

College Football Playoff Media Conference

Tuesday, November 5, 2019

Rob Mullens

College Football Playoff Media
Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, and welcome to the first College Football Playoff Selection Committee teleconference of the 2019 season. Joining us tonight is Bill Hancock, executive director of the College Football Playoff, and Rob Mullens, College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair.

As a reminder to those of you on the line, we are transcribing and recording tonight's call. We will post the transcript and an audio copy on collegepressbox.com shortly after the conclusion of this teleconference. At this time I'll turn it over to Rob for some opening comments. Rob?

ROB MULLENS: Thanks, Jim. Good evening. Our first week of rankings for the 2019 season is complete. As you've seen, Ohio State is ranked No. 1, LSU No. 2, Alabama No. 3, and Penn State No. 4. The committee's job is to enter the room with a blank sheet of paper, meaning we start with an open mind as we consider the strengths and weaknesses of every team, from opening day through this past Saturday. Nothing else matters.

We consider a team's win-loss record, its strength of schedule, head-to-head match-ups, games played against common opponents, and eventually we'll look at who is a conference champion.

Because this is the first week of our rankings, let me remind you of how this committee operates. This process created by the commissioners is subjective. The committee has 13 different people, 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 watch the games. We evaluate data and statistics, and in the end each expert uses his or her judgment to rank the teams based on who they think is best.

Inside the room, we push each other. We challenge each other. We want to be certain we have it right. We often go back and forth, debating the ins and outs so that our deliberations can be vigorous and all-encompassing as possible, which brings me to this week's rankings.



Ohio State is No. 1 because of their overall consistent dominant play each week as well as their strength on offense and defense. Undefeated LSU is No. 2 because of its tough schedule and marquee wins over Florida and Auburn. Alabama is No. 3 because committee members are impressed with its overall performance and quality of play on both sides of the ball. Penn State is No. 4 because of its strong play, which includes wins over Michigan and Iowa.

Penn State's strength of schedule gave it an edge over an impressive Clemson, which we ranked No. 5. As always, I'm grateful to the members of the committee for the many hours and hard work they put in each week before we gather. It's a quality group of people, and I appreciate their time and efforts. I welcome your questions.

Q. We've heard in the past talk about game control. I'm curious how the committee views Oklahoma's loss to Kansas State in that light. How do you balance OU coming back and making it a seven-point game versus the fact that for a large portion of the game it wasn't very close?

ROB MULLENS: Well, any time we're looking at the teams, we're looking at their full resume, and of course we watch the games, so when we look at Oklahoma, obviously we see their non-conference wins, UCLA, Houston when Houston still had their quarterback, and then as we look, obviously we'll watch the Kansas State game and the result, and what we see when we watch Oklahoma or what was discussed in the room was, again, a very powerful offense. Jalen Hurts has stepped right into Coach Riley's offense, and then an improved defense.

Q. Rob, when you talked about Minnesota and Baylor, you specifically mentioned their strength of schedule. You mentioned Minnesota's conference record and you mentioned Baylor's four non-conference opponents' wins, but when you talk about Alabama, there is not a reference of strength of schedule, which is also questionable. At what point does the Selection Committee value eye test more than resume?

ROB MULLENS: Well, there's no point, one point. Obviously we watch all the games and see the data, and what you see when you watch Alabama is

obviously outstanding playmakers. They've been dominant against their schedule, and while it may not be as strong as some others, when you watch the games, they certainly have been dominant.

Q. Rob, how much does it help Oklahoma that they were down 25 points in the fourth quarter and they made it a really close game at the end? And the second, in general about the Sooners, they've got a -- for several years they've had a core defensive reputation that was acknowledged by your predecessors in the room, and how much did the committee see of an improvement by that Oklahoma defense as being relative to all these discussions?

ROB MULLENS: Well, we're only looking at this year's results and this year's teams, so that's our focus. And again, what we see when we see Oklahoma is a very powerful offense with, again, outstanding play from the quarterback and a defense that's performing pretty well most weeks.

Q. And how about that Kansas State comeback; how much did that help Oklahoma not fall even further?

ROB MULLENS: You know, we don't incent margin of victory. We did watch the game, of course, and saw how it played out. Obviously that's their only loss. You can see what the committee thought of Kansas State and that they ranked them 16th.

Q. Just curious how the discussion went between Clemson and Penn State, especially regarding the close win that Clemson had over North Carolina.

ROB MULLENS: You know, we had a lengthy discussion about Penn State and Clemson, two really, really good teams, both strong defensively. In the end, what it came down to, and again, much debate, Penn State has marquee wins against 14th-ranked Michigan and a road win at 18th-ranked Iowa. In addition, they have a non-conference win over Pitt, which is a pretty good win at this point. So sure, the close win over North Carolina is a factor because we're looking at the entire resume, and what we see with Clemson is an impressive team, an offense that's improved in the last few weeks, outstanding quarterback, outstanding running back. I hope that answers your question.

Q. You have a lot of one-loss teams; you've got Georgia top among those one-loss teams. Why do you think Georgia ranked the highest among those one-loss teams?

