

College Football Playoff Media Conference

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

Rob Mullens

Press Conference

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

ROB MULLENS: Good evening, everyone. Our second rankings are complete, and the results are as follows: Alabama is ranked No. 1; Clemson is No. 2; Notre Dame is No. 3; and Michigan is No. 4.

As we do every week, we start with a clean sheet of paper, reviewing every team's play from the first game to the most recent. This week it's fair to say there was a good amount of movement in the middle. Nearly half of the teams that last week were ranked 11 through 25 lost their game, including the teams ranked 14, 15, 16 and 17. That leads to a lot of change both up and down.

This week we have nine teams with three losses in our top 25. In contrast, last year at this time there were only five teams with three losses in the top 25. The committee sees a lot more parity this year than last.

One of the things that's notable about the committee is how much time we spent talking about each and every position in the rankings. We talked a lot about teams 1 through 4 but we also put in considerable time discussing teams 5 through 25. I'm grateful to all the members of the committee for the work they put into this. They come prepared, and it's a pleasure to hear the thoughts of this group of experts. They work hard, and I sure appreciate it.

Happy to take your questions.

Q. I'm asking about UCF in terms of last week the strength of schedule was a knock, but how the committee viewed Thursday night's Wednesday over Temple in relation to the eye test.

ROB MULLENS: Sure, great question. Obviously they have a powerful offense. McKenzie Milton continues to lead that powerful offense, but when you watched their game last week you could see the defensive struggles. They gave up nearly 700 yards to Temple. Again, that is a piece of it. Strong offense, struggling on defense.

Q. You guys moved West Virginia up from 13 to 9 this week; what did you like about the



Mountaineers?

ROB MULLENS: Impressive road win versus a ranked Texas team, and we were really impressed with Will Grier's leadership and the resiliency that the Mountaineers showed, particularly on that last drive, and then the two-point conversion.

Q. Ohio State stays 10th this week as they were last week. LSU is still ahead of them, second loss; West Virginia also jumping ahead of them. What do you see in Ohio State right now, and what made you guys decide to keep them where they were?

ROB MULLENS: We see a team that's still pretty good on offense. They did struggle a bit against a 2-7 team, and that's two weeks in a row that they've struggled a little bit. They still had a quality win over Penn State on the road. They beat TCU in Texas when TCU was at full strength, but the last couple weeks Ohio State hasn't been as strong as they were in the middle part of the year.

Q. We've talked about how perceptions change from a week-to-week basis because you guys start over. How does seeing the team that beat Ohio State in Purdue go and beat Iowa, does that change your perception at all of Ohio State and their loss?

ROB MULLENS: Not necessarily. Obviously you can see that Iowa's loss changed -- Purdue is, what, 5-4, I believe. But it's one piece of it, of course, and in the end we're watching Ohio State and what Ohio State did last week, as well.

Q. I'm wondering what does the committee consider to be the strongest merits for Syracuse at 13, and to follow up on that, what are the key distinguishers between Syracuse and the other two-loss teams above them right now, LSU and Kentucky?

ROB MULLENS: Well, as I mentioned in the opening, half of the teams between 11 and 25 lost, so there was a lot of movement in there. When you look at Syracuse's resume, it starts with only two losses. They do have a win over a ranked NC State. You know, and they've been pretty consistent on offense. I think they've got a top-20, a top-15 offense, and they did have a close loss on the road to our No. 2 ranked team.

The one thing that you probably see when you

compare them to Kentucky and LSU is just the quality of wins. Kentucky has a quality win at Florida, and then they beat a ranked Mississippi State at home, and then LSU has the most wins against teams in this current CFP top 25 with a win at Auburn, a win versus Georgia and a win versus Mississippi State. That's probably the separator.

Q. You've got four SEC teams, Auburn, Florida, Mississippi State and LSU ranked higher in your poll than in the AP; for example, Florida is four spots higher. Curious what it is about those teams in specific that you're seeing that maybe voters are not, and also just in general about the conference, what it is about the league that has you guys valuing those teams more than the AP voters.

ROB MULLENS: Yeah, in the room, we don't talk about leagues. We just put up resumes and results. What four teams specifically did you say, Auburn --

Q. I noted Auburn, Florida, Mississippi State and LSU being higher in your rankings than the AP, and I noted Florida just because they're the highest of those four compared to the AP rankings.

ROB MULLENS: I don't even know what the AP Poll is, so we don't do a comparison. We don't look at other polls. Again, we just look at resumes.

As I mentioned, LSU has three wins against current CFP top-25 teams, at Auburn, Georgia, Mississippi State. Their defense is extremely strong. Their two losses come against No. 1 Alabama, on the road to Florida. Very similar, Florida, they've played a very tough schedule; Florida has played four games versus CFP-ranked teams, tough losses to Kentucky and Georgia, but impressive wins over Mississippi State and LSU. Mississippi State, all three of their losses are to ranked CFP top-25 teams. They have a top-10 defense in the country, and then a win against Auburn. And then Auburn, which is in at 24, they have a quality non-conference win over a CFP-ranked Washington and then lost a tough one on a last-second field goal to LSU and lost to a ranked Mississippi State.

Again, we don't look at other polls. We don't review anything by league, but when you look at the resumes of those four teams that you just mentioned, that's what we see.

Q. Can I ask a follow-up. This is a chicken-or-egg question. How do you determine what a CFP top-25 win is when you're making this list? For example, when you're saying Florida has multiple wins against teams in the CFP top-25, how do you dictate that in your thought process when your top 25 isn't complete until you rank a team like Florida?

ROB MULLENS: Well, I'm just doing this

retrospectively. We're looking at the whole list of teams, and on the data that we see when we're in the room, we see last week's rankings, but what I'm detailing for you is the list we have before us right now. But when we're looking at teams, we can see the resume every single game with the opponent's record and the results.

Q. Talk about Virginia and Duke; they're both 6-3. Virginia was in the top 25 last week. Can they crack -- if those two teams win this week, can they crack in the top 25 because of Duke beating Miami last week?

ROB MULLENS: We don't project. We are laser focused on only do our work through the results to date. We don't try to project. We don't look ahead. Our charge is to look at the results through week 10 in a very detailed manner, and that's what we do.

Q. Rob, it seemed like all of us outside the room pretty much assumed the top 4 was going to be what it was. I was wondering if it was that easy in the room, and if it wasn't, why not? What did you guys talk about? How much separation is really between these teams? Was there any debate at all between 4 and 5, and can you just kind of take us through that thought process, or was this done in five minutes at the top?

ROB MULLENS: You know, the reality is we spend a considerable time on all of these, and we want to be thorough. Of course we had lengthy discussions about each of those groups, kind of the 1 through 3 and then the 4 through 6 group and comparing 3, 4, 5, all of those. You know, there was lengthy discussion. But in 3 and 4 you have a head-to-head, but at this point, as you look at the protocol, through week 10, head-to-head still matters, and it's still significant. That's why Notre Dame is ahead of Michigan.

Q. What about 4 and 5?

ROB MULLENS: You know, again, certainly we talked about those. You look at Michigan, No. 1 defense in the country, Shea Patterson continues to improve in that offense, and sure, they've looked really good the last two weeks, a dominant win over Penn State and then a win over Michigan State in their previous game. Georgia also has back-to-back impressive wins, Florida and at Kentucky with an only loss to LSU. So Georgia's defense continues to be strong. But again, after 10 weeks, the committee felt that 8-1 Michigan deserved a 4 spot above an 8-1 Georgia.