

College Football Playoff

Media Conference

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Warde Manuel

Rich Clark

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF

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

One item I would like to clarify, as part of today's bracket announcement it was announced that the No. 1 seed pod led by Oregon is slotted for the semifinal at the Cotton Bowl, and the No. 2 seed Georgia is slotted for the semifinal at the Orange Bowl. Those assignments have been made and will stay in effect throughout the playoff bracket.

I think there was a little confusion today amongst the announcement on ESPN, so we did want to clarify that, and that has been set and established by the Selection Committee for this year's playoff.

At this time we'll take questions.

Q. I know you've been on the committee multiple years now, but going through as the chairman, I'm wondering if you have any sense of whether the weekly rankings show is the best thing for the playoff and for this process. I know you don't have a choice necessarily in this matter, but do you think it creates the best format as opposed to necessarily the NCAA basketball where they do a look-in and go a few weeks before they reveal the field? Is a weekly show beneficial to this process and a weekly reveal? Not the show but the reveal of the rankings every week?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I appreciate the question. I guess I would say it this way: First, it's what we've been asked to do. Second, I do believe it's good for us to release our ranking because our ranking is out there and competes with two others, the AP and the coaches. I think it's important since they release a weekly ranking that at

the appropriate time in the season, I think it's after the eighth or ninth week in the season, eighth week, that we release how we're thinking so people are not surprised in analyzing, in trying to figure out how the committee is thinking about things.

So I think it's good for the game. I think it gives people a sense of how we see teams from that eighth week on.

From my perspective, I think it's very beneficial.

Q. You have a two-year term, right, Warde?

WARDE MANUEL: No, sir, I am done after this year. I've served my three years on the committee, and I've loved every minute of it, but it's time for me to turn it over to somebody else. Whether they serve one year or two years will be up to the commissioners and Executive Director Clark. But I am done.

Q. I just wanted to find out, now that you've been through this and we've seen the bracket after a couple of months of going through this, do you believe there are any inherent problems in this new world of 12 teams that maybe you didn't face when there were only four and things that you've already put on the table as things that will have to be addressed because maybe it wasn't done in a way that, looking to the future, it might be done differently?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, this is the way I see it. I think the process to rank the best 25 teams is a great process. The people I've heard debates and discussions about how the seeding of the tournament should go, I will leave that up to the commissioners to make that decision.

But I think the way we rank the teams, the way we discuss them, the thoroughness of it, and the way everything is handled, I don't think that needs to change at all. As a matter of fact, I think it has been rock solid in the three years I've been on the committee and before. So the ranking themselves, I'll let other people debate, and I'll let the commissioners decide how they want to seed the tournament.

But what we do in this room I think is well established, very

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thorough and beneficial to figuring out the best 25 teams in the country from 1 to 25.

Q. Talking about the five conference champions automatic, even though it might not fit in with rankings, the top four conference getting byes, you're saying that will be talked about not now, but that will be something that will be discussed by the commissioners of the conferences going forward after they've seen this for the first time this year?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I'm not saying they should. I'm just answering your question. It's not something that's the purview of the Selection Committee. That would be for the commissioners and Executive Director Clark to have the discussion about. So I will leave that aspect of whether they do or not up to them.

Q. Do you think there will ever be a moment where there are cameras or audio in the room during the process itself? You used the expression "fly on the wall" last week. Is there a way to not have it be a fly-on-the-wall situation in your opinion as you leave now, that maybe transparency might be the way to go?

WARDE MANUEL: No. I don't think -- I'd just say people would understand how thorough the discussions are. Part of being open and completely open in this room is that what's said in this room stays in this room. So I would hope that it would never be a situation where people would have a camera and those kind of things because I feel in many respects it would restrict what people -- the honest people would have trying to play politics with what people think should be said or what their fan base wants them to say or what their conference wants them to say.

I think what I'm doing here now, answering questions and trying to be open and transparent about the discussion and the process is the way to continue to open up the transparency about what goes on in this room.

Q. With Texas after the loss last night to Georgia, there was a lot of conversation around them, 5 seed, 6, 7, putting them up against the Notre Dames and the Penn States. How did Texas ultimately end up at 5, and how did they compare to a Penn State and a Notre Dame?

