

College Football Playoff

Media Conference

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Rich Clark

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL
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THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome everyone to the fifth 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, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

One update for the group: Randall McDaniel was unable to join the meeting this week for personal reasons. He will be back before next week's final rankings.

Q. Warde, I'm curious, when you have these rivalry games at the end of the season, be it Ohio State-Michigan, Georgia-Georgia Tech, is there any discussion of the extra stuff that goes into those games outside of a normal football game, or do you guys view it as any other game on the schedule?

WARDE MANUEL: Thanks for the question. No, we recognize when there are rivalry games and we talk about those games. We realize they're highly packed with emotions, and there's times that a cliché that everybody says you can throw out the record book in those big rivalry games.

So we do recognize when those games happen and when they're played, and we evaluate them accordingly and still put the same sort of evaluation to it but recognizing that it's a very big game for both teams.

Q. My question is how will you evaluate SMU relative to Alabama if SMU loses in the ACC Championship game?

WARDE MANUEL: You know, that is something that we will decide in the room at the conclusion of those games when we evaluate what happens in the championship. I can't sort of go into the future and tell you exactly how the outcome of that discussion will be. It depends on the outcome of the game and how it's played and the results

themselves.

We will just have to wait and see how the committee is going to analyze that game depending on the outcome, where things will go in terms of rankings and how people will move or will not move.

Q. I want to make this clear. It's not a projection question, but it does bounce off of what you had said about if teams aren't playing, there's no datapoints. I think there are some fans who might think, well, Clemson is playing, Clemson has played South Carolina; couldn't Clemson's results sort of change South Carolina's resume? I understand what you're saying about, yeah, you should be able to move teams around if they're not playing, but I think there is probably some question from fans about whether these teams could impact other teams' resumes. I wanted to ask how the committee thought about that when you talked about not moving some of these teams that aren't playing.

WARDE MANUEL: Well, you know, it's a question that I understand it, but we've already included that. We know which teams have beat which teams who are playing in championship games, and so we've already evaluated how those teams have played throughout the season.

Them beating somebody else at this point in time adds to the resume of the two teams, the one who wins, the one who loses in the championship game, but it doesn't change our evaluation. We know who has won games against teams that are in these championships, and we've already taken that into account this week as we evaluated them.

Q. Some people say, well, it changes the evaluation of Clemson, so doesn't that by circumstance change the evaluation of the teams Clemson plays. But I just wanted to clarify that.

WARDE MANUEL: Right, I get the question. The converse of that, if we held it against teams that a team that they beat lost, I think people would be equally as outraged that we're doing that. In other words, we have to -- we've already in our deliberations this week considered those teams' resumes as it relates to who's playing in the

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championship games and how they performed as we ranked the teams this week, so we're not going to give -- I get it. Some people think we should give them a boost if they beat a team who wins, but again, on the flipside, they don't want it to take away credit or demote them because the team lost in the championship, that kind of thing.

Q. I want to get straight something here that you said a few minutes ago on the broadcast. I want to make sure that I understand. If a team that is in the top 12 right now loses in the conference championship game on Saturday, you're not saying that it would not fall out of the top 12, are you?

WARDE MANUEL: No, sir. I'm saying -- in answer to the question, if you take, for example, Tennessee is ahead of SMU, Indiana is behind SMU; Tennessee will not drop below Indiana at any point. Neither team is playing.

But SMU could move up, depending on how we evaluate the game. They could stay where they are or they could move down depending on the outcome of the game. But Tennessee and Indiana in this example would never flip. Indiana would never move ahead of Tennessee and Tennessee would never drop below Indiana because we've already evaluated them. There's not another datapoint because they're not playing in the championship games. So we don't have anything else to add to the evaluation of those teams, so we can't move them above or below each other.

Q. But could SMU drop below Alabama if it loses?

WARDE MANUEL: Potentially, yes. And they can move above teams, as well. Again, it just depends on the outcome of the game.

Q. One thing that I heard at the beginning of this call, did y'all say that Randall McDaniel was not there to vote this week and that he will be there next week?

