



Team Announcement Teleconference

No. 8 USC vs. No. 5 Ohio State
Sunday, December 3, 2017

CHARLIE FISS: Good afternoon, everyone.

Those participating on today's teleconference are from the University of Southern California, Coach Clay Helton, and from the Ohio State University, head coach Urban Meyer. One quick matchup note. This marks the first trip to the Classic for only the second time in history. This will be the Buckeyes' first Cotton Bowl visit since the 1987 classic and only the second time ever as well.

Well, let's start with USC and Coach Helton. Congratulations to you and the Trojans for winning the Pac-12 conference championship. And I'll ask for your thoughts as you begin preparations for the Goodyear Cotton Bowl.

COACH HELTON: Thank you, guys. We're very excited and honored to have the opportunity to be a part of the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic. It's been an exciting year for our football team. I can't think of a better way to celebrate this season than to have a chance to be in the great City of Dallas and be a part of this historic bowl. What a great matchup it is. USC and Ohio State, two great programs coming together to compete. Congratulations to Coach Meyer and Ohio State on their Big Ten championship win. They've had a terrific season. Having a lot of West Coast evening games, we've had the chance to watch several of the games that they played in. And you can see how well coached and how talented they are.

Our players and our Trojan family are excited for this opportunity. And we look forward to being down there on December 29th.

CHARLIE FISS: All right. Coach, thank you.

Let's go to Coach Meyer. We'll extend our congratulations to you and the Buckeyes for winning the Big Ten championship and ask for your thoughts as you and your staff begin putting the wheels in motion to head to North Texas.

COACH MEYER: We're excited when we found out a couple hours ago that we were heading to Dallas. We had a great experience a couple years ago for the national championship game. I was actually on Ohio State staff in 1987 when we played Texas A&M in the Cotton Bowl. It's a great city. And we also look forward to playing USC, a tradition-rich program and an excellent coach in Clay Helton. And I do agree with you that this will be one of the great matchups in the bowl season, and we are honored to represent the Big Ten Conference. Let's turn back to our operator who will poll the media for questions for the next 15 minutes.



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Q. Hi, Clay, this is for you. You know, I was just wondering, as you look at the 14 playoff fields, what you felt maybe it was about your resume that your team was further away from consideration than other conference champions and two-off teams.

COACH HELTON: I think all the teams that were in that final ten that you look at are terrific football teams. I think the committee had a very hard decision-making process. We're proud of the resume that we put together with our strength of schedule, being a conference champion, finishing an extremely strong season in November, winning five straight conference games, as well as a conference championship game against a good Stanford football team. You put your best resume out there, and then the committee chooses who they're going to select in those spots. It's a hard job for them. It's our job as coaches and as a football team to try to produce the best resume and see where it falls.

Q. A generation ago, Ohio State playing USC in the Rose Bowl would have been the highlight of the season. Obviously, there's some disappointment with not getting in the College Football Playoff. For you, how special is this matchup?

COACH HELTON: It's extremely special for our team as well as our fan base. This is a classic matchup between two legendary programs. And to have the opportunity to compete against an Ohio State, to have the opportunity to be on the same field as a Coach Meyer, it's one of those things you dream about when you grow up and you're a young football coach. And to be here at USC to be coming to an historic bowl like the Cotton Bowl and playing an Ohio State, you can't help but being excited. So we look forward to being down there on the 29th, and it should be a great show.

Q. What are your impressions of Ohio State?

COACH HELTON: What jumps off the page is just how well balanced they are, both offensively and defensively. It should be a great matchup. I'm a quarterback coach by trade, so I'm a huge fan of J.T. Barrett. And that matchup between J.T. and Sam [Darnold] is going to be something that's really fun to watch. But you look at not only one of the top ten offenses in the country, but they also have one of the top ten defenses. They're just a very well-coached football team across the board. And that running game right now with J.K. [Dobbins] and Mike, healthy Mike Weber, that balance between the passing game and run game is something that sticks out. Very, very exciting football team that we've watched this year.

