

# College Football Playoff

## Media Conference

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

## Rob Mullens

### Press Conference

GINA LEHE: Welcome to the College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference. Joining us tonight is Bill Hancock, executive director of the College Football Playoff, along with Rob Mullens, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

As a reminder to those on the call, we are transcribing tonight's call, which will be posted later on collegepressbox.com. At this time we'd like to turn it over to Rob for opening comments.

ROB MULLENS: Thanks, Gina. Good evening, everyone. We've completed the first rankings of the year for the College Football Playoff. As you've seen, Alabama is ranked No. 1; Clemson, No. 2; LSU, No. 3; and Notre Dame, No. 4. Just as a reminder, as a committee we're charged with one job, and that's ranking the 25 best teams in college football. To do that, our rankings are based on how a team plays its games. We look at their win-loss record, their strength of schedule, their head-to-head match-ups, games played against common opponents, and eventually, we'll look at who is a conference champion.

This process created by the commissioners is subjective by design. The committee has 13 different people on it, some of whom are athletic directors, some are former coaches, players, and one is a former journalist. Each is an expert in college football, and that's why they're on the committee.

We start with a clean slate of paper each week, meaning we go back to the beginning every time we rank. We take a fresh look at all the teams, week in and week out. Our conversations are robust. We discuss in detail the various strengths and weaknesses of the teams we rank. We'll talk about their offenses, their defenses, and the impact an injury can have. We challenge ourselves to be sure that we get it right.

Let me say a word about a couple of topics. One reason one-loss LSU is ranked No. 3 ahead of an undefeated Notre Dame is because they've beaten six teams with a winning record. Within the FBS, no other team in the country has that many victories against winning teams. They've played a strong schedule. By comparison, Notre Dame has three such wins.



UCF is an excellent team, and as you know, they're undefeated. However, they're the only team in the country that has not played a game against a team that currently has a winning record, and you saw that we ranked UCF No. 12.

Three teams in our top 25 have three losses. The committee looked deeply at the games these teams have played and were impressed with their schedules. For example, Texas A&M is a strong 5-3 team because their losses were against No. 1 Alabama and No. 2 Clemson.

I do want to take a minute to thank the 12 other committee members for the hard work they put in getting ready for this meeting. They watch a lot of games, take their duties very seriously. We're fortunate to have them on this committee.

I welcome any questions.

**Q. Just want to congratulate you on your first ranking as committee chair. I'm curious about ranking Alabama No. 1, Clemson No. 2, despite the fact that Clemson is the only team in the top 10 for total offense and total defense, opponents for Clemson 38-16 versus 29-28 for Alabama and the fact that Clemson has the No. 1 differential in total yards allowed versus total yards gained. Is it just the common opponent with Texas A&M, even though Alabama had them at home, Clemson was on the road? Was that the primary reason that you put Alabama ahead of them?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, thanks for the question. You know, it's never just one thing. Obviously we look at the data, then we watch a lot of games. Both of them do have the common opponent Texas A&M, which are quality wins for sure, but the committee felt when you look at it, Alabama's efficiency on offense was very impressive. They're strong on defensive, as well. So data is one part of it, but the committee watches a lot of games, and in the end, the committee felt that Alabama was 1 after nine weeks.

**Q. I want to ask you about Washington State and how much was their non-conference strength of schedule discussed?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, obviously as you know, we look at everybody's full body of work, so when you pull up



any team's resume and you compare them to others' none conference schedule is a piece of that for sure. But for Washington State we saw a dynamic offense with a quarterback that's had a real positive impact, and then you see their quality win over Utah and the tough road loss to USC, that's why the committee put them No. 8.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that Notre Dame and only the three wins with teams over .500 records, but can you expand a little bit more about how the committee viewed Notre Dame overall?**

ROB MULLENS: Sure. I mean, obviously a quality team, 8-0, impressive opening season win over Michigan. The committee certainly has recognized their improvement on offense over the last few weeks. So overall very impressed with Notre Dame.

When you look at them against LSU, though, LSU is the only team in the country with six wins against teams above .500. That includes wins over No. 6 Georgia, a ranked Mississippi State team, and their only loss is a road loss, close road loss at Florida.

**Q. Like you said, UCF has got a pretty poor strength of schedule overall, so I'd like to know from your perspective why they're No. 12. I mean, that's six spots higher than a year ago, and I think at this point a year ago objectively you could say they had a stronger strength of schedule, so what do you like about the Knights to put them that high?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, again, data is one piece of it, and as I mentioned, they're the only team in the country that's not played a team that has a winning record thus far. However, when you watch them play, they have an experienced quarterback, a quality offense, and that goes into that mix when you line it up. It's part of the data, including the strength of schedule, but it is also part of what you see on the eye test.

**Q. Quick question about that Washington State/USC game that you referenced earlier. You know all the background about what happened with the conference officiating process. Did that play a role at all in how you all evaluated that loss for the Cougars?**

ROB MULLENS: We watch the games, and the committee knows what happens. But that was not part of the discussion in the room, no.