WARDE MANUEL: Yes, that is accurate.

Q. Then my question is pertinent. How can all of these teams be set in stone if one member of the Selection Committee wasn't present as they were set in stone as you say they were?

RICH CLARK: This is Rich Clark, executive director. It is built into the number of committee members that we have so that we can still execute in a fair way the voting for the top 25 rankings. Even if we have one member that's absent, we still have a quorum that we can continue with the process.

WARDE MANUEL: He'll be here to evaluate all the other games. We also at times understand that people have to be recused from the room based on the recusal policy that the CFP commissioners have put together. So it's not always that all 13 members are in the room, and we accommodate that in our voting. We have ways to make sure that the vote -- if it comes to a tie we just reconsider and we talk about it more, for example.

But it's not a process where we can say one person out of the room would dissuade the vote of the committee. That's just not the case.

Q. Obviously Ohio State and Tennessee are right there together, and obviously if it was held this week, that would be the 8-9 match-up and Ohio State would get to host. You know both of those are really big venues. What went into the difference between Ohio State and Tennessee in that ranking because both the AP and coaches' poll had Tennessee one spot ahead of the Buckeyes.

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, very similar resumes. Ohio State is 2-1 against top-10 teams. They have the win over Indiana and the win over Penn State. One of their two losses is to the No. 1 team in the country and then obviously the loss to Michigan last week.

Tennessee also has had an impressive resume. They have two losses against Arkansas and against No. 5 Georgia. So they're very close. It was a constant conversation as to how we saw both teams, a lot of deliberation on them, and so it was just -- it was a lot of conversation in the outcome of the vote that had Ohio State ahead of Tennessee.

Q. You mentioned on the ESPN broadcast that a deciding factor between Alabama and Miami was Alabama's win against ranked teams and teams above .500. How did the committee factor in losses considering two of Alabama's three losses were to teams that are unranked at .500 while Miami's losses were to teams above .500 and being ranked?

WARDE MANUEL: We talked about it just like you laid it out. It's something we evaluate, both the wins, the losses, how it teams play, where they're playing. All those things go into consideration as we're debating and discussing these teams.

Look, both of them are very good, and I understand Alabama, the committee ranked Alabama one ahead of Miami, but it doesn't diminish how we see Miami, even with the last three weeks they have two losses. We still think Miami is a very strong team.

It came down to a difference in their body of work as we evaluated Alabama and Miami, not just wins, not just losses but the totality of the season and how those teams performed.

Q. You talked about Ohio State and Tennessee having similar resumes, both teams 10-2. What was the conversation like as far as Ohio State with Georgia, which is also a 10-2 team, just a spot ahead of them at No. 5?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, again, the two losses by Georgia were to ranked teams in Alabama and Mississippi, both on the road. You look at Ohio State having two great wins, a loss on the road at Oregon, a loss at home.

It was a great conversation, both of them having very strong offenses and very strong defenses. It was a back and forth between the two, and the outcome of the vote was really close in terms of where they fell. But the outcome of the vote had Georgia at 5 and Ohio State at 6.

Tremendous game by Georgia with Georgia Tech back and forth. The game against Michigan, as you know, was a back-and-forth game and a hard-fought game by both teams. It was something that we discussed and evaluated in taking a look at the resumes that both put forward.

Q. You gave some great datapoints on the show in terms of Alabama in comparison to Miami. I'm wondering then why Miami stays ahead of Ole Miss and South Carolina who also have several top-25 wins?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I think in terms of the analysis of how everything played, I just want to say to everybody on the call, these are not easy decisions for us to make as we look through it, meaning we just don't come to the answer and say, these are how the teams should be ranked. There's a lot of conversation, a lot of back and forth between them.

In Miami up until the last three weeks they've had a very good season. They've lost two in the last three weeks. Mississippi, for example, has a win against Georgia, as you know, a win against South Carolina. But they have a loss against Kentucky, the loss in overtime against LSU. At sometimes their offense is putting up a lot of points, defense leads the country in a lot of sacks. Miami, top offense in the country with 44 points and over 500 yards per game. So it's really close. It's not just one datapoint over the other. We just try to take a look -- not try; we do take a look at their body of work to evaluate them and make decisions.

