

# PAC-12 Conference Championship Game: Oregon vs Utah

Friday, December 6, 2019

## Larry Scott

### Press Conference

LARRY SCOTT: Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for being here with us as we get ready to kick off for the sixth Pac-12 football championship game here at Levi Stadium, our ninth overall.

Before I move on to other things, I certainly want to acknowledge and thank our friends and partners from Levi Stadium and the 49ers, particularly Jed York and Al Guido for a great partnership, really helping us establish this neutral site football championship game, which followed three years of a home-hosted model.

This time next year we'll be in Las Vegas at the new Allegiant Stadium working with the Raiders, Las Vegas Convention Visitors Bureau, MGM, ready for the next chapter of the game. But certainly very appreciative of the 49ers, Levi Stadium, Santa Clara, helping us establish this new model which will be the foundation for our next championship games.

I'd also like to thank the many partners that we have in the event that have helped us establish it. I'll start talking about some of our sponsor partners. I want to again thank 76, who is our presenting sponsor for the event, Dr. Pepper, Opus Bank, Unified, GEICO, Gatorade, Nike, Jack in the Box, amongst others.

This has been a well-supported event. We very much appreciate all our partners. The number of partners we've had have steadily grown.

As many of you know, this is a very historic year. It's the 150th anniversary of college football. There's been a tremendous year-round effort to celebrate the great legacy, traditions and impact that the sport of football and college football in particular has had.

Kevin Weiberg, the former deputy commissioner at the Pac-12, has spearheaded that effort nationally as executive director of the College Football 150th Anniversary. It's been a great opportunity to celebrate student-athletes, coaches, tremendous traditions in the sport. It's been a great example of the many different entities in college football coming together to tell the amazing stories that the sport has created.



We're going to do a few things at this game to celebrate, including having two legends of Pac-12 football, Lincoln Kennedy and J.J. Stokes are here as ambassadors to help us celebrate the 150th. You'll see during the game at a break there will be a presentation for J.J. and Lincoln, I'm sure some videos celebrating this great anniversary.

We got a great matchup at this game. It's an exciting moment for the conference. Two top-ranked teams in Utah, making their second straight appearance in the Pac-12 championship game, and Oregon, who are making their third appearance in this game.

We're excited that this game is going to be really the only game amongst the big conferences taking place this evening. We've got this great window, exclusive window, big commitment from one of our media partners, ESPN-ABC to put this game on network TV. Got a great crew that's here, as well.

ESPN-ABC are treating this as a big-time event, a great showcase for the league. We're expecting a very, very large audience nationally, especially given all that's at stake in the game.

These two teams have been amongst the top ranked teams throughout the season. Obviously a lot of implications of the game in terms of the Playoff, the Rose Bowl. We'll talk a little bit more about Utah and Oregon, of course, but from an overall league perspective, in addition to having elite teams at our championship game, having the championship game have Playoff implications, two teams deep into the season that had a shot at that. That's, of course, what we hope for, strive for, having elite teams, having teams participate in the College Football Playoff.

It's also a year where we saw again a lot of competitive depth across the conference. This year we had eight different teams that were ranked in the top 25 at one stage or another during the season. We are the only conference in the country where every single team won at least four games. It's a year we're going to have seven teams, over half of our league, going to bowl games this year.

This is one of those years where we're fortunate to see depth and all of our teams being competitive, but we

also have teams that are competing for the highest level at the end of the season, which is something we strive for.

Utah is playing for a couple of firsts. This could be the first time that they've made the College Football Playoff. Could be the first time that they play in a Rose Bowl. They've never done either.

For the Pac-12, of course, got a special relationship with the Rose Bowl, over a hundred years we've been playing there. I know for Utah, having the opportunity to reach a level and play in a game that they haven't been in before, is something very exciting for them.

For Oregon, if they make the Rose Bowl, it would be their eighth Rose Bowl appearance and the first since the 2015 College Football Playoff semifinal, where they beat Florida State.

I know there's a lot of hunger and desire amongst both fan bases and anticipation around this game. No matter what, we know these two teams are going to have a great post-season opportunity, as well as the other teams that we have in the league.

As I mentioned, this is the last year here at Levi Stadium. We think there's a great foundation for the game, a lot of tremendous memories for our student-athletes, our universities and our partners. At the same time very excited to be moving to Las Vegas and Allegiant Stadium.

As many of you know, we have a deep relationship in Las Vegas, have had a lot of success with our men's basketball tournament, our women's basketball tournament. We're excited about how our fans will react to being there and the opportunity for our student-athletes and teams, as well.

