

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Lieutenant General Richard M. Clark

College Football Playoff Executive Director

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to day 2 of Big Ten football Media Days presented by Old National Bank.

Please welcome to the stage College Football Playoff executive director Rich Clark.

RICHARD CLARK: Thanks, everybody, for being here today. I'm Rich Clark, brand-new executive director of College Football Playoff. It's been about five weeks, and six weeks ago I was in the Air Force, retired after 38 years, and I can't tell you how excited and how grateful I am to be here.

I just want to give you a little bit of an introduction to me but also a little bit of insight into some of my thoughts about where we are right now with the playoff, an exciting time for sure.

I want to thank Commissioner Petitti for having me on the Big Ten team, great hospitality. Thank you for allowing me to be here. I appreciate all of our student-athletes, coaches, athletic directors who are here. You're what it's all about, and thank you for your presence, and our media partners as well. So many of you I've been able to see over the last few weeks, but thank you also for taking the time.

When I think about my time, though, and this opportunity that I have, like I said, I'm full of gratitude and excitement. I'll tell you, the reason I'm so excited is because I get to give back to the sport that gave so much to me. I've been a fan of college football for my whole life. I played college football, I played at the Air Force Academy back in 1985, so it was a long time ago.

Four years there, played for Ken Hatfield and Fisher DeBerry, but this sport did more for me than I think most people. First, it opened doors for me. If it wasn't for football, I'd have never gone to the Air Force Academy. And I can remember sitting on a couch in my house when Coach Hatfield, Ken Hatfield, came to talk to my parents as

a high school senior, and I was not thinking about going to a service academy.

Coach Hatfield told my mom, Just let him come out.

And my mother, in true fashion, said, You know what? It's free. Just go.

And I went. I loved our coaching staff. I loved what the academy brought, and I wanted to play football there, and that's where I went. But the experiences and the people that I met were absolutely incredible. In fact, Coach Hatfield was the one that brought me in, and Coach Hatfield was at my retirement just six weeks ago.

Those are the kinds of people, your teammates, your coaches, the people that you come into contact with, that's what football is about.

It's also about the development. We have to keep that in mind. Developing leaders, developing student-athletes to go out and do great things.

I like to quote Douglas MacArthur sometimes who said: On the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that on other fields on other days will bear the fruits of victory.

What he's saying is you learn things on the field, on the court, on the track, on the ice, whatever sport it is, you learn things about life. You learn things about your character and who you're going to be and how you're going to perform in other situations that you learn playing the sport that you played. I learned things in football that I will never, ever be able to forget, and I'm grateful that they're part of who I am.

The most, I think, telling time was in combat. I was a pilot for probably 25 years of my career, and I will never forget flying over Baghdad, and before we went into the breach, watching the NR aircraft artillery flying up, watching missiles fly by, and knowing that we were about to head into something that was tough. Leading a foreship of B-1 bombers into that was one of the most challenging days of my life, but one of the most memorable days because of what we had to do.



What I will tell you is after the fact, I thought that was like getting ready to go play a game. The stakes are different. The whole situation is different. But the things that you face, the character that you have to have, what you dig deep in to find within yourself to go do that is absolutely what you dig deep to go onto a football field and face an offensive lineman that outweighs you by 70 pounds and go, okay, here we are, let's do this. We have trained. We prepared. We have practiced.

But everything I learned, I learned it on the football field, and I'm grateful for what it did for me.

Finally, as a fan, being able to do this is absolutely incredible because for my whole 38 years I thought about war every day and preparing for combat every day. I thought about the worst days America could have. I thought about it as a day that I hoped would never come, but it was something I was passionate about because I knew it was my job to do it, and that's what I did.

Now I get to think about college football every day. I get to think about a sport that I love. I get to think about something that's going to be the best days, rather than the worst days, that our country is going to have, and I get to think about it in terms of what's going to help us move into this next chapter. I couldn't be more excited to be here and be a part of this.

The reason I'm excited too is my timing couldn't be better. I always say better lucky than good, and I'm lucky to be coming here right now as we transition to the 12-team playoff. I'm grateful to our commissioners for the format that they've laid out before us. I think this format is going to, of course, create the access that we need so that we can determine that championship on the field. We can determine who the best team is on the field and not have to rely so much on a committee to do that, and that's going to be exciting for our future.

I think one of the principles that our commissioners had when they honor conference champions, I think that is a great, great aspect of this because the top five conference champions are going to go into the playoff, automatic qualifiers, and the top four of them will get a bye. I think that allows every conference to have that opportunity to put a team into the playoff, and that's something that we absolutely needed.

So it means something when those championship games are playing or are played. It means something as teams are going through the season, they know that that's a path that they have.

There's also the seven at-large teams that are going to come, another good pathway for teams to get in. But I think they created this playoff system that allows multiple pathways to come in, and that's going to open it up to so many other teams that hadn't had that access before, and I'm very proud that we're doing this and that we're able to be a part of it.

