

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday July 11, 2016

Bill Hancock

College Football Playoff Exec. Director

MODERATOR: We're honored to be welcomed by the executive director of College Football Playoff, Mr. Bill Hancock. Mr. Hancock will have a few opening remarks and then we'll take a few questions. Bill?

BILL HANCOCK: Thank you, Kevin. Hello, everybody. It's great to be back at the SEC. Great to have Media Days beginning again. In many ways Media Days are like a family reunion for me. Our friend, Mike Slive, is fond of saying he's a recovering attorney. Well, I'm a recovering journalist. For both Mike and me, what that means is that we will always be what we were when we started out. That's a pride I take in being a recovering journalist. I'm still one at heart.

Between now and the first week of August, all ten conferences will have Media Days. These are the official kick-offs of the season. Student-athletes, coaches, administrators, journalists all look forward to this time in July. Nobody has lost a game. Officials are all perfect and all is well with the world.

As these student-athletes and coaches meet with the media, they will be excited about the season and they will be pointing to what might happen for them in the postseason. It's the traditional beginning of what I believe and know is the best regular season in sports. It's a season that we've all been waiting for ever since that night on January 11th when Alabama and Clemson played a game that will be remembered forever.

As always, Media Days do begin the best regular season in sports, and it will culminate in -- I looked it up in the Web site this morning -- 173 days from now with the championship game down in Tampa, which is going to be a wonderful host for us. And of course it will be the first outdoor game in CFP history.

I use the term "CFP history" only partially in jest. In many ways it seems like we've had this championship tournament for a long time. Much has been accomplished in the four years since the tournament was created, and we're delighted with the way things have gone.

By every measure, the College Football Championship, College Football Playoff and its championship, has



been highly successful. Fans love the CFP. They continue to love their college football. We provided a memorable experience for students, not only student-athletes but band members, spirit squad members and students who just go to the games. They will remember the CFP game for the rest of their lives.

CFP has already enhanced the regular season. Certainly it enhanced regular season scheduling. We all follow the scheduling developments during the offseason as more and more of those top-quality intersectional games cropped up. And that will continue, and we're proud how the CFP affected regular season scheduling.

The CFP has been played firmly within the context of higher education. When the playoff was created back in the summer of 2012, we said it was important that the games feel like college football. Now, the term "feel like college football" may be hard for some to define, but it's not hard for us to define, and I dare say, not hard for folks in this room to define.

The CFP brought a campus feeling to two iconic NFL stadiums in the first two year. We have marching bands at halftime. We have school banners and stadiums full of passionate fans with no large slashes of neutral folks in the stands. And, of course, there's a process for selecting the teams. It works. Our model works -- 13 high-integrity people, football experts, evaluating, studying, debating, frankly working their tails off during the season and producing a ranking that, while someone will always be unhappy, folks can believe in and setting up this tournament in the way that it should be set up.

We'll talk to you a little bit about selecting teams. As you know, I worked with the NCAA Final Four tournament for 16 years, and there is no perfect way to set up a bracket. Every sport, from field hockey to soccer to baseball to men's basketball to the College Football Playoff, leaves passionate fans, leaves some passionate fans disappointed. That goes with the territory. And of course with the greater number of people who follow college football, that's magnified, and we embrace that. We embrace the passion for college football. And there's nothing that reflects the passion more than those weekly rankings, and the final rankings at the end of the year.

I'll talk to you just a little bit before I close and open for questions, just a little bit about the schedule of the semifinal games. We will be looking at that. This year's games will be on New Year's Eve, again on Saturday. As you probably saw, we moved the kick-offs up one hour. It will be 3:00 and 7:00 as opposed to 4:00 and 8:00. Next year they will be on New Year's Day again. So we have some time.

But we pledged after this year's games we will be looking at the semifinal schedule and will continue to do that. We don't feel any rush to make a decision now, tomorrow, or any time in the relatively near future.

Lastly, I want to take advantage of this rather relatively captive audience to paint a picture about what we're doing with the CFP Foundation. I hope you know about this. It is a remarkable success. We decided when the playoff was created that we wanted to give something back to communities and to the country. And we decided fairly quickly that the best way to give something back would be through K through 12 education. And so we created the CFP Foundation.

Its cornerstone, its flagship is Extra Yard for Teachers. And in the first year the foundation has helped hundreds, dozens, I dare say thousands of teachers around the country and certainly many thousand of students. And you will see the CFP Foundation with Extra Yard for Teachers grow and grow and grow over time. And just know we are very pleased with how that's gone, and we are pleased with the direction that it will take in the future.

In conclusion, thank you for your interest in college football. Thank you for your professionalism, and I just hope you can understand how proud we are, how privileged I feel, to be involved with the College Football Playoff, how much I appreciate being a recovering journalist and how much I'm looking to year three of the CFP.

Q. Wondering what kind of job you thought Jeff Long did as the Playoff Committee chairman the last couple of years?

BILL HANCOCK: That's funny you ask about that, Bob, because I had it in my notes and I just skipped over it. I want to thank Jeff for doing a tremendous job as chair of the committee. Jeff was in a position that in 30 years people will look back and say, wow, the first chairman of that really did a great job and got it off on the right foot.

Jeff was a leader in the room. He made sure that all voices were heard, and then he had the task of going out each Tuesday and explaining the will of the room. And sometimes the will of the room wasn't united.

Almost every time it wasn't unanimous, but Jeff got to come out and explain. Jeff is every man. Jeff is brilliant. He's ethical. He's dedicated, and we could not have had a better chair for the first two years of the playoff.

Jeff's term was defined. After he served the first year, he was reappointed for a second year, and we knew he wouldn't be coming back for a third year, because we wanted to spread it around. Jeff will remain on the committee, as you know, and we have a good new chair coming in with Kirby Hocutt from Texas Tech. But I cannot thank Jeff enough for the work he did as the chair this year and last year.

Q. I'm sure you expected to be asked to expound on what you said about looking at the schedule for the semifinals in the future and what complications are there, considering you have these contractual issues with the Sugar Bowl and Rose Bowl to be on New Year's Day?

BILL HANCOCK: The issues are what day is the best to allow the most number of people to watch the games, and, yes, we were disappointed with the viewership, although millions of people watched those games. The semifinal games this year were among the highest-rated cable games of all time.

We know we face the challenge with New Year's Eve. We also know that we face the challenge with the games not being as competitive as they were before. We didn't have two Heisman Trophy winners playing in our games this year.

We may have had a bit of a sophomore slump with the New Year's Eve matter. I don't know. But certainly the date was a factor. I feel fortunate that we have time to make the right decision on this, and we will take our time, and we'll make a decision. And as soon as we know, we'll certainly let you all know.

Q. Do you think there will be an addition to the playoff system, like adding two more teams?

BILL HANCOCK: We are -- there's no discussion of expanding. We set the four-team tournament for 12 years, and there's no discussion in our group about any kind of expansion.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you all very much. Mr. Hancock, thank you.

BILL HANCOCK: Thanks, everybody.