**Q. I was wondering how you guys viewed Ohio State's loss to Purdue.**

ROB MULLENS: Again, we look at a whole body of work, and when you look at Ohio State, they've had an offense that's carried them, quality road win against a CFP-ranked Penn State. When you look at Ohio

State's resume, when they played TCU, that was a healthy TCU team on a neutral site in Texas. So that does factor in. But obviously the loss at Purdue does weigh as a part of that, and I think that's why you see Ohio State at No. 10.

**Q. In years past, Oklahoma's defense has become a point of discussion in the committee room. Jeff Long has referenced it multiple times. Was the Oklahoma defense discussed at length in the committee room the last couple of days?**

ROB MULLENS: Again, when you look at a team's resume, you look at every piece of it. Obviously Oklahoma has a dynamic quarterback and an outstanding offense, but you look at the full resume. So obviously you look at all three phases of the game, and defense is a part of that.

**Q. Your No. 2 and No. 4 teams both changed quarterbacks during the season. How much of that was a discussion in the room, and then did that devalue the Irish win over No. 5 Michigan at all because it was with a different quarterback?**

ROB MULLENS: Absolutely not. It did not -- that's an impressive win for Notre Dame no matter how you stack it up, who was at quarterback. Oftentimes we do talk about that. In this specific instance Clemson is 8-0. That was not a part of that conversation. Their resume speaks for itself.

It was noted in the Notre Dame conversation how their offense has improved in the recent weeks.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, there's been a lot of public debate obviously about UCF. What kind of debate was there in the room about putting them at No. 12 or maybe perhaps ranking them even higher?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, there's a debate about every team when you put them in there. You stack their resume up, and you can see that the way it would work for the committee, UCF would have been in that 10-to-13 band, so that's where they end up. You compare them to all of those teams. There was a lengthy discussion, obviously, given the strength of schedule issue, but you balance that against what you see when you watch the games. So lengthy discussion, as there is about a lot of teams. But 7-0, quality quarterback, good offense.

**Q. Obviously there's a lot of things that go into a resume, but can you just maybe talk generally when you're looking at any team with a loss how you evaluate maybe a close loss, a tight game versus a game where a team didn't compete as well and lost by quite a bit?**

ROB MULLENS: Yeah, you know, it's hard -- everybody wants to narrow it down to one small piece, but really

when you're looking at a resume, you're looking at all the games, whether they've played seven or eight games, you're looking at every single game. We don't incent margin of victory, but we do watch the games and understand how they play out, so that is a part of the discussion.

**Q. Just a follow-up, why wasn't the officiating story line talked about in the room?**

ROB MULLENS: We just look at results in the end. People watched the game, and we can't project; we just look at how the games ended up.

**Q. How do you weigh a game like Ohio State playing TCU earlier in the year where TCU was ranked at that time but now they've lost more games since then? Do you look more at where they were ranked then, or do you look more at what TCU's resume is now?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, we don't look at rankings unless they're CFP rankings, but the committee is fully aware that TCU was at full strength and how they were playing when Ohio State went to Texas and played them. So that was a part of the discussion.

**Q. When you look at a loss, you might feel one way about a loss when the initial rankings are put out. How does the evolution of the way you view losses change as the season progresses based on more information and more results of games happening?**

ROB MULLENS: Yep, you nailed it, more information. That's the beauty of this process. We start with a clean slate every week, and we get a new set of results, and that blank sheet of paper is very helpful for just that, because things change throughout the year. Next week when we come in, we'll have a clean sheet of paper with another week's set of results.

**Q. How would you weigh OU's loss to Texas? For instance, OU's defense made improvements after making the change in defensive coordinators, and do evaluations change when there are mid-season coordinator changes like that?**

ROB MULLENS: Well, we evaluate results, and if there are changes that change results, then that's a factor. We don't look at changes and look back and say what would have happened had this change occurred earlier. The results are what they are. But when changes occur, we look at what happens in the next weeks after the changes are made.

**Q. I see you guys have Michigan as the second best one-loss team. Kind of speak to your overall read on Michigan's resume at this point.**

ROB MULLENS: Michigan has a very strong resume. Their only loss is to No. 4 ranked team on the road in the first game of the year. Five wins against teams

with a winning record, strong road wins, Michigan State, at Northwestern. Great on defense. Michigan is a very good team.

**Q. How did you weigh Kentucky's quality of their wins and their recent offensive struggles?**

ROB MULLENS: Again, quality wins at Florida and then a win over Mississippi State, both ranked teams, and Kentucky has an outstanding defense. They've found a way to win, and their only loss is to a CFP ranked team in overtime. Kentucky has a quality resume.

**Q. Instead of talking about Clemson 1 versus 2, what made them No. 2 and then put them ahead of LSU that has such a strong strength of schedule? What separated Clemson and LSU at 2 and 3?**

ROB MULLENS: I think, again, when you look at it, Clemson does have three wins over CFP-ranked teams, one of them on the road. You look at Clemson, impressive team on both sides of the ball, really strong defense, and they're 8-0.

GINA LEHE: We'd like to thank everyone for their participation tonight. That includes our teleconference.