



**2019 PlayStation Fiesta Bowl  
Media Availability with Executive  
Director Mike Nealy and  
Chairman Steve Leach  
December 31, 2018**



**Q. How are the ticket sales, and how did each team do with the allotted tickets?**

**MIKE NEALY:** Both programs have a lot of fans, and so we're happy with the tickets that were consumed from the local schools. We got a few tickets back. But the great thing about that is that we know if that ever happens, we line up nonprofits throughout the Valley here. So those tickets will all get used. So we appreciate those few tickets that they did return to us. We were able to allocate to nonprofits and bring teachers, youth, and military into those seats.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk last month about potentially expanding the Playoff. If it happens, it may be years away. It would seem like bowls would always still be involved in some form or fashion in terms of how that's set up. Do you have any feeling as you've seen that talk kind of fester over the last few weeks about expanding to eight and maybe playing first round right after the season and still have traditional bowls later? What's your opinion as that's percolated for the last few weeks?**

**MIKE NEALY:** The expansion talk certainly is a hot topic, and it has gotten a lot of press probably because it is of interest. People like to talk about things that create emotion.

From a bowl standpoint, I have to say, I don't think it would be a good thing for bowls. So if you're asking my opinion, should we expand, absolutely not. I think as we stand right now, with a four-team Playoff, I think it has been working well. I think it continues to work well.

But for the bowls, I don't think that's a good thing. I said not a good thing, that's also saying the student-athletes -- there are a lot of bowls that would start diluting everything from the regular season to the bowls themselves. And then all of the bowls -- and hopefully not ever from the instruction of some of the bowl system because this is something that the student-athletes should be able to experience across the country, the experience they get, the traveling, as we talked about locally with the communities and the interaction.

And we have a business. Some of the teams are there to win the championship. But a lot of the teams are going to a bowl experience, and that experience is probably second to none for a lot of student-athletes. I would hate to see that diluted and/or go away.

**STEVE LEACH:** I agree completely. I think college football is where it's at today in part -- I'm not going to overstate how relevant the bowls are. But in part because I think bowls allowed teams from different regions to play together, to be focused on, it became a national sport.

Because you had an SEC team playing a Big 12, or Big 8 in the day, or you had the Rose Bowl every year, Pac-8/Pac-12, Big Ten, and you brought that national connection. And Mike [Nealy] is absolutely right. I think there is a possibility that by expanding it, you really do hurt this experience.

I talked to a young man, a gentleman from LSU, a player, yesterday. I said, "Had you been to Arizona before?" He said no and he pointed up and said, "I've never seen mountains before." That's a cool thing. He'll never



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forget that. This is where he saw mountains and saw a different part of the country. Grew up right on the town of Lake Pontchartrain.

Or you can have a very good year and a scenario where we expand and the first round plays early December at a campus. So let's say LSU is in that boat and has to go to Columbus, Ohio, and you lose. You're done. That's your experience. You get to go for three days to a place that's probably cold and rainy or snowy and that's it. And I think that takes away.

So when we talk about Playoffs or money, there's a lot of a humanistic component that we need to protect. And I trust the people that are involved in making those decisions are going to take that into account and are going to protect it.

**Q. Can you talk about the relationship with PlayStation and what they brought to the table?**

**MIKE NEALY:** They've been phenomenal, a great brand, and it certainly resonates with the student-athletes. If you didn't know, we do give them PlayStations as one of their gifts. It's very well received. And as you noticed here, when some of the players had some breaks, they were over at the PlayStation area there.

Both the brand and the individuals that we deal with at PlayStation, they've been phenomenal to work with, a great brand to have, we're very proud to have. And just recently extended a deal with ESPN. So very proud to have them on board and hopefully for a long term.

**STEVE LEACH:** They fit what we love. At Fiesta, we're supposed to have fun. They certainly add to it and the players enjoy it, and they've been just a wonderful organization to be associated with. We're really pleased with that and hope it continues for a long time.

**Q. Is it concerning when you see the trend the last two years of guys who may have an NFL opportunity foregoing the bowl experience? And how concerning is that to see because there are a few examples this game.**

**STEVE LEACH:** I think that's a personal decision. I certainly understand the factors that go into making that decision. It is not up to me to judge that. They've got a career ahead of them. They've got a life. They've certainly committed a lot of their time to college football. It's not up to me as a bowl rep to say "Oh, they're not playing in our game. How dare they." That's their decision, and that's their right.

We would love to have them all play. We would love to have the best teams on the field. But you know, that doesn't always happen. Sometimes somebody is injured and they're not playing. Obviously UCF doesn't have its starting quarterback available. But it is a personal decision.



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**MIKE NEALY:** The majority of those players, even some of the top players, are sticking with their team and understand the value of that. And as a bowl, certainly we prefer them to play but understanding, well-answered, it is a personal decision. We can't pretend to inflict what's best for an individual.

**Q. In the past, it seems like maybe some major bowl games didn't want to have that, quote-unquote, Group of Five (Power Five) team in their game. I'm wondering if UCF has helped change that perception.**

**STEVE LEACH:** I'm going to turn it around a little bit and make this a little plug for the Fiesta Bowl. I think we helped change that. If you look back in our history, one of the best bowl games ever was Boise State-Oklahoma. And then we had Boise State-TCU and then UCF-Baylor. We've never shied away from that. I think it's great.

And our local fans have supported it. They come out to the game. We get good ticket sales. For all of the reasons we've already discussed, it is different. So I think it's great, and they've always played well in our games, and I don't think this year's going to be any different.

**MIKE NEALY:** We've hosted Boise State here a couple of times, UCF now a second time. And UCF earned their way to this. It has been well-received.

**STEVE LEACH:** I can tell you that no one in our organization went, "Oh, darn. We hate UCF." I mean, I was lead team host for UCF the last time they were here and I loved it. Obviously different coaching -- few folks still around but not many. But they were a great organization then; they are a great organization now. Very classy, very professional in what they do. And we are really happy to have them.