

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Mack Rhoades

CFP Media Conference

BRETT DANIELS: I'd like to welcome everyone to the first College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference for the 2025 season. Joining us here tonight is Rich Clark, the executive director of the College Football Playoff, along with Mack Rhoades, the College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

At this time I'd like to turn it over to Mack for an opening comment. Mack?

MACK RHOADES: Thank you, Brett. Good evening, everyone. Certainly a pleasure to be with all of you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Because this is the first meeting, I have a statement that I'm going to literally go ahead and read to you. It's lengthy so I apologize in advance, and I promise that I won't need to read it the next time we get together a week from now.

My name is Mack Rhoades, and it's my honor to be the new chairman of the Selection Committee. As you've seen, we've wrapped up our first ranking of the 2025-26 season.

I'd like to remind everyone on how it works. The rules for the committee are set by the 10 commissioners and the athletic director of Notre Dame, who all serve on the management committee that runs the Playoff.

Their instructions to us are select the best, with emphasis on best, 25 teams in college football and rank them for inclusion in the playoff. Preseason polls do not matter to us. No other organizations' polls matter to us.

What happened last year does not matter. Conference affiliations do not matter. We focus solely on the individual teams. We consider teams' performance on the field, their strength of schedule, their head-to-head match-ups, and results against common opponents.

This year we have 12 members on the committee, and we discuss all of the above factors and we do so in depth. It's



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a lively conversation. It's an informed conversation. I think it's a debate that fans would be proud to hear because we take this seriously.

Our committee members come prepared each and every meeting. We're comprised of sitting and retired athletic directors, retired head coaches, a former student-athlete who's in the College Hall of Fame, and one retired journalist.

We have lots of data statistics that are studied, but the committee is subjective by design. Each person on the committee has a lot of work to do. We've watched the games. Let me repeat that; we watch the games. We study the stats, debate the merits of each team and then we vote.

One thing will be different this year. Last year the top four conference champions received a bye. This year, regardless of conference, the top four ranked teams will automatically earn a first-round bye.

You've already seen our ranking. Each one is important, whether it's the No. 1 ranked team or the 25th ranked team, and all of the teams in between. That's why we work hard to get it right, to get it right for the institutions, for the head coaches and most importantly for student-athletes.

Thanks for listening, and I'm ready to take your questions. Let's go forward.

Q. Just wondering what the debate was like as far as No. 1, and what tilted things in Ohio State's favor over Indiana and A&M?

MACK RHOADES: Good evening. I certainly appreciate the question. There was robust conversation, discussion about 1 through 3, all three of them undefeated.

Certainly great conversation and discussion about Ohio State and Indiana, two really, really quality, quality teams, two teams with really, really good wins. Ohio State versus No. 11 Texas, and a win over 23 Washington. Indiana, No. 9 Oregon, No. 20 Iowa. Both defenses, both offenses ranked in the top 5.



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So it was certainly close, but when we looked at film, and we're blessed to have committee members and coaches that do a lot of film work, we just felt like Ohio State had a slight edge when we think about offensive line play and then a slight edge defensively. That was really the outcome.

Ohio State has some, I'm going to call them, explosive players that probably stood out as well.

Q. Curious about Alabama, kind of what the committee sees in Alabama, kind of what stands out and why you chose the Crimson Tide over say a team like Ole Miss or BYU.

MACK RHOADES: Thank you for the question. I'm not sure, when you look at resume, anybody had a better stretch of four games. When you think about Alabama, really, really impressive, two of those wins on the road. Going into Athens, one of the hardest, toughest environments to be able to get out of there with a win.

There was certainly discussion about the Florida State loss early on, but just felt like that four-game stretch -- which by the way, historical in the SEC. Nobody has beaten four straight ranked teams without a bye. Then they also finish that out with a good win against South Carolina.

That was the discussion. I think they're getting elite quarterback play right now from Simpson, so a really, really good football team.

Q. I was just interested how the committee views or evaluated Texas Tech.

MACK RHOADES: Texas Tech, again, great respect for them. Going into Utah, and again, we've got Utah ranked at 13, but going into Utah and winning at Utah, we thought, was a really, really quality, quality win.

The loss at Arizona State without Behren at quarterback, Arizona State wins that late, so we do talk about quality wins. We also talk about quality losses.