WARDE MANUEL: You know, from our standpoint, it was an amazing game. You watched it, you saw what we saw when we were watching the game. An unbelievable game, goes into overtime, all the drama that that creates. Then to have Gunnar's helmet come off and then to have Carson come back in the game and hand the ball off, those kind of things just make for great drama as to where it goes.

We felt as a committee that Texas played very well. Both teams played hard. The outcome of the game was extremely close. So from our perspective when you look at it, Georgia went ahead of Texas, they had beaten Texas twice now, and Texas went right behind them. So from our standpoint, Texas had an exceptional season, and they were ranked third. They were seeded 5 but they were ranked third by the committee.

Q. The fact that Texas did not have a win over a top-25 team, how much of a topic of conversation was that last night as things were playing out?

WARDE MANUEL: A lot. We always talk about what we see as their resume and what they've done during the season. That was a big topic of conversation, as it was with other teams who have either played a lot of games against top 25 or haven't played. We always recognize that, and that's part of the discussion. That's part of the data that we have in front of us every time we're looking at teams.

Q. After the Big Ten Championship game last night, the projections that I saw had Penn State anywhere from the first at-large at No. 5 to the No. 9 seed and not even playing a home game. How did Penn State land on 6 when they have a similar resume to Notre Dame, which had one loss and was also ranked ahead of Ohio State which had the same amount of losses but beat Penn State on the road head-to-head? What went into having Penn State exactly as a 6 seed?

WARDE MANUEL: Here's what I'll tell you had them in the 6 seed. It was the way they were seeded. As you know, when you look at our rankings, they were ranked fourth in the country, and then the seeding principles took over and put them at 6. But what we saw is them playing a very good game, hard-fought game against the No. 1 team in the country. They were ahead, already ahead of Ohio State because they only had one loss to Ohio State, and we just felt like Penn State was playing very good football. They happened to be on the losing end of that game, but we were impressed with how they played on both sides of the ball even though they gave up 45 points. It was hard-fought and there was a lot that went into it. We were impressed with the game and with their performance.

Q. You mentioned Penn State's ranked No. 4 and seeded sixth, ranked No. 4 ahead of Notre Dame. How would you compare those two resumes?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, very close. A lot of discussion about both teams and how we saw them both side by side and amongst the others as we looked at different groups.



The committee was very impressed with both teams.

Penn State played yesterday. Notre Dame does not have a conference championship so they didn't play. We had a chance to see another data point on Penn State, and it was something that impressed the committee and had them remain ahead of Notre Dame in the rankings.

Q. I was just wondering, what has the assessment of Arizona State's resume been just changing over these last four weeks where they've picked up three ranked wins? How has the thought process in the committee room changed over the last four weeks for them?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, we've been impressed. That's the basic gist of it. They've had a lot of great success. We can see them coming on. They're one of the hottest teams that are playing right now. They had an unbelievable game against Iowa State in their last outing in the championship.

Skattebo and Leavitt, they're playing remarkably well. They lost to Texas Tech and to Cincinnati, but since that loss to Cincinnati, they have gone on an unbelievable run.

We have been impressed. We've been watching them all along. We just felt what they showed yesterday elevated them into the 12 position in our rankings.

Q. Was there any talk about rising them any higher? Was there something holding them back? Obviously they ended up getting that fourth bye but still stayed at No. 12 below three-loss Alabama.

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I mean, we looked at them in comparison to others. They moved up three spots. Alabama didn't move. We still think Alabama is a very strong team in our rankings.

I just think it was the conversation about their resumes and what they had done. Arizona State, as you know, is 4-1 against teams above .500, and they have the ranked win against BYU and now Iowa State. They have two unranked losses and so does Alabama.

It's one of those things where you compare their resumes and you look at them, ultimately the committee decided to rise them up three positions but not ahead of Alabama.

Q. I noticed today that Ohio State flip-flopped with Tennessee in the AP Poll. Not sure why. I know that the committee had kind of set that ranking up last week. I was wondering if you could go into whatever amount of detail you want as to what the difference was between those two teams, Ohio State and Tennessee.

WARDE MANUEL: Well, I mean, I think when you look at their resumes, they're very similar. Ohio State lost to Oregon. Tennessee lost to No. 2 Georgia. Tennessee lost at Arkansas. Ohio State lost to Michigan in a big rivalry game. So similar resumes in where they are in terms of what they've done. Obviously Ohio State also has two wins against Indiana and Penn State, both in the top 10, but Tennessee has that win over Alabama who's 11th. When you look at their resumes, they are very similar.