The other thing that they did that I think is very helpful to us is having the first round of games be on campus, and that's going to allow our fans to not have to travel for at least that one game, but what it's really going to do is bring some electricity to the playoff because those campus games are going to be absolutely incredible.

When we see the teams that are going to go, we at CFP are ready to start helping them. In fact, we're already starting to communicate with all of the teams now, the 134 FBS teams, so that they can be ready when the time comes, to make sure they understand what the requirements are going to be, what's going to be expected of them when they get into the playoff.

But we're starting to build that excitement on the campuses already, and people are starting to let us know we're going to be ready to go when this happens. So we're very excited about that.

I think also the idea of taking the playoff to the selection committee is still key and critical for us because they're still going to be able to rank our teams 1 to 25. They're going to be able to narrow the field down. But the exciting thing is all the way until November, all the way up until November, we're going to be able to see that there's going to be teams that are still in the hunt. There's probably going to be 20 teams, maybe even more, that still have a shot, that could still get into the playoffs.

Fans are going to be still excited, still engaged in the season, and the access that the teams have is really going to make this a much better experience for our fan base. So another reason that we're so excited about this.

I want to thank our CFP team as well because not only are they preparing for the campus games, but they're working with our bowl partners to make sure our bowl games are relevant. The six New Year's Six bowl games are great operators that are going to put on the quarterfinals and the semifinals. They are ready. They are the pros at this. And that's going to bring another level of excitement to their bowl games.

And we're already in Atlanta. We're already working with our Atlanta site for the '25 game, which, by the way, is MLK Day, which is very exciting for us, but it's also inauguration

day. So half the country is going to be mad, half the country is going to be happy, and then we all go to a football game to come back together. So it's going to be a good event for all of us.

Then there's going to be some people mad after the game obviously. But it's going to be a great day, and we're already getting ready for that. In fact, we're already getting ready for Miami as well.

We're excited about everything that CFP has and that it's bringing. I'm excited, we're starting our selection committee meetings next week to educate -- half of our members are new, so we're getting them ready so that they can execute another successful year of rank ordering our 25, and then off we go.

It's an exciting time in college football, lots of change happening, lots of flux, but what we know is the 12-team playoff is going to be spectacular. I couldn't be more excited to be a part of it, and I just look forward to seeing it execute. It's coming quick, and I can't wait.

With that, I'll stop right there and take any questions that folks might have.

Q. First off, congratulations. The second thing is you talked about the basic procedure of the CFP, but what do you think your role is going to be in that?

RICHARD CLARK: First of all, my role is going to be to make sure that our team puts on a spectacular playoff, and that's our number one goal.

There's a lot of talk about what the future might hold and where we might go into the next iterations of the playoff, but I'll be honest with you, our goal right now is to make this year spectacular. This is the format that we have. This is the format that we're going to execute, and we need to make it as amazing as it can possibly be.

So that's goal number one for us. Our other goal, though, is to make sure the selection committee operates and functions in a way that they get the top 25 teams rank ordered in an appropriate fashion, that they follow the protocols that the commissioners have laid out, and that we're making that selection committee as effective as they can possibly be to get that right.

Then, of course, we all work for our commissioners, and we will continue to work with them not only to assess how this season goes after we're all done executing it, but what kind of changes might need to occur in the future because we're not going to rest on our laurels. It's going to be a spectacular season, of course, but then we have to get

better. There is no end to better. You always, always have to be looking forward.

We'll make sure we're working with our commissioners to assess and make decisions on how we go into the next seasons and beyond.

So a lot of different roles, but I'm excited to be here. Honestly, I'll still learning some of my roles, some of them I didn't even know I had until I got here, but it's been good, better than good. Thank you.

Q. Because of conference realignment and the conferences naturally being more difficult to win, how much, if any, conversation has there been about how the committee evaluates strength of schedule, and are there any considerations to change the way they evaluate that whether through statistics or any other type of protocol?

RICHARD CLARK: Strength of schedule is always a key criteria for the committee, and it's written into the protocol. Strength of schedule, obviously record, head-to-head competitions -- there's so many things that go into this.

But what we're trying not to do is tie the hands of the committee members and make it so prescriptive on how they use the different data that they have and incorporate that into their ranking, but what we do is emphasize that things like strength of schedule are very important, that it is among the top things that they have to take into consideration. And for all the reasons that you just talked about, it's going to be critical for them to take that into account.

I sat in on three of the selection committee meetings last year, and I'll say that that team operates with great sophistication, there's a lot of discussion there, and I think that they take into account the things that are most important, especially as we go into some of the changes now. They're going to recognize that these changes are happening and that strength of schedule is going to matter.

So there's science in this, there's art to this. We have the eye test. We have committee members that are very smart and very in depth in their knowledge of college football. So I think that that is always going to be a top criteria, but I think they're taking it into the right level of importance when they're making their decisions.

But it is important, and it's going to be critical always in their selection.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for your time.

RICHARD CLARK: Great talking to everyone, and we'll see you out on the field.

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