Today we always try to use as a platform to give back to the community, as well, to highlight certain initiatives. That's no exception at this game, as well. In partnership with the College Football Playoff Foundation's Extra Yards For Teachers Program, teachers from all over the Bay Area have been given the opportunity to come to the game. Some of them you'll see recognized on the field. We will be awarding tonight \$36,000 to 12 of our local area teachers as part of this national effort.

Additionally, unfortunately, we had the opportunity to do this in the past, we'll be honoring some of the heroic firefighters that have had to battle some of the blazes that have affected Northern California this year. So you'll see them recognized, as well.

We'll also will be featuring our Team Green Initiative as

well. You'll see people around the stadium with Team Green T-shirts which are made out of, believe it or not, 100% recyclable plastic. Sustainability is a important priority for our conference and universities. You'll see these ambassadors around the stadium helping fans with compost and recycle-ability.

Let me conclude by talking about a couple of these teams. Generally great source of pride for this conference is not only our success and pedigree in football, but all the all around excellence. The Pac-12 conference has had 526 national championships, as we speak, far more than any conference.

Broad-based excellence is part of the league and the conference. It's also about the complete student-athlete, success on the field, on the courts, but in the classroom as well.

I want to finish by pointing out that both of our teams here tonight are achieving in the classroom at a level that's historic for them. This year the Utah football program is boasting a 93% graduation success rate, which puts them in the very top echelon of football programs nationally in terms of graduation for their student-athletes.

Oregon, I do want to note Justin Herbert has gotten a lot of attention, a two-time academic All-American, this year he's a Campbell Trophy finalist. We're hopeful he gets that recognition in New York next week.

Beyond that, the Oregon football team will have an 86% graduation rate this year, which is the highest it's ever had. I know we're all going to be focused tonight on what's happening in the stadium, what happens on the field, which is obviously our focus, but I certainly wanted to acknowledge the commitment and effort of those two programs in terms of the academic success of their student-athletes.

With that, happy to open it up and take any questions that you may have.

**Q. If Utah were to win tonight, then not be included in the Playoff, would that change how you view the Playoff? Would you like to see it expanded or tweaked where you have to have a conference championship? Or is that just the way the cookie crumbles, go on with the four?**

LARRY SCOTT: Well, when we designed the Playoff, we understood there were four slots, there are five big conferences, independents. There would mean years that teams couldn't get in. So we understand that.

If Utah were to win tonight, we think they'll have a very, very strong résumé, and will be a strong candidate. I

certainly recognize the depends on what happens in other parts of the country.

It's hard to anticipate what might happen, but they're going to have an incredibly strong résumé if they win in terms of their balance of the team, the competitive dominance that they've shown on both sides of the ball, really historic proportions, particularly on defense.

Given some of the unique circumstances around the one loss that they had, they'll have about as strong a résumé as you can have for a one-loss team.

**Q. You indicated the decision as to outside capital investment would be reached by the end of the calendar year. You picked today as a possible announcement day. What is the status?**

LARRY SCOTT: The status is it's ongoing. We had a board meeting with our presidents and chancellors a couple of weeks ago. I think our chair made a statement coming out of that that we spent a lot of time on it, some in-depth presentations. Our presidents and chancellors want to continue with the process.

Beyond that, I don't have any specifics. But we've been asked to continue to engage with prospective partners, whether they're prospective between now and 2024 or they are candidates to be partners in our next round of television negotiations, we'll see. But we've been asked to continue that process.

**Q. What are your thoughts about Coach Petersen stepping down at Washington unexpectedly this past week?**

LARRY SCOTT: Yeah, came as a surprise. Certainly disappointed to lose Coach Pete in the league. He's held in such high regard, not only as a football coach, what he's done with the U-Dub program, College Football Playoff, Rose Bowl, great trajectory around the program, but the kind of human being and person he is. He's had a tremendous, tremendous impact throughout the league. We will miss him.

Had a chance to communicate with him post announcement. Wish him well. Happy that he's been able to kind of dictate the terms of this next chapter. Deserves to be able to find whatever balance he wants to find in his life right now.

There's a lot of excitement around Jimmy Lake. Having worked closely with Coach Pete, held in high regard nationally. I think it's a program that's in good shape.

**Q. If Utah were to win, perception-wise, how important is it for a one-loss conference champion to get into that Playoff to help the perception nationally of this conference?**

LARRY SCOTT: It's very important. Since the advent of the Playoff, the first five years, it's become clear that's become a litmus test for a lot of folks that follow the sport as to which teams make the Playoff, which teams don't.