But Texas Tech, just a really, really good football team. Look, we tried to help ESPN out with their ratings getting BYU and Texas Tech together with Gameday in Lubbock, so enjoy that.

Q. Was just curious when it came to Notre Dame, ranking a two-loss team that doesn't have as many quality wins as some of the teams ranked below them, how you guys arrived at Notre Dame at No. 10?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, I think it's a great question. We

had a lot of conversation, obviously, about Notre Dame. I think it starts with two losses, total of four points, against two very, very good teams. Obviously one of them ranked third in the country and one ranked 18th.

We talked about I think early on defensively, maybe they weren't as good as what we thought they would be, but certainly most recent, it seems like they've been much, much better defensively.

Six straight wins. You look at their backfield, Jadarian Price, Jeremiyah Love, probably the best backfield in the country when you think about one-two punch. Going into the Southern Cal game, they lost their starting center for the year, and they were able to overcome that and run for a bunch of yards, again, against Southern Cal.

We think Notre Dame is a really -- when we look at the tape, we think Notre Dame is a really solid football team, both sides of the ball.

Q. How much is timing of loss factored in, and if you guys have feelings about who's playing well or how good the players are, how far can you guys veer off of what the actual metrics and protocol says when making these rankings?

MACK RHOADES: I think timing of loss, again, we look at complete, full, total body of work. I don't know that that is a huge factor.

Can you repeat the second part of that question?

Q. Just in terms of strength of record, strength of schedule, quality wins. Notre Dame has some edge in some areas, but quality wins certainly not. How much do feelings and eye test and the things that you guys see and believe while watching the games take weight in comparison to the actual data that might say otherwise?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, I think we refer to it as art and science. I think the art is watching the team on film and tape and how good they are, how physical they are up front, offensive line, defensive line play, how good are they up the middle, their quarterback play, their skill players, and then certainly contemplating and looking at metrics.

I know you know this, but not any one metric weighted heavier than the other. We use them all at our disposal to try to get the very best answer, and I think that's where the public misses out a little bit; just the beauty in this is the actual debate and discussion and conversation in the room when we're talking about all of those metrics.

I hope that answers your question.

Q. Just wanted to ask, what did y'all see in A&M, and can you elaborate on any particulars about A&M's defense that separated them behind Ohio State and Indiana right now?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, so what we saw in A&M is a really, really good football team. They went into Death Valley, I thought dominated a good LSU team. You have a dynamic playmaker at quarterback, Marcel Reed. He can beat you with his arm. He can beat you with his feet. Impressive win, certainly going on the road, South Bend.

I think you're talking about really small margins when you think about the difference between Ohio State, Indiana and A&M, and then I think statistically when we looked at A&M defensively, they're just lower than both Ohio State and Indiana. We had to make a hard decision, and you're trying to find separators, and that was a separator for us.

Q. How did the strength-of-schedule metric impact UVA's ranking, as of now would be the lowest rated among the P4 conference leaders?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, thank you. Appreciate the question. Again, not to be repetitive, but certainly we looked at schedule strength when we considered Virginia. We looked at three overtime games, the Florida State win. I think that's hard, quite frankly, for the ACC. Florida State has lost its luster a little bit as time has progressed, as games have accumulated. A really close game, obviously, at North Carolina, and then a close game again on the road at California.

To Virginia's credit, beating a really good Louisville team at Louisville, overtime, that's a really, really good win. I would just say in general for the ACC, five teams in the top 25, four in the top 20, and there's still a lot of ball to play.

If we go back to last year, Arizona State wasn't even in the rankings our first two rankings. Again, to everybody out there, this is the first ranking and still a lot of ball left to be played. Virginia is a really good team.

Q. I wanted to follow up on the schedule strength. I know there's an enhanced schedule strength metric this year. I don't know if you can go into a little bit more detail about it. And then I guess I would ask you about the two teams, Georgia and Miami with its schedule strength a little low apparently.

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, so we introduced the new metric, which is record strength, which measures how well a team performs against its schedule, and that's a

cumulative sum of scores as we progressed through the year.

Then we took schedule strength and we tweaked it. Schedule strength measures difficulty of schedule up to that point, but we put more weight on the stronger teams, and so that was the adjustment for schedule strength.

