College Football Playoff Media Conference

Monday, November 9, 2026

Irving, Texas, USA

Rich Clark

Nick Dawson

CFP Media Conference

ERIC TOSI: Thank you to the members of the media who are joining us today. On the call we have Rich Clark, executive director of the CFP, and Nick Dawson, senior vice president college sports programming and acquisitions for ESPN.

The format of today's call is going to be brief opening remarks from both Rich and Nick, we will then go into the question-and-answer portion.

We'll turn it over to Rich.

RICH CLARK: Thank you and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us. I'm joined today by Nick Dawson from ESPN. We appreciate you making time on what we know is a busy day.

Before we get into the details, I want to thank the people who made today possible. First the CFP management committee for their vision, diligence and collaboration throughout this process. Dr. Mark Keenum and the board of managers for their leadership and support.

Key staff members and legal teams from across our membership for their countless hours of work. Our media advisers at CAA for their guidance and expertise in getting this agreement completed. And our staff at the CFP, who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

I also want to thank our colleagues at ESPN. ESPN has been a terrific partner for the CFP since our inception. We're thrilled to continue that partnership.

Like the CFP, ESPN celebrates everything that makes college football so great. The promotion, storytelling and innovation they bring to the sport are second to none, and we know that level of excellence will continue as we move to a 24-team format.

Now, to the decision itself. The management committee went through an extremely thorough, thoughtful and deliberate process to arrive at this decision. That decision was unanimous.

The group weighed a number of factors: the college football calendar, student-athlete health and safety, protecting the Army-Navy game, conference championship games, and the perspective of our fans, among others.

At its core the decision was driven by a desire to increase opportunities for FBS programs, student-athletes and fan bases to participate in the Playoff and have a chance to play for the CFP national championship. Simply put, more opportunity.

New scheduling standards will incentivize institutions to schedule more compelling non-conference matchups during the regular season, and 16 Playoff games will now be played on campuses, bringing Playoff football to more students and local fans.

Finally, our commitment as the CFP administration and staff, we will make the 24-team Playoff spectacular for the fans, for the student-athletes, for the institutions, and for all our stakeholders.

Our organization delivers a world class championship experience at our games and our events, and that promise continues under this new format. 23 games of football with 24 ranked teams competing for the right to be crowned the true national champion.

With that, I'll turn it over to our great teammate from ESPN, Nick, then we'll open it up for questions.

NICK DAWSON: Thank you, Rich. Good afternoon, everyone.

On behalf of ESPN's leadership team, that of the Walt Disney Company, and my colleagues who pour their hearts into the College Football Playoff each year, ESPN is pleased to expand our relationship for the next five seasons, bringing 12 more Playoff games with immense meaning to fans around the world, to the reach and power of ESPN, ABC, and the Walt Disney Company's platforms.

Over the past dozen years the CFP has established itself as one of the most impactful events in American sports. We believe this next iteration will only enhance its position as a cultural moment on the world's sporting calendar.

Combined with our long-term comprehensive agreements with the SEC, ACC, Big 12, American, MAC, the Sunbelt, Conference USA, the Heisman, and many more, along with the best and deepest coverage of games, highlighted by College GameDay, digital and social, this deal further cements ESPN as the home for college football fans.

Our sincere appreciation to the entire CFP board of managers, management committee, staff and CAA for their continued trust and belief in ESPN as your partner.

We look forward to a fantastic remaining few weeks of the regular season, an outstanding final 12-team Playoff, and the expansion to 24 teams starting next year.

Thank you.

ERIC TOSI: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. I notice that there are no dates, specific dates, for the middle rounds, quarters and semis. Is there any chance the title games for New Orleans and Tampa could be moved earlier in January? I know those late January dates have been something that's been a bugaboo for teams and fans.

RICH CLARK: I'll take that one, Nick.

No, those quarters, semis and the champ game will continue to be played on the dates that we've already established for them. We have some contractual obligations.

But the way that the new format is laid out allows us to continue to play those games where they are, and it flows very contiguously with the new format schedule.

Q. Rich, when you talk about creating opportunity and the expansion of the Playoff, what this does for the non-autonomy groups, if you feel like there is truly a path for those in the group of six and how you see that path with the five automatic plus the 19 at-large now?

RICH CLARK: Yeah, thanks.

I do think that it provides opportunity for the non-autonomous four conferences. First, we do have one automatic qualifier, the highest ranked G6 team that will have an automatic qualification into the Playoff, but also expanding it just as at-large members, because there will be 19 at-large teams selected. It opens that pathway up even more for those G6 teams.

I think this provides a much better opportunity for a team to find their way and find a path into the Playoffs now.

Q. Rich, I was looking over the fact sheet. Are you still going to have the selection show every week in the leadoff to selection day? Wasn't sure if that's part of the contract moving forward.

RICH CLARK: Yeah, the plan is to still have the selection show, and at this point that has not changed.

Q. Is there any thought yet as to how many teams might be ranked each week?

RICH CLARK: So right now we plan to still use the selection committee process that we have in place. But we're obviously going to look at our processes now with the expanded Playoff to see if there's any changes that we need to make.

In fact, every year we do a certain amount of look-back at our process to make sure that it's in line with what happened in the previous season and what we expect for the next season. We'll do that this year, for sure, with 24 teams in mind.