Beyond that, we want to win a national championship sometime soon. That's the things that need to happen, being in the Playoff on a consistent basis, winning our national championship, getting our fair share of those for the Pac-12 Conference to achieve the level, all of our schools, all of our football programs, aspire to and think they deserve.

We're coming off two years where we did not make the Playoff. Absolutely helped shape a perception that the conference was down. I think we've all seen this is a year where the conference has been stronger top to bottom, including elite teams in the hunt for the Playoff at the business end of the season. It would be an important step to get back in the Playoff and hopefully win the national championship.

Yeah, these are important milestones. We're eager to see it happen this year hopefully.

**Q. If USC were able to kind of reclaim where it had been in the past as a top five type of program, what impact would that make for the conference financially, visibility, all those things?**

LARRY SCOTT: USC is the best known marquee brand the conference has nationally in the sport of football. I think it is the case that when the bellwether programs, the biggest brands, biggest names do well, there's a halo effect on the league overall. I think the same is true for other leagues. We could all probably have a similar list of the historic football programs in the country that have had the most success traditionally.

I think when USC is doing well, it generates more attention, eyeballs, more buzz about the league from a football perspective, and there's a perception that the league overall is just better. When they're not doing as well, I think the inverse is true.

I don't think that's unique to the Pac-12. I think it's true of other leagues as well. It's not unique to the sport of football. We've talked about the same I think for basketball, as well.

It would be a great thing overall for the conference if USC gets back to the kind of success they've had over the last couple decades. That would be terrific financially, exposure-wise, and importantly national perception.

We have some unique challenges being on the West

Coast, with the time zone, population, other things that have been well reported. I think it makes it that much more important that we have a competitive excellence and our biggest brands are competing at the highest level regularly.

**Q. What is your appetite to get into other streaming services, YouTube, Hulu?**

LARRY SCOTT: High priority. Our teams had worked hard to get us we're right now on two of those streaming services: Sling and Fubo. Our team is regularly trying to get on the other ones as they emerge or those that exist.

The world is changing very, very rapidly. There are services like ESPN Plus as an example that exist today that a year or two ago we wouldn't have been talking about. It gives you a sense of how dynamic the space is. It's one of the reasons we are eager and excited about all of our rights coming back and available to license and package in potentially different ways than we have.

The world has changed so much already, from when we licensed our deals in 2011, and the pace of change continues to pick up. I think it will be a very different paradigm when we're out in the market in '22, '23 getting ready.

**Q. You have a media rights deal where fans feel disregarded. With the kickoff times, the six-day windows, they can't make plans. Showing up less frequently in your stadiums. How do you chase those dollars while making the person in the stadium feel like they're important?**

LARRY SCOTT: For us it's a challenging balancing act. We made certain tradeoffs in 2011 that resulted in maximizing revenue, trying to be mindful of game day experience and traditions. But we've gotten a lot of feedback from fans that attend the games, that they don't like the number of nighttime games that we play. It's about a third of our Saturday games are at night. That's in addition to Thursday and Friday night games, which teams play occasionally.

I know this weighs heavily on our university leadership, who I talk to regularly, from presidents, athletic directors, on down. I get a lot of fan feedback. It's clear to me we're going to have a lot of discussion about that as our rights come up and as we think about licensing our rights going forward.

It's unclear whether the calculus will be the same that it was in 2011 going forward, whether it has to be a direct tradeoff between night games equaling more revenue and more exposure, whether that's a tradeoff that results in more money or not. It's too early I think to

say.

That happened to have been the case with ESPN and FOX. If we wanted to be on ESPN and FOX, if we wanted the kind of revenue and commitment to exposure that we're going to enjoy tonight on ABC, there are certain things we had to agree to in the back and forth, including more night games than our fans felt comfortable with.

I don't think we anticipated the level of angst we'd hear from fans. I think that is a learning. I'm confident as we approach our strategy going forward, that will weigh heavy in whether it's in the tradeoffs with the ESPN or FOX's of the world, whether that leads you to license rights to other broadcasters that don't have the same shelf space issue, don't see it being a premium for you to play at night.

It's a little too early to tell. That's going to be one of the top issues our campuses are concerned about and I think it will get thorough consideration.

**Q. When Utah joined the league eight years ago, some question whether they were worthy to be in the league. Are you surprised, or could you envision they would have been on the verge of the final four in just such a short time?**

LARRY SCOTT: I'm not surprised. Not too long before we invited Utah to join the conference, they were in big BCS games, famous Fiesta Bowl win, kind of shocked the world. We knew that they were a team that had enjoyed success at the highest level, deep commitment to football, great tradition.