Obviously Mississippi is going to be ahead of South Carolina with the head to head, same record. As we evaluated them, that's how the vote came out in terms of Miami, Mississippi and then South Carolina.

Q. Warde, in comparing playoff contenders, when one contender made their conference championship game and the other one didn't, obviously the team that wins the title game will get an automatic bid if it's a Power 4 title game. But for the team that loses, does the team that got to the conference title game have an advantage in the committee's eyes over the other contender that didn't make it to the title game?

WARDE MANUEL: Listen, the committee has coaches, athletic directors, former players who have played the game. We have great respect for the teams that make their championship games, and we give them a lot of credit for what they've done throughout the season.

But we've been asked by the commissioners to rank the top 25 through the end of the championship weekend, and so we have an obligation to take a look at those datapoints and the outcomes of those games in order to rank the final top 25, and that's what they've asked us to do since the inception, and that's what we'll do this weekend once all the games are played.

Q. I wanted to ask you, how close was Clemson with Arizona State and Iowa State when you evaluated those three teams? And how would the committee value a win over SMU should that happen because those two teams are going to be playing each other when Clemson is going to be playing a top-10 SMU team?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, there was a lot of conversation between those teams and how we ranked them, a lot of back and forth and a lot of discussion. Obviously they're in the championship game, and should they win, they'll earn -- should earn an automatic berth into the playoffs.

What I can't do is tell you where they'll be ranked if that happens and they beat SMU. I can't get into, sort of, evaluating what could happen. We just try to stay in the present and not look to the future as we evaluate what each team has done during the season, and we look forward to watching Clemson and SMU play on the field, and then we'll evaluate both teams once that game is done.

Q. Earlier I know you said if SMU were to lose to Clemson in the same way, they could drop out. By the same token, would that help Clemson get more



datapoints because maybe if there's a blowout and Clemson should win?

WARDE MANUEL: I actually didn't say SMU would drop out. If they drop out if they lose, I'm not sure. What we'll do is evaluate them in the performance, again, watching the game, having high regard for those teams who are playing. There are 18 teams that are playing this weekend, and we will be watching all of them and evaluating the results of those games, and we'll see how they move, if they move at all, as I referenced on the interview on ESPN.

Two years ago TCU lost and stayed at 3 in that particular year, and so those things can happen. People can lose and maybe stay where they are. They can move as we have done in other years and go down big or they can go down just a little. It just depends on the outcome of the game.

Q. If Georgia wins Saturday, would it be simple and logical to just flip their spots and move Georgia to 2 and Texas to 7, or is it more complicated than that?

WARDE MANUEL: I don't know if it's complicated, more it's just going to be a conversation about the results of the game and where we see those teams based on the outcome of the game. So it's not as simple as just saying, flip them. Others teams are playing; there's other outcomes of games. But we will evaluate the results of that championship game between Texas and Georgia and then assess where those teams will fall and be ranked in the top 25.

Q. If you just have massive chaos and all the underdogs win this week, how fragile is Boise State's position, or does the committee view them as a very, very strong team sitting at 4?

WARDE MANUEL: You know, the idea of chaos is just the results of the game. We will evaluate the results of the games as they occur when we get together after all the games have been played, start ranking the top 25. I can't speak to what could happen if all the underdogs win, those kind of things. We don't get into trying to determine what we would do beforehand. We will just sit in the room after we watch the games together and evaluate what we saw and rank the top 25.

Q. Is there a wish trying not to match up teams from the same conference? Does that enter into it at all?

WARDE MANUEL: Not at all. We don't think of those things. The commissioners have actually said they don't want us thinking about those things. We rank the top 25 the way the committee sees them, and if they happen to be from the same conference and play against each other

again or play against each other for the first time, that's irrelevant to the discussions that we're having. We're ranking the top 25 from 1 to 25.

