

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Gary Barta

College Football Playoff Selection Committee
Chair

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CFP Media Conference

BRETT DANIELS: Welcome, everyone, to the first College Football Playoff Selection Committee conference call of the 2021 season. Joining us tonight is Bill Hancock, executive director of the College Football Playoff, along with Gary Barta, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair. At this time I'll turn it over to Gary for opening comments.

GARY BARTA: Good evening, everybody. I can tell you, and I'm sure you share this feeling, it's great to be back in a regular college football season after last year.

Before I go into the rankings, I do want to mention, I think most people know, but we have seven new members on the committee this year, and I'm welcoming each committee -- everybody cares deeply about college football. They have a lot of knowledge, and we've gotten to know each other this summer. I know they've all been working hard and taking their mission seriously. They've been a great addition to the committee.

As you've seen now, Georgia is No. 1, Alabama is No. 2, Michigan State is No. 3 and Oregon is No. 4. Just to remind you, in determining all these rankings, the committee starts with no prior assumptions. We don't worry about or think about what happened in previous years. The preseason polls do not matter and don't come into our discussions. The only thing that matters is how each team is playing so far this year.

If anybody is new to our process, I'm just going to remind you of our protocols. This has been the same since the beginning of the College Football Playoff from day one. We look at teams' records; we look at their strength of schedule, head-to-head, results of common opponents. Then every committee member makes their own ranking based on their expert college football knowledge.



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It's really important, and we stress, and they do watch all the games, and they just have a wealth of data and statistics available to them at all times. We put it together and we talk about it. We've been doing that for the last two days, Monday and today, and so as you see, I'll run down just a couple of thoughts.

Georgia was seen as the No. 1 team hands down, and then Alabama. Even with the loss to Texas A&M, the committee looked at the quality across the board, their strength of schedule, their strong record. They ranked them No. 2, and it was a strong consensus. Michigan State is still undefeated, had a very impressive win this past weekend against a strong Michigan team. They're at No. 3. And then Oregon at 7-1 was ranked No. 4 in large part because of its win earlier in the season at Ohio State but also a good win against a 7-2 Fresno State team.

In addition to the top four, our charge is to rank the top 25 teams, and while we spend a lot of time 1 through 4, I can tell you that we spend a great deal of time all the way through. We know how important it is to rank all the way through to 25. Our conversations are deep and in a lot of detail.

I've said this before last year, and I'll say it again and you'll probably hear me say it again in the weeks ahead. I'm honored to serve in this role. This is the best committee I've ever been asked to be a part of, and I'm certainly honored to serve as chair, and I'll do my best to try and answer your questions now.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Oklahoma. When you were evaluating the Sooners against the other teams in the top 10, how much did the advanced metrics, the relative scoring, things like that, come into play when you were looking at them?

GARY BARTA: Well, every time we put a team up for discussion, all of those metrics are in front of us on our screen, so they certainly were included. So that answers your direct question. A little bit beyond that, just looking at who they've beaten, Kansas State and Texas Tech, both good wins, but the strength of schedule is considered among other things. I hope that answers at least your direct question about the metrics.



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They're always up on the board, and they certainly were looked at. Oklahoma is 9-0, a great team, but I hope that answers your question.

Q. Concerning the Sooners, their strength of schedule has not been great, and they haven't dominated or even won convincingly most of those games. How much did all those close calls factor into where they were ranked?

GARY BARTA: Well, the committee sees all those things. First of all, they're 9-0, and so they belong being ranked eighth. They're undefeated, so they get a lot of credit for that. But you mentioned it, defensive struggles throughout the year certainly was discussed.

The other thing that was discussed is Oklahoma is still trying to find their identity, but certainly when they added Caleb Williams at quarterback, the committee agreed that the offense certainly changed in a positive way, but it may -- we may be seeing it impacting the whole team, defense included.

Nine is where they're at right now, but that switch in quarterback, I think everybody agreed, is potentially -- it'll be fun to watch from here forward.

Yeah, those close calls are seen by the committee just like everybody else.

Q. Was there any other separator between Oregon and Ohio State for that 4 spot other than Oregon's head-to-head win, or was that just it?

GARY BARTA: That was a big part of it. If you look at Ohio State, you look at who they've played so far, they won at Minnesota and they beat Penn State. That was a good game the other night.

Offensively, who can argue with what's happened with Stroud and Henderson and Olave and Wilson. That's been impressive. But they don't yet have a signature win, and because Oregon had beaten them head-to-head, that certainly was an important criteria.

Oregon had also beaten similar type teams. Fresno State is 7-2 and they won at UCLA, so those sort of had some similarity with Minnesota, the Minnesota win.

At the end of the day it was close enough that that head-to-head put them ahead of Ohio State, put Oregon ahead of Ohio State.