Again, it's one of a handful of metrics at our disposal.

We looked at Georgia, and again, really good football team. I think Gunner Stockton at quarterback has really progressed. It certainly feels like they have more confidence in him, doing a lot more with him. Again, he's another maybe similar to Marcel Reed where he can beat you with his arm, he can beat you with his feet. The head-to-head against Ole Miss, obviously we took that into account. We absolutely took into account the loss at home versus Alabama. But Georgia is a really, really good football team.

Georgia Tech, again, quality team. I think Haynes King is everything to that team. To this point in time, and I think you can say this about the ACC, not at least at this point a lot of non-conference signature wins. We looked at Georgia Tech at North Carolina State, and it just felt like North Carolina State dominated Georgia Tech on both sides of the ball. A bad night for Georgia Tech. But again, a lot of ball still to be played.

I'm sorry, you asked about Georgia, and I'll go to Miami.

Miami probably early on, I think like everybody else in the country, held them in high, high regard. Certainly the win against Notre Dame. But with recent loss that Friday night game to a Louisville team that came into Miami, and then watched obviously the game at SMU, I think offensively right now, Miami is struggling a bit. The committee felt strongly in terms of where we ranked Miami.

Q. What about Miami's team do you see that could make them a potential threat down the road?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, great question, and I think we all believe Miami has got a talented team when you look at their roster, their roster composition. Certainly think they're really good defensively. I think if they can maybe correct some of the woes that they've had just in terms of turnovers, and certainly on the offensive side of the ball, they can certainly have an opportunity to win games.

I think for Miami, I'm just going to say it: For Miami, it's about consistency and their lack of consistency. We just need to see more consistency out of Miami headed down the stretch.

Q. Along the same line of everyone else, I just wonder, we saw some head-to-head results factoring into teams that are ranked within one or two spots of each other. Notre Dame and Miami it did not come into play. I wonder if you could speak to when that becomes a tiebreaker for this committee.

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, and a great question, but head-to-head really matters when the teams are comparable at the margins. We look at that really, really closely.

Again, I think back to Notre Dame, the committee felt strongly that that is a team that when you look at week 1 to now, a team that has improved, has gotten better, particularly when we think about defensively. I talked about the running game, and what I didn't talk about is the quarterback play of Carr. As a freshman, he's just been really, really good, throws a great deep ball and has been really consistent for them at that spot.

Again, to the point of that team is getting better, Notre Dame, six straight wins.

Q. As you guys are discussing these teams, as you mentioned the discussion at the top of the poll, when you talked about those three teams, did you talk about non-league scheduling and the fact that two of those teams challenged themselves and of course Indiana didn't?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, the schedule is the schedule. We don't talk about scheduling philosophy and how any team scheduled. We just looked at hey, this is who they have on the schedule. This is the outcome of those games. Then looking at all of the metrics at our disposal.

Q. You mentioned earlier about watching the film. I'm curious when you guys are doing that how much you rely on the former head coaches or people that have had more experience than maybe some others to really break down what you see on film for each game you guys watch.

MACK RHOADES: Appreciate the question. It's a great question. But man, know your strengths. Know your strengths within the committee room, and those are experts. Those are pros. Those are people that have done it for years and years and years. We've got great respect for Coach Dantonio, Coach Ault, Coach Riley.

But I do want to say this: There are others in the room that are skilled at looking at the tape, looking at the film, so it is a collective effort, and it's great discussion, and we

certainly count on our three coaches and their opinions.

Q. You kind of touched on Virginia having three overtime victories. I'm wondering how the committee evaluates an overtime win specifically because Virginia has three of them. Is it an overwhelming positive? Is it something where you guys are thinking, they're struggling a little bit because they need overtime? How do you look at overtime victories particularly?

MACK RHOADES: Yeah, I think I mentioned overtime just in terms of close games. Look, if you win, it's a positive. Wins matter. And if you lose, we evaluate what type of loss that is.

Again, Virginia, that's a great overtime win, when you talk about going on the road and beating a quality -- a really well-coached Louisville team. Virginia is a really good football team. Coach Scott has done a great job. Again, they've got more games to play.

BRETT DANIELS: We'd like to thank everybody for joining us here tonight. This will conclude tonight's teleconference.

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