ROB MULLENS: Obviously Georgia has beat two top-15 teams, No. 10 Florida, No. 15 Notre Dame. They are the only defense to hold -- they're the only FBS team to not give up a rushing touchdown, which is a pretty strong statement. Obviously experienced

quarterback, elite running back, but I think the separator for them at this point was the two top-15 wins.

Q. That answers my question as to why Georgia was the top one-loss team, and I know you have to recuse yourself from the Pac-12 discussions about Oregon, but can you characterize what the discussions were among those who were able to have them about Oregon and Utah and the Pac-12 as a whole?

ROB MULLENS: Well, we don't talk about leagues, and as you mentioned, when Oregon is in the pool, I'm out of the room. I was recused. When I came back in after the vote relative to 7, 8 and 9, what was relayed to me is that obviously Oregon has won eight in a row, quality road wins at Washington and USC, and the only loss was on a neutral field on the last play of the game against the team that's ranked No. 11. Specifically as it relates to Oregon and Utah, Utah's only loss is at USC, a game that Oregon won.

Q. You mentioned Ohio State's consistent dominant play on both sides of the ball. Obviously all of these teams at the top have won by convincing margins in all of their games. How did the committee quantify the Ohio State dominance? Was this just an eye test thing, or were there metrics you're relying on, and can you expound on what it was that really exemplified that dominance?

ROB MULLENS: Sure, it was both. Obviously we have data. They're highly ranked in just about every statistical category, both offensively and defensively. Again, when you watch their games, they play at a consistent high level. Again, on both sides of the ball, explosive offensive playmakers, outstanding defense, probably the best defensive player in the country at this point. Very efficient, very consistent.

Q. I wanted to ask you, you've mentioned LSU's schedule, you mentioned their marquee wins against Florida and Auburn but no mention of their road win at Texas which I realize is not in the top 25, but does LSU get any credit for a win like that, and how does that square against Ohio State's schedule when they did not put themselves out there in the non-conference schedule against a team that was preseason highly regarded?

ROB MULLENS: I mean, we're looking at the whole schedule, and sure, we recognize that LSU went on the road and beat a Texas team. We recognize that Ohio State beat a Cincinnati team that's ranked. So sure, we look at all the games, conference and non-conference, and both these teams have strong schedules.

Q. Rob, you've mentioned scheduling, and I'm just curious in regards to Oklahoma how the committee

viewed Oklahoma's schedule with its three non-conference opponents not having a winning record and one of those opponents being an FCS team?

ROB MULLENS: Well, obviously we're very aware when there's an FCS team, and Oklahoma won on the road against an improving UCLA team, and we're aware when they played Houston, Houston had the experienced quarterback. So the committee is very aware of that.

Q. Just to clarify, the non-conference schedule of Oklahoma didn't factor into keeping them below two other one-loss teams in Oregon and Utah?

ROB MULLENS: You know, we don't slice it that way. We're looking at full body of work, and the non-conference is a piece of that.

Q. Rob, my question was kind of asked before, but can you give an idea of how close it was between Ohio State and LSU?

ROB MULLENS: You know, two great teams, and when you've got two strong teams with quality schedules, both undefeated, two outstanding offenses, great quarterback play, so there's a lengthy discussion, and at the end of the day, the committee felt that Ohio State was 1 and LSU was 2.

Q. I was just curious with seven undefeated teams I think it was, how would you describe the difficulty of this ranking, and can you tell us what the biggest debates were about this time?

ROB MULLENS: Sure. Well, every ranking has its unique challenges. We take this task very seriously. We understand the importance. Everybody spends considerable time preparing for it. Each has its unique challenges, and it's not just undefeated. We're trying to compare teams in winning matters, but you're comparing teams with different schedules, with different numbers of losses against different schedule strengths, so all that goes into it. And we have a lot of debate. Obviously there was lengthy discussions about 1 and 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 through 9. There was lengthy discussions really across the board. But those are the ones that I can think of right off the top of my head.

Q. I understand the argument for strength of schedule for Ohio State and LSU; Ohio State has been a little bit better than Clemson, than LSU. Clemson is the only team in the top 4 for both total offense and total defense, only team in the country with seven Power Five wins, only team to hold every opponent under 300 total yards. Just curious how do you reconcile Alabama? I can even understand Penn State with their strength of schedule beating Iowa and Michigan, but Alabama's strength of schedule can't be much harder if at all than Clemson's, how you reconcile

not having Penn State above Alabama if you're going on strength of schedule.

ROB MULLENS: No, sure, that's one piece of it, and we do have those discussions. I think at the end of the day, when the committee watched Alabama, what they saw is a team that's being dominant against that schedule, and that was the difference between Alabama and Penn State.

Q. Can you just talk about what you guys liked about Cincinnati and why they're ranked where they are.

ROB MULLENS: Sure. You know, obviously Cincinnati is undefeated in their conference. They beat UCLA and UCF at home. Their only loss is to the team that we have ranked No. 1. So solid overall schedule. That really impressed the committee.