Q. One thing I've noticed the committee over the years

has been more forgiving of losses than the traditional polls, and this week's addition, you have a team like Mississippi State that's 5-3 and not just in the top 25 but relatively high up. Wisconsin, as well. Can you describe how the committee balances that part of a team's resume, especially with these teams that have three losses already?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, Mississippi State, certainly we don't ignore those three losses. They're real, and we consider those. But in Mississippi State's case, they have wins against North Carolina State, who the committee thinks highly of. Texas A&M, same there; Texas A&M obviously has a big win against Alabama and then this past week winning impressively over Kentucky. Really in Mississippi State's case specifically, I'll just tell you the committee really focused on -- those three wins impressed the committee enough to put them at 17.

Q. Can you maybe describe why the committee didn't think so highly or in what ways they didn't think so highly of Cincinnati as the polls have?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, really can't speak to the polls and how that worked out, but I can tell you that Cincinnati has tremendous respect from the committee. They're 8-0. The win at Notre Dame, probably everybody on this call saw that game. It was a heck of a performance. It was a great win.

But after that win, look at who else they've beaten. Look at who else they've played. Then most recently, watching them against -- the last two weeks against a 2-6 Navy team, and understanding preparing for the option in that kind of game can be a challenge, but then the next week, just this past weekend against a 1-7 Tulane team, Tulane was able to run the ball effectively against them. They were starting a freshman quarterback.

I think the Notre Dame win is realized here and shown here by the respect of being sixth in the country, but certainly the Navy and Tulane and the rest of their schedule was taken under consideration.

Q. How does the committee sort of -- how would you describe how they feel about the prospect of a team going undefeated, winning all of its games and not getting into that final top four philosophically?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, I can tell you just my first reaction is we don't talk about what it would be like or philosophically if somebody is undefeated and don't get into the top four because that's not our only focus. Record is one piece of the puzzle for sure, but as I mentioned at the opening, strength of schedule, who you play, who you beat,



head-to-head, common opponents.

At the end of the day whether somebody is undefeated or has one or two losses, we haven't talked about philosophically as a committee. We really haven't gone there.

I think you referenced Cincinnati; right now you have Oklahoma at 9-0, Wake Forest at 8-0, and I know there's at least one other undefeated team in UTSA. There are other undefeated teams, and again, not talking philosophically about what happens if any of those teams go undefeated and the aren't in the top four, the final four.

Q. Among the one-loss teams outside of the top four, how did Notre Dame compare? What did you like about the Irish? What did the committee maybe dock the Irish for when you were placing them at No. 10?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, Notre Dame has a tough schedule, and so week in and week out, they're up against strong opponents. Probably their signature win is a win over a Wisconsin team, and even though Wisconsin was referenced earlier and has three losses, Wisconsin is a very good football team, so that win was well thought of by the committee. A loss to a very good Cincinnati team, we've talked about that a little bit.

Offensively they have some playmakers, but just using this last weekend as an example, at halftime in North Carolina the game was 17-13. North Carolina is a good football team, but when you started to compare with the teams above them and then a couple of teams right below them, Notre Dame fit at No. 10 for the reasons I was just talking about.

Once you get to the point where you're comparing three or four teams with one loss kind of with similar schedules, you can go a lot of different ways, but I hope I at least answered your question on some of the factors.

Q. I'm wondering, how much room is there for Wake Forest to move up in your mind? You mentioned on TV that there were quite a few hours spent discussing teams 3 through 9, and with Wake Forest winding up at the bottom, I'm just wondering what discussion went into where they landed.

GARY BARTA: Well, the discussion especially if you look just above Wake Forest, it was very close, and a lot of discussion about Oklahoma and Wake Forest. They're both undefeated. Once we started to push them to that point between 8 and 9, which one of those should be ahead of each other. In Wake Forest's case, I think the committee would say that their best win was at Virginia.

Their strength of schedule, it's not real strong. It's very similar to Oklahoma's, but when you compare it to some other programs above them, it's not real strong. They don't have a signature win. They have some nice wins, but they don't have a signature win. So it's a really solid team, veteran, impressive, powerful offense that are putting up points. Obviously last week against Duke.

But at 8-0, they're undefeated. Anytime you go undefeated, I don't care what sport you're in or what conference you're in or what level you're playing at, that's hard.

You started to ask about kind of their prospects or ceiling or something of that nature. The committee does a great job or tries really hard to not project, so we have Wake Forest at 8-0 at No. 9. They have to win out and others probably have to not win out for it to move way up, but we don't spend time projecting on it.

I hope I answered your question.