That was one of several criteria, of course, that we looked at. But it hasn't surprised anyone that Utah has been consistently competitive in all the years they've been in the league. Certainly the last two years they've hit milestones they hadn't previously seen in the Pac-12 by making our football championship game the first time last year, this time of course coming in as a top-10 team with a shot for the Playoff or the Rose Bowl.

If I do harken back to the moment on the steps of City Hall where I announced they were coming in, it's been an unqualified success, having both Utah and Colorado in the conference, on every level: academically, overall integration and fit, and then success.

Certainly we've had Utah and Colorado in this game since they both joined the league. So I think from my perspective it's worked out very, very well.

**Q. Is Media Day, Football Media Day, moving to Las Vegas? Do you have finalized plans for your last bowl affiliation?**



LARRY SCOTT: We have not finalized or announced either one of those things. I think we're still working on both.

**Q. Regarding fan engagement, with the championship game moving to Las Vegas, earlier this week the conference announced the addition of 12 men's basketball game for next season, many of them around the same weekend as the football championship game. Was there any discussion at any point about perhaps hosting those games at a neutral site in Las Vegas whereby every fan base would have one place to go, all of your conference's media, to increase the exposure, all of your television partners in one place at one time, one weekend, seems to be a means by which you could have addressed the issues that ail this conference? Was that on the table at all?**

LARRY SCOTT: I'm not sure -- restate. I'm not sure I'm following the question.

**Q. You announced the addition of those basketball games.**

LARRY SCOTT: You're talking about the Coast-to-Coast Challenge?

**Q. The men's additional games, 20-game conference schedule.**

LARRY SCOTT: Okay, I'm sorry.

**Q. Many of those games are taking place around the same weekend as this football championship game. Why are they on campus as opposed to creating a big event weekend around your football championship in Las Vegas where every fan base and all of the conference's media and all of your television partners could be there for a three-day extravaganza of sorts?**

LARRY SCOTT: I don't know the answer to the question. I don't know if that was considered or not, but I'll find out for you.

**Q. About Utah, when you invited them, they have been very successful. I don't know that the national awareness for them maybe matches what they've done on the field. If they can win this game, make the Playoff, how much would you see that kind of raising their visibility, people's respect for them?**

LARRY SCOTT: Yeah, I think it's hard to overstate the significance for the University of Utah in terms of the national awareness. I think tonight, frankly, is going to be a platform, an opportunity that I don't know they've had recently. I mean, they were obviously in this game last year, they've been in big bowl games.

Given the implications of this game tonight, the national ramifications, we're certainly expecting there are going

to be fans from all across the country tuning in based on how it could impact their team, their league.

What's been gratifying, I think in terms of the national discussion about Utah, unfairly they have flown below the radar a little bit compared to some other programs and brands, even compared to Oregon, which has been in Rose Bowls, College Football Playoffs, has gotten more attention. We certainly have noted that there's been less narrative around Utah.

Having said that, it's one of the reasons I was so supportive of the move from the BCS to the College Football Playoff, because if you look at the committee, they've absolutely shown huge respect for Utah throughout the season. They're watching the games. They're not going off of brand, they're not going off of history, they're actually watching the games. They're seeing the consistent dominance with which Utah is winning games. It's the reason they're ranked where they are.

They're very well-positioned for the Playoff because the committee goes beyond the one-loss record, they go beyond the brand, and they're seeing you've got a Utah defense that some have compared to the Alabama defense of a couple of years ago. The point differential in their last eight games is 308 to 76. Utah scored 308 points, given up 76 points in their last eight games. The number of games they held opponents to under a hundred yards rushing is equivalent to Alabama, I think it was 2016. We may have a defense here which is historically as strong, good, stout defense in the recent history of college football.

The committee has seen that. It's not necessarily showing up in national discussions and talking heads on TV, but I know based on the rankings and the feedback we get from the committee people have seen that. To see Tyler Huntley showing up on Heisman lists, Zack Moss being recognized as a very top runningback, I think the recognition is coming, but it's been a little bit late throughout the season.

If they are to win tonight, to go on to the Playoff, certainly if they go on and win a national championship, I think this could forever change. They will be seen more as a blue blood rather than an up-and-comer, let's say, which they certainly deserve.

**Q. Have you seen any impact from the Simpson Consulting review, implementation of the recommendations?**

LARRY SCOTT: I certainly have. The report was delivered on the eve of our Football Media Day. Some of the recommendations have been able to be implemented, but not all. I'd say yes, but not to the full extent. Some of the recommendations, as you'll recall,

related to hiring, related to training, things that were already done by July for the most part.

