



Team Selection Teleconference with Mike Nealy December 2, 2018



SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: Thank you very much. And good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the 2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl media teleconference. We have today the executive director of the Fiesta Bowl organization, Mr. Mike Nealy, who will join us in a few minutes, make an opening statement, then gladly answer any questions you have.

We're really excited about the game. UCF will be the home team in this game as eighth-ranked team in the CFP rankings, and LSU will be the visiting team at number 11.

The game is on January 1st this year. It will kick off at 11:00 a.m. Mountain Time at State Farm Stadium, which is home of the Arizona Cardinals and the Fiesta Bowl. We look forward to a great week.

This is the first time that LSU will have played in the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl in our -- this is our 48th game. And the first time the SEC Conference will have played in the Fiesta Bowl since 2000, when Tennessee was here.

UCF played in our game back in 2014 and had a high-scoring but really electrifying win here over Baylor. And, obviously, they are on a quite a run right now with 25 straight wins. And we all saw what happened yesterday, especially their second half performance in the American Athletic Conference championship game.

So I'm going to turn it over to our executive director, Mike Nealy, and then we'll gladly take questions. Mike, take it away.

MIKE NEALY: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for joining us today.

As we knew, we were going to get two exciting teams and we did. We're very excited to have LSU and Central Florida coming our way, first time, as was noted, for LSU. And we're no stranger to putting on great games here, championship games along the way, Heisman Trophy winners that have played here, the hospitality that we're known for. First time that we'll welcome LSU. Very excited about that.

And I think, as matchups could go, I think we scored with a great matchup and that's -- we're ready to roll. We've done this many times with this matchup. And we've made our calls to the athletic directors. So it's official! We're going to roll in with another Fiesta Bowl, and we're ready to go.

Q. Hey, if you could, kind of take us through the selection process of LSU being brought to the Fiesta Bowl and just kind of what led to that and what your thoughts are about them being in this game.

MIKE NEALY: Sure. Well, as you know, the Selection Committee is busy all year as they're preparing for and doing their weekly rankings. And as the day unfolded today, once they lined up the top four teams and we knew



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the slots there for the Playoffs, that's when the dominoes start falling and falling into place.

And so we knew at that point, with the teams that were available, that LSU, probably along with the Peach Bowl matchup teams, those are the four teams that were probably in play to come our way. So, as you know, with the matchup that's being determined by the committee, when we find out the UCF-LSU, that was a win. So we were excited about it.

We can note here we just recently announced an extension of our PlayStation local activation and with ESPN's extension of a great partner. So that was an exciting piece of news that we're rolling with as well. And having these teams here and the demand that that's going to cause, we're excited about having another big game here and doing what we do for the community and for the charitable aspect of our business.

So two great teams. It will be a great game and all of the things that come out of bowl business, and we're proud to have that.

Q. Hey, Mike, just curious what role did LSU having never played in the Fiesta before and just what you did hear from LSU in terms of "We can sell this many tickets; our fans would be excited to go," those kind of things? How did those things play into LSU ending up in your bowl game?

MIKE NEALY: I had the opportunity to see LSU play at A&M and got a chance to meet with the leadership there. I know they have great fans. I knew if they came here, they would bring a lot of fans.

But excited to know that LSU -- we know their fans are going to travel. We know UCF's fans are going to travel. So we were excited when that matchup was announced.

Q. I've been there before. Certainly you've got some of the best golf in the world. What are some things that fans can look forward to when they travel to Phoenix?

MIKE NEALY: Well, weather is going to be top of that list, of course. It is sun shining all the time. We have a lot of activities, outdoor activities, because we can. You named the golf, that's certainly up on the list. A lot of hiking availabilities and a lot of -- there's arts and the theaters and stuff. There is a phenomenal list of things that will keep you busy. And Scottsdale is a wonderful destination place along with the other locales around here.

Not too far off, certainly, we have the Grand Canyon, if you want to take a couple-hour trip. And if you want to catch some snow, you can catch some snow up North as well.

We love to be able to offer what this Valley has to offer. You're not going to get bored. The weather is going to take care of you to begin with. From there, you can decide what you want to do.



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Q. Hey, Mike. Just kind of going into the details of maybe some of the technical parts of this. At what point do teams kind of start practicing? And what are kind of the travel ways that they're getting there and just putting the logistics together for this?

MIKE NEALY: Yeah, it depends. There's some requirements as far as how many days, but each school does it a little bit differently. That you might want to defer to the schools themselves, but they're required to come in three days prior to the game.

And some practice before they get on the plane and come visit us. Some practice, they land and they go off and practice right away. We'll know more in a few days. That's really what -- my staff right now is very busy making contacts with the administrations of each of these schools. And they're getting plane tickets to come here this week and to learn the specifics. So I think Tuesday and Wednesday, depending on the school, they'll be visiting us.

Then later in the week and over the weekend, we'll be visiting their schools. So a lot of information crosses back and forth, and then decisions are made on the timing of when they come here. And then, of course, the coaches will decide the practice schedules.

Q. Hey, Mike. When LSU has gone to these bowl games in the past, they may go to an amusement park, a basketball game, go visit some hospitals, do kind of some charity appearances. What kind of things do you guys have scheduled? Or what can you share about what the student-athletes will be up to when they go to the bowl?

MIKE NEALY: Thanks for asking. I think that's an important part of the trip for a lot of schools that come here. We do have set up an outreach for each of the schools, and they'll be coming to a couple of local -- we try to make it easy for them. We have some charitable pieces come to them on practice, and there's a group here called Vet Tix and Positive Coaching Alliance is going to be involved. We have some local nonprofits that also have some national flavor to them. They like to get involved, and we like to get them involved in the community. We're a very big community-oriented organization. And it's great that all of these teams jump on board and want to be a part of that.

We're not going to overtax them, but we haven't come out and -- this particular year, we have some calls the day of play. So I'm thinking a little sports clinic that we'll do.

So it is a lot of fun for them, and they get to give back to the community, and it's a big part of them coming here. I know they have business on their minds as well, so we don't overtax them.

Q. If I can ask you a quick follow-up, have you spoken to LSU head coach, Ed Orgeron? And just what is your impressions of him as a head coach, in particular his energy and his personality?



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MIKE NEALY: No, I have not had the opportunity to do that but certainly that's a positive for having them come here and Coach O to be bringing his team here. We know there's going to be some excitement here.

I mentioned I was at their game against A&M. So I saw him in action there. I didn't want to bother him. I didn't get a chance to talk to him on that particular day. But I know they're going to bring an awesome team for us.

SCOTT LEIGHTMAN: I want to say thank you to everybody for joining us and for everything over the next few weeks. Please don't hesitate to reach out to our office. I also invite you to visit fiestabowl.org for more information about the organization and all we do on a year-round basis and leading up to the game.

So credential information is in the media room on our website, fiestabowl.org. And we'll gladly be in touch with everybody on the call. Thank you so much.