Q. Going back to Ralph's question before and the viability of moving datapoints for the teams who aren't playing relative to those who are, to follow up with that, what about datapoints that could move for teams who also aren't playing? UNLV and Army are playing, and with losses, they could drop out of the top 25, and depending on who y'all were to put in, if that were an ACC team that Miami beat like Louisville or Duke, would that not enhance Miami's resume with a top-25 win?

WARDE MANUEL: What you're saying is if we would, say, give a bounce to Miami because a team that they beat won their conference championship; is that correct?

Q. No, I'm saying if Army loses or UNLV loses and drops out of the top 25 and Duke or Louisville who presently aren't ranked become top-25 wins for Miami, didn't Miami's resume just improve?

WARDE MANUEL: We've already evaluated their resume and we've included the fact that they've beat those teams in our analysis of how we see Miami. The fact that they would get a bump because now those teams are in the top 25 after that happens is not something that we will do. We also won't use it, for lack of a better word, as a negative if teams that are in the championship games lose. That's how we will assess it.

Q. So if two ACC teams were to move into the top 25, that does not help Miami? I just want to get that clear. Miami is stuck on the outside looking in even if Duke and Louisville were to enter the top 25 in the rankings. I just want to be clear.

WARDE MANUEL: We don't know if Louisville or Duke will enter the top 25 in the rankings.

Q. But they're just on the outside in the polls. That's what I'm using them.

WARDE MANUEL: You're asking me to justify or project what would be done. We have already evaluated those teams and recognize that Miami has beat Louisville and Duke. So that's already in our analysis in the process of how we've talked about them and where they're ranked. So whether they come into the top 25, we're not going backwards and re-ranking teams based on who wins or who loses in the championship game.

In other words, if you're asking me to give a team credit for

wins, you're also conversely asking me to give demerits to teams who a team beat who loses in the championship game. That's in essence what you're asking the committee to consider, and that's not in our purview. We've already considered them and recognized that they've beat those teams that they've won against and we've recognized who they've lost against. So those kind of things with a team that's not playing for a conference championship, the wins and losses of those that they've beat or lost to are not reevaluated for those teams that don't have a datapoint themselves in terms of a game.

Q. Warde, I was listening to the datapoints kind of going down the list, and it doesn't seem like they're hard and fast necessarily. There's a lot of different ones considered in different circumstances. But two I noted was the head-to-head that you pointed out with Ole Miss and South Carolina and their rankings, and then what you just said about not going backwards and re-ranking teams based on wins and losses in the championship games. I'm wondering if logic follows in the case of, say, Georgia and Tennessee, two teams that are 10-2 that have been evaluated to this point in the regular season. If Georgia were to lose in the SEC Championship game, does it stand to reason that you've already ranked them ahead of Tennessee, barring a major injury to a quarterback or a blowout since those teams have already been evaluated head-to-head based on the regular season and Georgia has the head-to-head win?

WARDE MANUEL: I can't tell you exactly how the committee will look. It depends on the outcome of the game as we watch the game and the results of the game and the outcome as to whether or not teams will move above, below other teams that are ranked in the top 25.

It's, again, asking me a question that I can't tell you the answer because we have not as a committee seen the outcome of the games. We've evaluated both teams. We've ranked Georgia higher than Tennessee. Georgia beat Tennessee. They are where they are based on the evaluation and analysis that the committee did.

There are multiple things that we consider, multiple datapoints, strength of schedule, there's all kinds of data that we look at to evaluate. We look at the tape, look at film, look at games that are live or look at them in terms of the film, re-look at some of them to make sure we know what the strengths and the weaknesses and comparisons that these teams have. So there are a lot of datapoints. I mentioned a few that you just mentioned.

But there's a depth to it in a way, a process that all 13 members can communicate, unless they're recused, about

a team and how they see it, and that's the beauty of the committee. It's not one person making the determination. It's not one stat or datapoint that determines how we rank the teams.

We will see how the game goes, and we will definitely rank them as we see the results of the game, again, with a high regard for those teams who have made the championships. We wish all of them, all 18 teams well in the championship, and we look forward to watching those games on Friday and Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: That concludes tonight's teleconference. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us tonight.

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