Some of the recommendations around accountability that I see go on, on a week-in, week-out basis, importantly transparency, public accountability, was not something that we had done before. This year for the first time there was a protocol by which we publicly acknowledge mistakes. Someone pointed out to me the other day I think we're the only league that has done that. I thought there were going to be more, but we're the only league that's done that this year, three times this season. We publicly commented on a mistake that was made.

I think that's been a good step. Some could argue that we've brought more attention to an officiating error. That's the tradeoff there. We're going to sit down with our athletic directors and football coaches this spring and evaluate how we feel about that. What were the pros of taking that step, do we want to do more of it, less of it, and weigh it up.

I'm sure we didn't get it pitch perfect, but it was an important step going forward. So, yeah, that's my overall synopsis.

**Q. How do you anticipate any of the 9 a.m. Pacific time starts?**

LARRY SCOTT: We don't have any confirmed. It's not something we would actually talk to schools individually in a serious way until early this coming year. It will be completely voluntary if it happens. There is not a groundswell of support for it. I think I'm safe saying that. There are some schools that are interested.

There was a bit of a wait-and-see attitude as well among some of our schools. They wanted to see how FOX's big noon kickoff went. I think people have noted some of the success with this window.

It's challenging, not something we've done before. I can't predict whether we'll have any teams that will want to do it. It certainly won't be on many occasions if it happens. If it fits for a particular school, I think it would be an interesting test. Certainly would signal to fans trying to find creative ways to be responsive to some of the concerns we've had about late night.

I understand this presents different challenges for people. It's no silver bullet, I get that. We've tried to signal that we're open if there are creative ways to work within the framework of our current television agreements, to try to be responsive to fans. Given some of the challenges we'll have with time zones, we're going to explore it.

**Q. A couple of rules proposals being discussed,**

**coming forward elsewhere in the country. Kansas has a proposal that would call for the opening of 30 initial counters in a initial signing class in one year, but that the two-year combined number would be 50, obviously as part of a rebuilding program or something like that. West Virginia's AD, on the Football Oversight Committee, made comments regarding that committee revisiting the four-game redshirt rule due to players using it either for transfer means or for means by which to return for the following season. Said it's a bad look optically for college athletics.**

LARRY SCOTT: We don't have a conference position on either one. On the last one there has been a lot of discussion about the four-game redshirt. Been a lot of discussion about the transfer portal. I think all these ideas have had the right and very positive rationale behind them, which is trying to provide more flexibility for student-athletes, trying to be supportive if student-athletes don't feel like they're in the right situation and fit.

When you introduce new rules like that, you don't always have a chance to anticipate all the consequences. I think some of the unintended consequences from that rule change, I know there's some coaches out there that are not thrilled with it, they want to revisit it.

Between now and the NCAA convention, we as a league are going to be sitting down and reviewing the specific proposals. We'll take an official position on those, but we don't have it yet.

**Q. The primary difference right now between Utah and Oregon is Oregon played and lost to Auburn. Is the system starting with the Management Committee, Selection Committee on down, set up to favor a little bit the teams that are not maybe playing as challenging a schedule because there's so much emphasis put on the number of losses?**

LARRY SCOTT: It's a question I'd say that myself and my peers still have. We have five years under our belt. Every year is a little bit different. I don't know that we have enough data points yet.

As a member of the Management Committee, the College Football Playoff, every year we sit down with the chair of the Selection Committee, Bill Hancock as the executive director, and we engage in this discussion, in addition to the value of a conference champion, some others.

Strength of schedule, the value of a conference champion, how unequivocally better a non-champion has to be to rise above a champion, these are part of the protocol that we've established for the Selection

Committee that get a lot of attention. Every year we sit down and discuss to make sure we're all comfortable with how the Selection Committee is calibrating those things.

I think it's hard to generalize. I would say the year Washington got into the Playoff, I know I felt that year that their strength of schedule helped them, the nine-game conference schedule, being a conference champion, beating Colorado in the game here, helped push them over the line.

There are other examples I could point to as evidenced by the fact there's never been a two-loss champion that ever got into the Playoff. That's also indicating that the one-loss issue is kind of a (indiscernible) issue.

A long way of saying I don't have a clear answer yet. I think we look at it year by year. It's a conversation we've had throughout this season in looking at Oregon compared to some other one-loss teams across the country that are ranked higher than they are, that may have played a weak non-conference schedule.

We've raised the question as to how seriously was Oregon punished for going and playing Auburn at a neutral site, first game of the year, without some of their star receivers, dominating most of the game then losing, on and on. It seems like they've been penalized pretty hard for that. It's something we'll have to evaluate.

Thank you very much. Enjoy the game.