So there may be some changes, but at this point we're still focused on the 12 team. We'll look for next year what changes may need to happen with the selection process.

Q. If you want to tell me if you're going to rank 30 teams...

RICH CLARK: I don't want to tell you that yet. We'll look at the process, and that determines what number of teams we would need to rank and how that would happen. But thanks for the question.

Q. Rich, you mentioned incentivizing better non-conference scheduling. How will you do that? What are you trying to do, other than requiring a 10th game? What will the committee do to reward those teams that schedule more difficult schedules?

RICH CLARK: So we will continue with a scheduling policy that we'll put out. You've probably seen some of that in the fact sheet of what we're going to do there. That will encourage some level of I would say increase in the competitiveness of the schedules. I think in the end it's going to be up to us to make sure that we're rewarding that schedule strength, as we do.

We'll continue to look at that to make sure that teams understand that those marquee wins really do mean a lot, that if they have those games in their schedule, especially in their non-conference schedule, that it could benefit them to win one of those marquee games.

We'll continue to stress that, schedule strength. We'll continue to push for the scheduling policy that we have. But I think ultimately the proof will be in the pudding as to who gets into the Playoff and who doesn't.

Q. Nick, more of a by-product of the expansion. Has the network decided what the fate of the bowl games they own and operate will be, like the Las Vegas Bowl?

NICK DAWSON: Yeah, no decisions have been made at this time. We were obviously waiting for this process to play itself out first, then we'll quickly kind of turn our attention to assessing what the rest of the college football post-season can look like moving forward.

We certainly feel there remains a need for post-season opportunities for teams. There are clearly still good TV windows to be had as well. That will kind of be the next step in our process.

Q. Nick, what was sort of ESPN's calculation - obviously the Playoffs aren't the only games you televise - on how the expanded field will impact sort of the value watch-ability of all the regular-season games that you televise?

NICK DAWSON: Thanks for the question.

We certainly thought through that extensively as these discussions went through the process. I think in all honesty it's impossible to know for sure.

Clearly the measures that the CFP and the management committee have put in to improve non-conference scheduling are an asset in that conversation.

But I think time will tell, right? Ultimately, I think a lot of the responsibility here will ultimately fall back to the schools and coaches. As they treat the regular season as 12 important games moving forward, I don't think we'll see a lot of dip in terms of fan passion for college football.

It is a different sport. It's only 12 games per school. To me each of them will have really, really high meaning and importance on both regular-season records, conference chases, as well as seeding and placement within the expanded College Football Playoff.

Q. Rich, I'm curious if there were any votes taken or potential changes made to the revenue distribution to the conferences?

RICH CLARK: Yeah, thanks.

We did vote on the media rights agreement, the management committee did, and voted on the escrow agreement and how the new dollars would be distributed among the management committee. Both votes were unanimous. Every commissioner and the Notre Dame athletic director were all in favor of both of those agreements.

Yes, a vote did happen, and they were unanimous in support of both of those decisions.

Q. Were there any changes in terms of the actual distribution percentages?

RICH CLARK: No, there were not.

Q. Rich, was there thought from the committee about the elimination of FCS games as a part of the formula, FCS games, IAA games?

RICH CLARK: There was not a question about elimination of FCS games, but there was a thought that a team should limit itself to one FCS game in a season as our policy.

Again, our policy is not binding. It's just a policy we will use to evaluate the teams that come to the CFP selection committee. No elimination, but a limit to one FCS game per team.

Q. The G6 seeding, will that go directly to where they are ranked or will it be seeded through the one through eight protected by?

RICH CLARK: Thanks for that question.

It's actually the highest ranked G6 team. Regardless whether a conference champion or not, it's only the highest ranked. They would be seeded in accordance with wherever they were ranked in the final CFP ranking.

Q. Rich, when we look at Notre Dame, obviously where it currently sits, them not being in a conference, having to be in the top 12 in the final CFP rankings, as you expand to 24, what can you say about how you view Notre Dame and if there's anything changed when it comes to the Irish and trying to assess their schedule?

RICH CLARK: Well, no changes in how we assess the Irish. They're obviously a great football team and we'll

continue to assess them as we have.

Right now they will be seeded into the Playoff as they're ranked. The policy now is that they're ranked in the 12 team, with the 12-team format, that they would be in. In a 24-team format, though, if they're ranked anywhere in the top 24, they're in the Playoff.

We'll assess them according to their season and what happens on the field.

Q. Regarding the fan opinion of expanding to 24, the online segment of the fan base seem to be maybe against this. Might be a generalization on my part. How do you view maybe the greater fan base that isn't necessarily eternally online? How well do you think this will be received by the fans, both passive and extremely not passive?

RICH CLARK: Yeah, thank you.

We're aware of the fan sentiment and that many fans aren't in favor of expansion. That was certainly weighed into the decision. It was considered.

Ultimately we just need to make a spectacular Playoff. I mean, the CFP has a responsibility to our fans, they're the lifeblood of college football. We owe it to them to make this great. That really is our intent. We appreciate our fans. We did take into account their sentiment. That was rolled into this decision. But we decided to move forward with it.

ERIC TOSI: Thank you, again, members of the media who joined us today.

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