

PAC-12 Conference Championship Game: Stanford vs USC

Friday, November 30, 2018

Commissioner Larry Scott

Press Conference

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Good afternoon. Exciting day, the Pac-12 championship game tonight. Delighted to be able to address you and talk about the game, our fifth here at Levi Stadium, our eighth Pac-12 championship game.

Have a fantastic matchup with two great teams: Pac-12 North champion, Washington, and Pac-12 South champion Utah, two of the more impressive teams in the country both as teams and in terms of individual talent of those teams.

It's been a really fun and competitive season in the Pac-12, wide open at times, certainly a lot of drama and competitiveness. Pac-12 North was only decided in a very dramatic Apple Cup last Friday night. The Pac-12 South a couple of weeks ago when Utah clinched their position.

When I talk about competitiveness, we had nine of our 12 teams at different times this year ranked in the top 25. We're going to finish the season with seven bowl-eligible teams. See how tomorrow goes with the final committee decisions, but with multiple teams in the top 25 as well.

This game tonight has very special significance for the teams that are involved. We'll have to wait for the final results and see what happens in other parts of the country. In all likelihood the winner of this game is going on to the Rose Bowl, which will be very meaningful and exciting for both Washington and Utah, whoever qualifies.

So special because the Pac-12 has had a relationship with the Rose Bowl for over 100 years. It's our most special relationship and an honor for both these teams to have a chance to participate. In the case of Utah, they've never had a chance to play in this game. They're here for the first time. Never played in the Rose Bowl.

I know from the earliest moments I spent with the folks



in the Utah community back in 2010 when they were discussing joining the conference, the idea someday they could play in a Pac-12 championship football game, have a chance to compete for the Rose Bowl, was a dream. I know there's a lot of excitement only eight years into it that's coming to a reality.

In the case of the University of Washington, they've been in 14 Rose Bowl games, but have not been in a Rose Bowl game since 2001, when they beat Purdue. They're coming off a winning last performance, but it was a while ago. I know there's an incredible desire by the fans to be able to join in Pasadena for the Rose Bowl if they wind up there.

Regardless, we have a great bowl lineup, Pac-12 will be well represented. We'll have terrific matchups in the Rose Bowl and beyond.

Turning back to the game at hand here, a lot of people want to certainly acknowledge, as I mentioned, the fifth year in partnership with the San Francisco 49ers, Levi Stadium, city of Santa Clara. We extended our game here until 2019, an option to play the game here in 2020, as well. The event is growing in stature and enthusiasm as evidenced by the partners involved in the event. New ones coming in, partners renewing.

We announced earlier this morning that the presenting sponsor of the event, 76, has renewed the agreement till 2019, which is a great sign. The partners see a lot of value to have the partnership extended.

We have more partners in this event than we've ever had. Sponsor partners include Audi, Dr. Pepper, ZipRecruiter, Opus Bank, Unify, Maui Jim, GEICO, Gatorade, Nike, Jack in the Box. A lot of momentum in terms of the sponsor support.

FOX will be broadcasting this game prime time East Coast time, hence the 5 p.m. kick here, so a big national audience. They have a lot of production resources they're putting against this in terms of the commentators for the game, sideline reporters, pregame and postgame show.

There will be some other things I want to point out to you that are going on around the game, as well. This is a platform to acknowledge some things going on in

the world around us here. We are going to be honoring here tonight 100 firefighters, first responders and their families, that have been involved in the Butte County fires that have been so devastating here in northern California, that they've been bravely fighting against that natural disaster.

In partnership with USA Football, who is a partner of ours, they will be donating \$54,000 in football equipment to the Paradise Junior Football Program, that's one of the schools that was flattened by the recent fires. There's a huge rebuilding effort to Butte County. We're pleased that not only can we acknowledge some of the brave first responders that have been involved in fighting that disaster, but we're going to be able to be part of a \$54,000 contribution to the rebuild effort that's going on at Paradise.

We also will be honoring tonight, in conjunction with the College Football Playoff Foundation's Extra Yard for Teachers, teachers from all over the Bay Area that have been invited to attend tonight's game. We're going to be awarding \$10,000 to one of the local school area teachers tonight. That's something all conferences are doing in conjunction with the College Football Playoff as part of Extra Yard for Teachers.

