

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday July 12, 2017

Bill Hancock

MODERATOR: We're pleased to be joined by executive director of college football, Mr. Bill Hancock.

BILL HANCOCK: Thank you, Kevin. Good to be here. I appreciate the SEC giving us this opportunity, very good to be here among friends, so many professional colleagues. And I do consider many of you my friends.

I have so much respect for the job that you do, covering this great game that we all love. In many ways, media days is like a family reunion for me and I think for all of you who haven't seen each other for awhile.

And between now and July 27th, reporters, coaches, athletes will get together at ten different cities for ten different conference Media Days around the country. And it's become a de facto beginning of the season. It's a season we've all been waiting for ever since Alabama and Clemson got together for that epic game back in January in Tampa.

The Media Days began with what I consider the most magical, most compelling, most meaningful season in sports. It will culminate. It is 181 days for those of us that are counting at the fourth championship game in Atlanta's remarkable new stadium, and it is a remarkable facility.

I know you heard Rich yesterday, and everything he said was true. It's fantastic facility. Fans will love being there, and it will provide a great competitive atmosphere, a memorable atmosphere, for the athletes who get to participate. So we're very excited about Atlanta.

In many ways, it seems like we've had this CFP Championship format for a long time, but last month, we passed the fifth anniversary of the creation of the playoff. The playoff was born on June 26th of 2012 in a meeting at Washington, D.C., among University presidents from all ten conferences. And that was a very good day for the sport that we all love so much.

I remember going on a run that morning in the neighborhood. And on the way, while I was out there, I was thinking, wow, what's getting ready to happen here. We're getting ready to change the paradigm for college athletics, and we did.



By every single measure, the College Football Playoff has been highly successful. Fans love it. Coaches appreciate it. Athletes get memorable experiences from participating, not only athletes, fans, all kinds of students, spirit squad, band members. The students that attend the games are making memories that will last them forever. And we are conducting the playoff in the context of higher education. We cannot, we will not, we must not ever forget that.

When we go to the championship game, we want the games to feel like college football. Now, feel like college football, quote, unquote, may be hard to describe and hard to define for some people. I know you know about it, but people that haven't experienced a Saturday in Oxford or Norman or Columbus cannot understand it until they're there.

We transform an iconic professional stadium into one that feels like a college game, and that is one of the best things that we have done with the playoff. Carrying the campus atmosphere over to a significant stadium was a big goal that we've had and one that we've been successful in completing.

We have marching bands at halftime. We have school banners. And we have stadiums full of passionate fans. Really unlike any championship of any sport in America that is conducted at a neutral site have we been able to create an atmosphere where everybody in the stadium cares more than the other. If you have been to any of our championship games and contrasted that with the other neutral site championships, I know you will agree.

There are no large chunks of neutral fans at the college football playoff championship game. And of course, there's the process for selecting the teams. Every selection in every sport creates great interest among people who follow the sport closely. I know that very well from the 16 years that I spent working with the NCAA basketball committee. And of course, for college football, with a huge number of fans, the significant scrutiny, that is all multiplied.

I think the best thing that the founders of the playoff did was to create the Selection Committee of high integrity experts to choose the teams, moving away from the strictly science part that we had with the BCS over to

the more art that we can devote to it, the more debate that we can devote to it, with the Selection Committee.

I also want to thank our chairman, first of all,

Jeff Long from Arkansas who got us off to search a great start and now Kirby Hocutt, all Big Eight linebacker from Oklahoma -- Kansas State. Jeff and Kirby worked together at the University of Oklahoma. Jeff will always remind me and Kevin that he was a terrific option quarterback back in college.

So we got a lot of football people in the room, but I know you will join me in thanking Jeff and Kirby for the job that they do, for the time that they spend, they invest with reporters, to analyze and discuss what the committee has done every week. We are in great debt to those two guys.

We will continue to help with the understanding of the playoff by staging the mock selection exercises in September for reporters and for others. Several of you have participated in the mocks, I know, and you know how tense they can be, but also how much fun we've had.

By the way, it looks like the mock table is full for this year, but if anyone in the room would like to attend a mock and participate in the future, please drop me an e-mail, and I'll put you on the list. We'd love to have you. It's just bhancock@collegefootballplayoff.com. Again, drop me an e-mail, and we would love to have you attend a mock.

What's ahead for us? A championship weekend in Atlanta that will be a great culmination and celebration of college football. I'll go ahead and answer the question that's on many of your minds, I know, there's no talk about expansion of the field among our board. We have a 12-year contract for this four-team event, so 9 more years to go. It's simple. Four lets us keep the focus on the regular season, the best, most compelling, most meaningful, as I said, regular season in sports, a regular season that every other sport in America would love to trade for.

Why monkey with a good thing? Four also lets us keep the Bowl experience for the athletes, for thousands of athletes across the whole spectrum of college football. And four keeps our sport within the framework of higher education.

Lastly, I want to take a minute with the captive audience here to sing the praises of something you may have heard of tangentially or peripherally, but I want to call it back to your consciousness, and that is the CFP Foundation. Our foundation honors and assists teachers from across the country. Many

teachers and thousands of students have benefitted from the funds provided through the CFP Foundation and our signature initiative, which is called Extra Yard for Teachers. Watch for this program to grow and grow over time.

I would ask you personally that you devote a little space to writing about Extra Yard during the teachers -- during the season. We have Extra Yard Awareness Week coming up during the middle of September when every campus, at least many, many campuses around the country will be joining us in celebrating teachers.

Education is our most important opportunity as Americans, and teachers make that engine go. I want to repeat that for emphasis. Education is our most important opportunity in America, and teachers do make that engine go, and they need our support and our assistance. They are the unsung heroes of our culture, and I ask that you please join us in honoring them.

I want to give you a column idea. Remember a teacher that helped you and that set you on the path for life and write a column about that teacher. Write about what he did or she did for you and how you wouldn't be where you are but for the teacher. Mine was a guy named Flavious Richardson back in Hobart, Oklahoma, who taught me to think for myself, who taught me I could do anything I wanted to do and taught me to respect others. He had the unusual name of Flavious Richardson. He's still alive, and I go back to see him when I go back to my home town. He's in his 80s, and he never fails to say I am so proud of you. I always say, Mr. Richardson -- I can't call him Flavious. I have to call him Mr. Richardson. I always say, Mr. Richardson, I would be nowhere but for you.

Each of you has a Flavious in your life. And please tell the person and if you have a chance write paragraphs about the person and how education is so important in our country.

I'll conclude now. I know you have better things today. I want to thank you for your interest in college football and for your professionalism and for your friendship. I hope you can understand how honored we are by the success of the College Football Playoff, what an honor it is for me and our staff down in Irving, Texas to be involved in this great event.

Sometimes I have to pinch myself to remind myself what an opportunity that we have to be involved in this game, that I'm not just dreaming, that we're all up here and we're getting to work with college football every day. I'll be around for a while today and look forward to visiting with you. Thanks very much.

Kevin, thank you.