

College Football Playoff Media Conference

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Rob Mullens

Press Conference

GINA LEHE: Good evening, and welcome to the College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference. Joining us tonight is Rob Mullens, chair of the College Football Playoff Selection Committee.

ROB MULLENS: Good evening, everyone. We've completed week three of our rankings. They are Alabama, No. 1; Clemson, No. 2; Notre Dame, No. 3; Michigan, No. 4.

There were no changes in our top four, and there were no changes in our top 10. There were many changes beyond the top 10, principally because eight teams which previously were ranked 11 through 24 lost their games. For example, Washington, which was idle, moved up to 18 because five teams that were previously ranked above them lost their games. Similarly, four teams that were never ranked this season are now Nos. 22 through 25 because of their wins and the losses above them.

I say this all the time, but it bears repeating. The committee operates under a very disciplined process in which we talk extensively about every team we rank, from team No. 1 to team No. 25. We discuss in depth the strength and the weaknesses of each. We take nothing for granted, and we carefully work our way through every position in the rankings. Thank you to all the members for the time and the work that they put in. I'm grateful and happy to take your questions.

Q. You mentioned on TV briefly the committee's reaction to Georgia the last three weeks. Can you elaborate a little bit more about the conversation around the Bulldogs?

ROB MULLENS: Sure. Obviously their last three wins were extremely impressive, and the bounce-back from the loss at LSU. You look at those, coupled with their only loss to a ranked LSU team, we see a very competitive team, strong defense. Offense continues to make strides. That's why the committee has them fifth.

Q. I asked you two or three weeks ago about the Oklahoma defense. I'm going to ask you again. What's your conversation like when you specifically talk about the Oklahoma defense in the



room?

ROB MULLENS: Well, we talk about Oklahoma in total, so we look at their whole resume, and you start off by saying they're 9-1, and their only loss is to a Texas team at a neutral site in a very close game. But as you dig deeper, you see a great quarterback, one of the top offenses in the country with a lot of playmakers, but you also notice particularly in the last two weeks that the defense has struggled and that their offense is carrying them. That's all part of the conversation.

Q. I'm kind of following up a little bit, but more specifically, why is Michigan ranked ahead of Georgia?

ROB MULLENS: Well, I mean, Michigan has a very strong resume. They've won nine games in a row. Only loss is to the No. 3 ranked team on the board in the first game of the year, and again, they've got wins over Northwestern at Northwestern, at Michigan State, and a dominant win over Penn State, the No. 1 defense in the country. Strong resume.

Q. What do you see right now in Ohio State with their win over Michigan State this past weekend, with that being a team that was ranked in the top 25? I know Ohio State didn't move up, but did that improve the committee's opinion of Ohio State at all?

ROB MULLENS: Well, obviously the committee left them at No. 10, but when you look at it, the teams ahead of them took care of business, as well. When you look at Ohio State following the loss at Purdue, they've had two wins, but they're not as sharp as they were in the middle of the year. Let's put it that way. And we know they still have the quality wins over Penn State, Michigan State is certainly a quality win. They beat TCU in Texas when TCU was healthy. So those are all good wins, and they keep finding a way to win. When you look at last week and what the special teams did and what the defense did, the committee put Ohio State at No. 10.

Q. Two questions that are related: How decisive would be head-to-head meetings between teams with similar records even though they may have played back in October? And also, what is the attitude of the committee going to be about a team that might lose a conference championship game to a team ranked ahead of them? Will they be

penalized for that?

ROB MULLENS: Well, I'll take the second question first, and that is that we don't project. We're not going to try to predict what's going to happen in the future. On the first question, when you look at the very specific protocol that's provided to the committee when teams are comparable, head-to-head is one of those elements. There's other elements, too, obviously strength of schedule, conference championships, and then record against common opponents. So all those things factor in no matter when the games were played.

Q. I want to ask, what was the discussion like this week when talking about UCF?

ROB MULLENS: Similar to past weeks. Obviously we saw their game against Navy and the win, but obviously offense continued to perform. McKenzie Milton is a special talent, but strength of schedule continues to be part of the discussion for the committee, and that's why they moved up to No. 11.

Q. What was the thought process with the Florida Gators as the top three-loss team?

ROB MULLENS: Again, when you look at their resume, they've played a tough schedule. They've played four games versus ranked teams. Two of their three losses are to ranked teams, to Kentucky and Georgia. They've got the good win against Mississippi State, great win against LSU. So the last three weeks they haven't been the same team, but obviously they bounced back with a win against South Carolina.

Q. Last week you said that Ohio State is not as sharp right now as they were in the middle of the year, since the Purdue loss, and then I think the general viewpoint from Ohio State's win over Michigan State is that that would have been a season-defining win. Can you elaborate a little bit more on what you saw out of Ohio State? Did they not look sharp to you in that game, and how does your viewpoint of Ohio State change now that you've seen what they did against Michigan State?

ROB MULLENS: Again, the committee left them at No. 10 with no movement about them, as well. Obviously understand that East Lansing is a tough place to play, watched the game, saw what their special teams and defense were able to do, so that's why the committee left them at 10.

Q. You look at the poll, you see UCF at No. 11 and Syracuse at 12, and they both have a common opponent in the ACC Coastal leader in Pitt. UCF beat them by 31, Syracuse lost by seven. How much separation do you see between those two spots, and do you think that UCF if they win out could have a realistic shot at the playoff with a ranked Cincinnati on their schedule?

ROB MULLENS: Well, again, I'm not going to be predictive because it's not just what one team does, it's what all teams do. But when you look at those two teams, Syracuse has a close loss on the road to the No. 2 ranked team in Clemson. Both are very strong offensively. The committee put UCF 11 and Syracuse 12.

Q. I wonder if you could characterize about the amount of time maybe that you spent discussing teams 4, 5 and 6, and then maybe specifically some kind of a ballpark estimate on how much time you would have spent on Oklahoma in total, its defense, its offense and all that kind of stuff. Could you give me a ballpark estimate of that for this week?

ROB MULLENS: Yeah, I don't know that I really could, to be honest with you. Again, as I said at the open, we stick to a very disciplined process. You've been through the mock. You understand how it works. We kept that process the same. I don't know that I could put a stopwatch on the amount of time we spent, but I can tell you it's very consistent with what we've done in the past.

Q. Among the top 10, West Virginia is a little bit unique in that they had a game canceled by the weather, and it was their marquee non-conference game, North Carolina State. Do you have a sense of how much that one less data point is affecting West Virginia?

ROB MULLENS: No, not at this point. We're just looking at the data points that are available to us through week 11. We can't take into account what happens with Mother Nature. We're just looking at the results as they are presented.

Q. You were asked last week about Purdue and how their win last week might have affected Ohio State and how you guys view them. This past week Purdue losing to Minnesota, how much does that factor in in terms of seeing a team that might have done well then go and not play well that a team lost to?

ROB MULLENS: Yeah, I mean, it's just one piece of the overall body of work that we look at. That's it. We're looking at the whole resume. We're comparing each team's resume with other teams, so that's one piece of it, one out of however number of games they've played.