The final set of activities I want to mention to you that's new around this event, Pac-12 launched a sustainability program this year. I think the first conference in the country to do it in such a comprehensive way. We are working with a company called Copia. This is the first event that they're doing. It was founded actually by a Cal Berkeley grad, designed to reduce food waste at all our Pac-12 championships. This is the first one. But all Pac-12 championships going forward, all the unused food is going to be repurposed to feed people that are in need.

Copia is going to feed two million people this year with food that would otherwise have gone to waste, and we're proud on behalf of the Pac-12 and this league to take the lead in that effort.

There's a lot going on, a lot of partners involved with the event. It comes at an exciting time for the conference. I think you all know, coming off a year where the Pac-12 won twice as many championships as any other conference, up to 514, about 200 more than any other conference, and counting.

Our schools not only are focused on this athletic success, but also the academic success of our student-athletes. I do want to point out, give a shout out to one of the players you're going to see on the field tonight, announced the Pac-12 Football Scholar Athlete of the Year, Ben Burr-Kirvin, linebacker for U-Dub. Went to high school here. But we recognized him this week as

an outstanding scholar-athlete, 3.86 GPA, the type of athletes that our schools look at, being able to compete at the highest level of academics and athletics that the Pac-12 has to offer.

With that, I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

Q. Most likely the Pac-12 will miss the College Football Playoff. Where do you go from now to gain this respect, especially as Washington State drops out of the top 12?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Yeah, obviously we want to have a team in the Playoffs every year, we want to win national championships. It's unlikely to be in a Playoff this year based on the committee, 13 people that look at it. This year we'll see how it goes and what happens in other parts of the country. This year our teams may not have the record to make it.

We are fortunate in the Pac-12 Conference that we have this unique relationship with the Rose Bowl, which is a very coveted prize. So certainly from our universities' perspectives, the student-athletes on our teams, and I know from the fan bases from the feedback we've gotten, one of the things that's great for the current system and structure from the Pac-12 perspective is if there are years, three years if we don't have a team in the Playoffs, we get to play a traditional Rose Bowl game. If I think about the teams that either Washington or Utah are going to play in the Rose Bowl, it would be Ohio State, could be Michigan, could be Northwestern. It's going to be a fantastic experience for the student-athletes.

Sorry, you asked about Washington State, I think, as well.

I would say the committee is not done yet. They haven't made their final determinations. We've had a chance over the season and certainly this week to weigh in with the committee as part of the process. We've worked in lockstep with Washington State on that I think very well.

Whether it's the result of the game tonight, and the fact that we as a conference have a regular-season game tomorrow between Stanford and Cal that could have impacts in terms of what Washington State's résumé looks like. I would just say to you the final determination hasn't been made yet. We're quite hopeful and expect that Washington State is going to get some very serious consideration for the top 12.

Q. (Question regarding criticism of the Pac-12 in a recent article and the response to that article.)

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Yeah, I had a chance to read John's pieces. I respect the role of the

media. I certainly respect particularly the role of opinion journalists. People are entitled to their take. There's a lot of that out there these days.

I think there's a lot of mischaracterizations in it. I know we're challenging to follow because we're unique as a conference in that we're a conference on the one hand, but when it comes to head counts, financial results, we're actually a media company as well. The way all that gets reported is all together. That's very hard to parse. We do it internally with our members.

What I can tell you is that we're confident, and I know our members are confident, that we operate very efficiently and that we are aligned in our strategy going forward. We know where we're going. We're very confident with who we are. Our presidents measure success, our ADs measure success, and we measure success, and that's what matters.

Q. I think the biggest talking point was a lot of the spending, particularly on the rent that wasn't so efficient. That's part one. The second part is, you said there were some mischaracterizations. Can you speak specifically to what those were?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: We don't have enough time for me to go through all the mischaracterizations.

In terms of the rent, that's a great example. It is very hard for someone to understand what the costs are, what the rent costs and head count costs are for a media company, for ESPN, FOX, Big Ten Network, local RSNs. But trying to look at the amount of square footage we've got, the head count, the rental expense compared to other conferences is not an apples-to-apples comparison. It's kind of hard to even respond to if you don't kind of understand those are two fundamentally different things.

So, yeah, it's an opinion, but it doesn't really resonate with us. We go through a very rigorous process internally with our members, athletics directors, university CFO's, our presidents and chancellors. We have an audit and finance committee that regularly reviews our expenses, compared to other conferences, vis-à-vis conference operations.