Q. I wanted to give you guys a chance to respond to American Athletic Conference commissioner Mike Aresco's comment this evening to my colleague Andrea Edelson. He said, "These rankings, the more you look at them, they're indefensible. It's clearly a P5 invitational." We have heard Mike say that before. I just wanted to give you a chance to respond to that.

BILL HANCOCK: You heard what Gary said about the committee's feeling about Cincinnati, so I don't have to repeat that. I have not seen Mike's comments, so I'll refrain from commenting about those.

Q. Michigan State at No. 3, I'm wondering how much of that was based on having Michigan, and when you got to 2 and 3 with Alabama and Michigan State, you mentioned common opponents in Miami being one. How much was that game looked at, as well?

GARY BARTA: Well, we did look -- Michigan State beat Miami on the road, Alabama beat them at home. So it was discussed. I think more direct to your question, the Michigan-Michigan State game, you asked about that game, you had two undefeated teams heading into that game, and it lived up to expectation, two really, really good teams. I think Kenneth Walker, he's been coming on as one of the best running backs in the country, and that may have been the difference in the game.

You know, clearly that Michigan-Michigan State game was important in the evaluation in putting Michigan State in third. But the win on the road to Miami was talked about as well as their strength of schedule is actually pretty solid,

and kind of the growing -- Kenneth Walker and where he's been coming on the last several weeks.

Q. I'm asking this in relation I guess mostly to Ohio State, though I suppose it could also apply to -- you suggested Oklahoma and some other teams. Two of the big factors you're considering are results which apply to a fixed date sometimes several weeks in the past, and then the eye test and game plan analytics which can be very current. How do you reconcile those two aspects that can be in conflict with each other, especially with this first ranking?

GARY BARTA: Yeah, you hit one thing I was going to mention, this is the first ranking, so we have a lot of information that we're catching up on, so we've watched the games throughout the year. Recency certainly plays into our discussion. Watching the games is really important. We're actually trying to balance all those things, head-to-head common opponents, the data. How do we do it? We have 13 people who spend a lot of time on it, who do watch the games, and to your point, this was the first week that we came out with a ranking.

We'll now start over next week, and we'll add information, this week's games. We aren't going to forget about what happened in the past, we'll just continue to add to it, but it'll be a little bit more from here forward one week at a time. That's what my coach always used to say, one week at a time. That's kind of what we do. We kind of take the same approach in the CFP. It's one week at a time, now that we've caught up.

Q. Gary, I'm curious what you guys saw out of Minnesota to put them at No. 20.

GARY BARTA: Well, they don't have a signature win. I've used that term a couple of times. I probably need -- but I think that gets the point across. But they are on a four-game winning streak. They beat Maryland, they won at Purdue. This weekend they did what probably they expected and maybe people watching expected.

To do all that after losing some running backs and some of the injuries, the committee just remains impressed that they're 6-2 after going through that.

Now, that said, the loss to Bowling Green was talked about at great length.

20 is where Minnesota is. The committee feels comfortable there based on those things that I just mentioned.

Q. UTSA is not in the top 25; how much were they

discussed?

GARY BARTA: They were discussed a lot. They're undefeated, and anytime a team is undefeated, I think it was brought up earlier, it's worthy of conversation. UTSA is a really good football team. They beat Illinois right out of the gate, and then they have no other wins against an opponent that's above .500.

I'll give you just a measurement. So Pittsburgh is our 25th team, and they're 6-2, and they have wins over Clemson; they won at Tennessee; they won at Virginia Tech; they're a top-5 scoring offense in the country; Kenny Pickett, that's been well documented. So if you compare, the committee compares UTSA and what they've done against Pittsburgh's resume and the committee just decided that despite UTSA being undefeated, the committee just didn't feel comfortable putting them ahead of Pitt, but we did talk about it a lot, and the season isn't over.

I figured out yesterday that we have more than 250 games still remaining, so there's a lot of football to be played yet.

Q. There are teams, whether it be Ohio State, Alabama, sometimes Clemson, that don't benefit because they're not on their own schedule, and other teams do when you talk of strength of schedule. How do you guys rectify that fact when kind of looking at these teams, knowing that they can't play themselves?

GARY BARTA: Well, I think I get the gist of your question. The answer would be the same whether I get it or not. I'm smiling; you can't see that.

We don't spend time thinking about who they could have scheduled or who a team might have scheduled if they had more flexibility or when they scheduled someone, they thought it was going to be this or that. So all we do is evaluate the games that end up being played.

I know that's oversimplifying, but that does take out of the equation the question I think you're asking, and that is we don't worry about who someone could have scheduled, to schedule up or someone scheduled down. We evaluate the games that have been played when we get to the week and start ranking.

I hope that answers your question. Either that or maybe I didn't understand it.

BRETT DANIELS: That concludes this week's Selection Committee call.

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