Q. Clay, when you guys woke up this morning and then were looking at the selection committee rankings, were you expecting to be closer to the playoff? Were you kind of surprised you were eight? Or did you kind of think you'd probably end up in one of the other bowl games? What were your expectations this morning?



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COACH HELTON: You knew you were going to be excited because you were going to be part of the January six bowls. Again, like I said, you try to put your best foot forward, your best resume forward, and see where it falls with the committee.

I think when you're putting a resume together from a strength of schedule, playing nine conference games and having the ability to play a Notre Dame and a Texas, to be able to win a conference championship, to have a great finish in November, you've put together a really solid resume and one that should be considered. And I believe that was. We ended up in the final eight teams in the country as far as the ranking.

And the committee had a hard job. They had several good football teams this year that were vying for those spots. We're proud of our resume and proud of where we sit today.

Q. Clay, you mentioned that kind of a lot of the things that you were impressed of with Ohio State. Are they a team that you watch often over the course of a season?

COACH HELTON: Yeah. You know, like I said before, typically we played a lot of evening games on the West Coast here at USC. So you get to watch football, basically, all day on Saturday. And Ohio State is one of those teams that you turn on each and every time you get the opportunity. And just have been blown away by their football team, how they produced wins, but really how they finish games, too.

Even that game last night, I thought they did a terrific job of how they performed in the fourth quarter. They were a very fun team to watch this year. It was neat to follow them as we went through the season.

Q. As you've been in your first couple seasons as a head coach at USC and you look at someone like Urban Meyer, are there things you see that he does as a coach that you've tried to model after yourself?

COACH HELTON: Yeah. I mean, the guy is a legend. As a young coach growing up, I think all of us tried to model ourselves after Coach Meyer. Wherever he's been, he's had success. And one thing that I think I've really taken away from Coach Meyer is how he builds relationships with his players. That's evident when you see him around his guys. And I think that's a big part of college football today. It's something that I've tried to emulate with our players. You can see that that's something he's had a long time, whether he was at Utah, Florida, now Ohio State, he finds ways to capture his players and make them play at the highest level.



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Q. Yes. This for both of the coaches. Obviously, there's a great deal of history between these two schools. I was wondering if both of you could reflect on the first time you saw a USC/Ohio State game. What stood out?

COACH MEYER: Well, I'll go ahead and answer that first. I remember back in 1979 when Earle Bruce took over for Woody Hayes and they had a chance to win the national championship. And I remember the tailback was, I believe, Charles White, and it was a one-point game. And I remember watching that. I grew up an Ohio State fan, so I've always had great respect for the Rose Bowl and these two teams playing against each other.

And when I was at Notre Dame, I had the opportunity to coach every year against USC. I love that stadium. I love the tradition, and it has always been one of my favorite places, just when you hear the fight song and et cetera. So just a lot of respect for USC and, obviously, this game.

COACH HELTON: Definitely. For me, those classic Rose Bowl matchups of an elite Big Ten team coming together with an elite Pac-12 team coming together, I think that's what makes this game so exciting, is to have these two great universities coming together to compete. It's going to be a lot of fun. And both teams hold great tradition, and I know both fan bases are excited to get back together again.

Q. Clay, you talked about, because of the night games and the way the schedule works, you get to see Ohio State play a lot.

Do you think with finishing eighth today and you talked about your resume, which, you know, really is a good resume, is there something that the Pac-12 maybe needs to do to deal with maybe other people getting to see your resume the way you see it? Are there some things -- maybe not playing as many night games, things like that.

COACH HELTON: As I've said before, we're in a television-driven market, and you don't worry about things that you can't control. TV is one of them. We know that we're going to have to play some Thursday, Friday, Saturday night ball games. And it's our jobs, as coaches and as a team, to go out and win those games.