Separately we look at the costs of running a TV network, and compare that to information and data that we have with peers that run TV networks.

What I can say with absolute confidence is not only are we comparable with other conferences in terms of conference operations, but we're very, very efficient. What we do for the amount of expense to run the TV network compared to peers is admirable.

Q. As far as the TV network, with the uncertainty of AT&T's partnership with DIRECTV, how does that affect the Pac-12's partnership with AT&T?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: The sequence was we had a sponsorship deal with AT&T that expired at the end of June. We chose not to renew it, we the Pac-12, because they wouldn't carry us on DIRECTV. As a principle, we'll only work with sponsor partners that have a distribution, if they carry something, distribution.

A good example of that is recent sponsorship deals we announced with Comcast that's going to be sponsoring a bunch of our schools in the conference, as well as Cox. We were willing to take them on as a partner.

When AT&T bought DIRECTV, they weren't willing to carry the Pac-12 networks on DIRECTV, we said we weren't going to be able to continue with you as a sponsor partner. We understood an implication of that might be that they would drop us at some point from the AT&T coverage. They decided to keep it for the football season, which was great. That was kind of bonus coverage for us. But we expected this was a possibility.

Q. Have you had some discussions on officiating and the targeting calls, especially when it comes to reviewing?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: I'd say targeting is probably the area that's gotten most attention nationally amongst those that spend time talking about rules, talking about football. Like the NCAA Football Rules Committee, there's a football oversight committee, something called the College Football Officiating LLC that I'm a board member of. Those organizations spend a lot of time talking about targeting. It's been a point of emphasis in terms of the health, safety and well-being of the student-athletes.

Trying to be progressive, those discussions all happen on a national basis. The rule making, the policy making around targeting and the role replay should play when it comes to targeting calls is all the same nationally, not conference by conference. What happens conference by conference is the implementation of it and how the protocols work for replay, which is still in an experimental mode.

The NCAA approved collaborative instant replay two seasons ago. This is the second season. We're on an experimental basis. Conferences can have collaborative instant replay for an instant replay center, command center as it's sometimes referred to. That's the mode we're in right now.

Nationally, I just came from meetings with my peers at other conferences. We had a college officiating board meeting. I know in the off-season, there's going to be

a lot more time, and I think there's more room to clarify certain aspects of the targeting rule. Every year there's going to be some changes to it. I know there's going to be more discussion about those rules in the off-season.

Q. I was wondering how often non-officials are involved in what you're calling the collaborative process?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Are you talking specifically?

Q. Reviewing those incidents that have been lightning rods for controversy.

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: In our conference?

Q. Yes.

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: I'm not going to comment on how other leagues do it.

We had a protocol leading up to the controversy around the USC-Washington State game. Our head of officiating and head of football were involved in discussions, or could be involved in discussions, with replay officials during any game.

When the questions arose around Woodie Dixon's comments that were interpreted as a directive to change a call by the head of replay, we realized that was problematic, a mistake, a mistake on a couple of fronts. One, the final decision of instant replay is supposed to be with the instant replay officials, not with someone that's not. And there was a lack of clarity in how those decisions are made.

I immediately, in consultation with some of our leaders on campuses, made a change to our policy and clarified that neither head of officiating or Woodie Dixon as the head of football would be involved or around the replay center while replay calls were being made. Made it clear that the only three people that should be involved in a replay decision are the replay supervisor, who is in the command center, replay official for that particular game in the stadium, and the on-field official. That's been our policy, that's been how it's carried out since I made that decision.

So I don't think there's any gray area.

Q. Where is the collaboration that you said?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Three people that are involved.

Q. Other people are brought in to review or no?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Just make sure I understand the question. During an actual replay review, there are only three people involved in the

discussion: the on-field official, the replay official that's in the stadium, and the replay supervisor.

We have a very extensive process after the fact in terms of grading, in terms of accountability, in terms of training, in terms of assignments. We take accountability very, very seriously.

Our head of officiating is involved in that. Our head of football is involved in that, as well as other officials. We have graders. We have a whole team of graders whose only job it is to grade how our officials are doing. We grade every single one of their calls.

Q. To follow up on that a little bit. After the Yahoo report, you looked into whether there were any instances where there had been involvement in the past. During that process, did you have any discussions with replay officials in the booth or with your supervisor about the other targeting play that wasn't called, which was a crucial call in that game? Did you have any discussions about whether the first instance impacted the decision not to call the second?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Yes, I did. I asked that question specifically. Moreover what I can tell you is that when we did the review of my report with our athletics directors, I encouraged them to ask that question directly to the leadership of replay.

