia, as you know, and really dominant on both sides of the ball in that win.

For the most part, we've been impressed with Jaxson Dart. We've been impressed with their defense and how they have performed. Two close losses to Kentucky and LSU. We've been impressed with them, and I think they really moved up because they performed well and the teams

ahead of them have had losses.

**Q. Can you assess Notre Dame. As we know, they lost early in the season to NIU but they're holding strong where they are in the rankings. What's your assessment on the Irish?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I think the Irish since that loss have performed very well. Riley Leonard has come into his own. He's really a dynamic runner. They had a great opening win against Texas A&M. Really going into that Navy game, Navy was playing well, and then they really had a dominant performance there.

We've been impressed in how Notre Dame has recovered since that loss to NIU at home, and their performance moving forward we'll continue to monitor and take a look at. But they've really come on strong since that loss.

**Q. With Clemson, what is it about Clemson's resume that has them at 17? I know you've said that wins matter, and is it the eight wins that kind of has them in that 17 spot? And then they play South Carolina in a couple of weeks; there's one spot separating them. What separates those two programs by the one spot?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, both are coming off wins. The win by Clemson and South Carolina's win versus Missouri. The difference, as you can see, Clemson has lost two games. They bounced back from that Louisville loss and had back-to-back road wins against Virginia Tech and Pitt. Significant loss to Georgia at the beginning of the season, but they've come back. Cade Klubnik has really controlled the offense and done very well. That run to end the game against Pitt was phenomenal.

I just think they are playing good football as well as South Carolina. So it'll be interesting to see -- as you can see they're very close. The committee feels that Clemson and South Carolina are very close to each other as it relates to how we see those two teams.

**Q. Regarding the Mountain West conference, Boise State at 12, at this point getting the first-round bye, not a position many expected a G5 team to be in. What are the committee's thoughts on how that came to be this week?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, they performed very well against the competition that they had. Started with a close loss at Oregon by three, and they've performed very well in their games and the competitions they've had since.

For us, you look at what Ashton Jeanty has done leading the country in rushing, they really have been a great solid

team in their performance, and the committee has been impressed by how they've played all year.

**Q. Then with UNLV cracking the top 25 this week, interesting situation as they're No. 3 in the Mountain West standings currently behind Colorado State who's in second. The committee's thoughts on how that conference title race is going currently?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, you know, two close losses, overtime at Syracuse and the loss by five to Boise, impressive in what they have done. Their quarterback, Williams, has really performed both passing and rushing. I think he leads the team in both categories.

They've just been impressive to us, and while they may not be in the top two in the league, we really look at the team's performance overall throughout the season to determine how we rank them. But we've been impressed by UNLV.

**Q. Curious, you said earlier the committee values wins kind of above all -- I don't know if you said above all, but you talked about the value of wins. With the logjam of SEC teams, you've got Georgia who's played five games against the top seven teams of the committee's teams and has won three, which is one more than Alabama, Ole Miss and Texas combined. Curious, how do you weigh that strength of schedule and still kind of have them there at 10 behind the rest?**

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I mean, it's hard as we look at all of these teams. They're playing different schedules. It's not the fault of one team who doesn't have a stronger schedule who they're playing in their conference opponents. These conferences have increased in size, and so there are less match-ups where you are matching the top teams in the league each weekend. So it does make it difficult to assess the teams even with the strength of schedule.

We have to rely on how the teams are playing and who they're playing as well as how the other teams, regardless of strength of schedule, are playing their opponents. We take a look at it holistically. Strength of schedule is a component. It's an important data point to us and for us. But it is not the only assessment that we make.

But Georgia, they had a great game this week against Tennessee, and we will continue to look at them as they progress in this season.

Then there is also the possibility of being in the championship game. They perform well -- then when you look at it, the last thing I'll say is Georgia is behind Alabama and Ole Miss, and they've had head to head

losses against those teams.

It's one of those things where we try to assess everything and come to a decision about where the teams are ranked.

**Q. I was wondering, how did the assessment of Arizona State change from the prior weeks where they're unranked to this week where they had a convincing win against Kansas State?**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, you just said it. They had a convincing win against Kansas State, who was ranked last week by us, and it was convincing. Impressive what they're doing. Their running back is just impressive in what he's doing and how he's running. Cam is just playing very well.

We felt the team deserved, based on what they've done, losses were at Texas Tech by eight and at Cincinnati, both on the road. So we just felt that Arizona State is playing at a high level right now, and that's how we saw them and breaking in for the first time and being ranked in the top 25.

**Q. Just to follow up, was there any consideration with how well they've been playing as of late that they were missing their quarterback when they played at Cincinnati?**

WARDE MANUEL: It was a part of the discussion, yes.

**Q. Going back to the comment about the schedule strength when we started this and how he talked about how it cuts across all conferences and that it really wasn't about deserving teams as much as anything. I guess I'm comparing Alabama to Penn State. I'm not in the room and I know you probably have this discussion, but you've got one team with four top-25 wins and two losses and one team with no top-25 wins and one loss, how do you quantify blowing out a bad opponent versus -- or winning impressively I guess I should say, versus maybe struggling to beat a good opponent? I'm trying to get in the head of the committee as they measure they teams a little bit.**

WARDE MANUEL: Well, it is a part of the discussion, and if you're in the room, you would see that that is a considerable aspect of the discussion about how to evaluate each team, given that they're playing different schedules and who's in front of them in any given week.

There's a lot of discussion about the variables, strength of schedule, who they're playing, where teams are ranked, where they're playing; are they home, are they away. There's all kind of things that we talk about and look at and debate and discuss as it relates to that. So it's not cut and

dry. If it was about just strength of schedule, the rankings probably would look much different.

But because we have the evaluation process, because we see how teams are playing, and all they can do is play who's in front of them, and then the committee has to deliberate and make a decision based on what we see in the results of the games and how they proceed.

It's not easy. It's not something that we take lightly. It's something that we understand is a key part of the discussion process and something that we value and really take a hard look at in terms of strength of schedule.

**Q. Is there any point where you consider who the teams chose to schedule in their non-conference game? Is there a value to a team playing maybe a better non-conference schedule? Should that or will that ever factor in do you think?**

WARDE MANUEL: We look at who teams play, whether they select them or don't select them, whether they're assigned by the conference or scheduled out. As an athletic director, I can just tell you we're scheduling games out four, five, six years ahead of time, and some of the teams that you put on your schedule at the time you schedule them are not strong teams, some of them are, some of them get stronger, some of them don't perform as well. It's not as easy as saying we choose to look at a team and who they choose versus who's in their conference schedule. We just look at them holistically and who they play and make our decisions at that point in time.

THE MODERATOR: This does conclude our teleconference. We'll post the transcript shortly on [collegepressbox.com](http://collegepressbox.com).

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