How do we take the next step forward is to eliminate probably two losses and, again, be conference champions and try to increase that resume profile the best we can. And we produced a good one this year. It wasn't quite good enough, but we did take a huge step forward.

And we'll just continue trying to become a better program and a better team. I think the more times you win and the more opportunities that you put yourself out there, you're going to create that resume that hopefully gets you in.



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Q. For Coach Meyer, do you get to see USC play the late-night games the way they get to see you play when they're waiting for their game?

COACH MEYER: I'm a lot like Clay that if I have that opportunity, I do. We played a lot night games ourselves, so we were getting home late. And so I have not seen a bunch of USC games. But just because of the one thing is after about 10:30, it's hard for me to stay awake any more. But when they're on, I love to watch them.

Q. Urban, what's it like at age 53 to be called a legend by a fellow head coach?

COACH MEYER: Why did I know you were going to ask that question? Just means I've been around for a while. And Clay and I actually -- Coach Helton and I actually get to know each other on the Nike trip. And he has a wonderful wife and seems like a great person. So I look forward to competing against him but also have great respect for him as a coach.

Q. I want to ask you, obviously, you guys are two legendary traditional-rich places. With Coach Helton, what stands out about him in your mind about the job he's done there? Obviously, they had tough times earlier and they have kind of rebounded from that.

COACH MEYER: Well, I don't know how much tough times. They won the Rose Bowl last year. They won the Pac-12 again this year. So when I hear that, I'm not quite sure what you're talking about.

Q. I mean what happened after there in the mid 2000s when they had some problems and they've rebuilt themselves. Yeah, him, personally, what just stands out about the job he does?

COACH MEYER: Well, he wins games and wins conference titles. I respect people who have a job to do and they do it very well. And that's my opinion of Coach Helton.

Q. My question for each coach, I guess the same one, first Clay and then Urban. You know, y'all were obviously candidates for that Number 4 spot. How do you go about the next day preparing your guys for kind of the chaos that unfolds on Sunday? And how do you get them excited for a game that might not be a semifinal game?

COACH HELTON: Well, I think the first thing that sticks out to me is the quality of opponent that you're going to get to face. And being -- having a chance to go to a great city like Dallas, Texas, and be part of an historic bowl like the Cotton Bowl. That's not too hard to get fired up for. It's USC versus Ohio State. That alone is going to excite your football team.



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These are two programs that got a lot of pride and want to do well for their fan bases. And to have that opportunity to compete against a great football team, a Big Ten championship football team, I don't know how much more exciting you can get than that.

COACH MEYER: I've not had a chance to visit. I sent out a group text. We got in real late last night, and I'm going to be on the road recruiting. But I saw a couple of guys, and there will be zero issue. This is a team that we live by a brotherhood that they love each other, they care for each other, and they're going to go play their best.

So was there disappointment? I'm sure there was. We had a conversation in the locker room after the game last night. We had a job to do; we did it. Now we have the chance to go to -- we have great memories of going down to Dallas, Texas. I still have many guys on our team that was down there before we played. The minute you say the University of Southern Cal, that gets attention. Everyone knows they're the champions of their conference. One thing about our players, they're excited to represent each other and Ohio State. That's all you can ask from a team.

Q. Having a chance to see Ohio State play, have you played a team that has an offense like they have, or what is it about the team from Ohio State?

COACH HELTON: The balance jumps out at you right at first. You know, you're talking about J.T. Barrett, who's thrown 35 touchdowns on the year, but then you combine it with the 1300-yard rusher in J.K. Dobbins, as well as a tremendous runner in Mike Weber. So that balance on offense that's produced 500+ yards a game is something that sticks out. They're very, very hard to defend, one, they can throw the ball down the field, but, two, they have a very good running game that not only includes the running backs but also includes J.T., who's rushed for 700 plus yards. So it's a group that makes you defend every inch of the grass, of the field, and has fabulous athletes across the board.