Not only was I satisfied, but our athletics directors were all satisfied that this was an isolated incident, and any other call in the game was not affected by the one call in question.

Q. Is Woodie Dixon involved in the instant replay process in any way, shape or form? If he is, what are his responsibilities? Where is the line that he can't cross? You talked about mischaracterizations (indiscernible).

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: We'll count that as one question.

So on the second question, to me that's a perfect example of someone asking a question of compare \$3.1 million in travel expenses to the SEC's travel expenses, I think shows there's a challenge, but a fundamental misunderstanding of the fact that you're comparing a media company with over 170 people, a lot of whom are traveling all the time, plus a conference office with over 40 people, to a conference with only 40 some odd people without a media company.

What I can tell you is that our travel expenses for the conference, compared to other conferences, are comparable. There's certainly differences where we're based, the distances between our schools, but are

comparable with other conferences.

Separately, our travel expenses for our media company are very efficient.

I understand it can be difficult. Everyone looks to compare apples to apples, but unfortunately looking at \$3.1 million for travel expenses, to the amount you have for rent, to fairly look at that, you would have to look at what ESPN is allocating for head count, travel, rent for the SEC Network. What is FOX allocating for head count, travel, rent, executive salaries, all the other things you'd like to look at.

That's what we do. That's what we do internally to allow me to look you in the eye and tell you with confidence we're running in a hyper-efficient manner and audit ourselves every year.

Q. Woodie Dixon?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: He's not involved in any way, shape or form with instant replay calls.

Q. (No microphone.)

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: Correct, correct.

Q. The Woodie Dixon situation, frustration over the Pac-12 probably not getting to the Playoff again, some of the financial issues that came up, a lot of Pac-12 fans are generally frustrated right now. What steps are you taking to try to restore your credibility and the conference's credibility with Pac-12 football fans?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: So I'm working very, very closely with our athletics directors and with our presidents on our future plans and strategy. Very fortunate that we've got a lot of alignment in terms of where we are, what we're working on going forward.

We're constantly looking at what can we do differently, whether it's how we schedule in football, how we schedule in basketball. As you know, when it comes to not making bowl games, there's really nothing the conference office gets involved in in terms of coaches, recruiting, calling games. Our purview is really around scheduling, media, those things, things at a conference level that we tend to focus on, running great championships, tie-ins, neutral-site games.

So I think when we come together as a conference with our presidents, with our ADs, with our football coaches, we tend to focus on what things the conference can do to put ourselves in the best position possible.

We test with rigor every year. Nine-game conference schedule, should we think about eight? What do we all do in terms of non-conference schedule? These are

questions that I think any best-in-class organization is always asking themselves, deciding what's best.

But I can tell you our schools, I feel the same way, feel like we've got a great group of coaches, great group of assistant coaches. Every one of our schools has treated football incredibly seriously. Since I've gotten here there's been over \$1 billion investment in new state-of-the-art facilities. Every single school either has redone or is redoing the football stadium, football operations buildings. A lot of great things have happened. I certainly feel, as I know our schools do, that the trajectory is very, very good for Pac-12 football.

We're testing with rigor as a league all the time. Should we stay with an 18-game conference schedule, should we look at a 20-game conference schedule? What can we do in terms of the neutral-site games? How do we look at the RPI, trying to figure out what that is, things of that nature. What else could we be doing?

But I like our process. I like the group of athletics directors that we have, presidents and chancellors, are very engaged. We all talk about these things together.

Q. Do you get a sense from the coaches that they would favor an expanded playoff system?

COMMISSIONER LARRY SCOTT: We spend a lot of time discussing that when we agreed to evolve from the BCS to the College Football Playoff. Felt then, feel now, four is absolutely the right number. It's a great balance between the importance of the regular season, conference championships, having a Playoff, which is about determining who is No. 1, and maintaining the importance of the bowl system, the importance to our student-athletes, our schools, our fans.

We feel very fortunate that we've got the Rose Bowl two out of every three years, which is, yeah, the best bowl game in the country with 100 years of history for the Pac-12. We feel that the balance is very, very good.

There's no discussion amongst the commissioners about expanding the Playoff. We've got contracts. I don't expect there will be any time soon.

Thank you.