In terms of how we saw them, it really came down to the vote and the discussion was heavy on both sides looking at -- and really giving a lot of credit to both teams and then talking about some of their losses. Both their losses, because they both have two losses.

It was a very thorough discussion about those two because we knew as we went into it they would not have another data point coming this week, so it was really important for the committee to be extremely thorough last weekend in ranking and talking about those two teams.

Q. You talked about last week's rankings and specifically with Alabama and Miami, you talked about the top-25 wins kind of being the trump card there. How much did some of those wins versus losses discussion happen with SMU and Alabama, especially given SMU has a similar resume as far as top-25 wins as Miami?

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, I mean, we looked at -- the difference in terms of how we saw SMU was going into their champ game, they were undefeated in their conference. They had been playing very well in terms of what they were doing on the field, in the conference. So for us, as we looked at it, they lost to two ranked teams in terms of BYU by three and Clemson.

But it was just the performance. It was just their total body of work. We felt as we examined SMU, undefeated in the conference versus when we looked at Miami, losing two of the last three, we just felt they were different teams going into that championship weekend, and that's why we had SMU slightly ahead of Alabama.

Q. As far as the championship games go, how much did the fact that teams made that game factor into -- Big Ten, all the other championship games, there was a lot of movement for the losers.

WARDE MANUEL: Yeah, it depended on the game, and it was another data point that we discussed. We didn't give people a lot of -- we didn't boost people because they were champions or knock people way down because they lost

the game. It was how the game was played.

If you look at those games, the ACC game, extremely close, last-second kick; SEC game went into overtime; Big Ten game came down, it was a one-score game. Those were very close, very tightly played competitions. Even though at one point Clemson had a larger lead in the first half of their game, when you look at it, those games came down to the fire, came down to one possession, one kick, one two-point conversion. Those kind of things are something that we really did take a good hard look at as it related to these teams and how they played.

I shouldn't say two-point conversion, but you know what I'm saying, the last drive by Georgia.

Q. To continue the discussion with Tennessee and Ohio State, you said similar resumes. Did it factor in any that Ohio State lost a home game while Tennessee losses were on the road? How did you determine Ohio State should host? Also losing a home game.

WARDE MANUEL: You know what, we didn't determine -- how people host is not what our committee is doing. We're ranking the teams, and the seeding principles come into effect. But obviously they were extremely close, one away from each other.

What we did consider is all that you said. We took a look at where people lost, how people lost. Ohio State loss also on the road to the No. 1 team by one point. So we analyzed all of those things in terms of how -- where the losses occurred, Tennessee lost at Arkansas, Ohio State lost at home to Michigan. We talked about all of that.

Ultimately as a committee and as we voted these teams, Ohio State was one ahead of Tennessee, but we didn't look at it -- as well, if we put Ohio State 6 and Tennessee 7, one is going to host and one is not. We never, I can assure you and everybody on this call, never even talked about it until after the top 25 was ranked.

I made sure in this room that was not a point of consideration. That was not something for us to do. The commissioners asked us to rank the best 25 teams from 1 to 25, and that's what we did.

Q. To clarify, Oregon will play their first game in the Cotton Bowl instead of the Rose Bowl, correct?

RICH CLARK: No, they will still be in the Rose Bowl for their quarterfinal. That grouping, that winner will be advancing to the semifinal at the Cotton Bowl.

Q. Regarding Boise State and their first-round bye,

obviously Ashton Jeanty has had an incredible year, but I was curious if you could give me a summarization of what kind of put Boise State's run and what about their performance helped them get to the point where they are seeded above two power conference champions in this year's rankings?

WARDE MANUEL: Well, going into this championship weekend, they were ranked ahead of those two teams that won, the championship. They were behind SMU but they were ahead of the other champions.

As you know, I'm not telling you anything you don't know. The second game of the season, they lose to the No. 1 team in the country by three, giving up two kickoff returns, playing unbelievable offense and defense in that game, and then they won the rest of their games, including their championship by double digits.

For us, we have been impressed all along, but again, the seeding, they earned it, based on how the commissioners wanted the playoffs seeded. So they earned the third seed ranking because they were the third highest rated conference champion.

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