



Head Coaches News Conference

USC Coach Clay Helton
Ohio State Coach Urban Meyer

Thursday, December 28, 2017
Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, Texas

COACH HELTON: What a great week it's been for our football team. We heard so many great stories about the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic, all of them are true. I'm going to tell you what. From an unbelievable first-class group of people to the events our team has been able to do this week, you don't got to come to the Cotton Bowl Classic. You get to! We've been absolutely blown away as a team this week. It's been a great week of preparation for our guys to have the ability to be in AT&T Stadium for three days and get some really good work in the venue that you're going to get to play in. That doesn't happen too often.

So a wonderful week. Could not be any better for our players and our coaches. And we look forward to playing a great Ohio State football team this Friday night.

COACH MEYER: I'd also like to thank the Goodyear Cotton Bowl for their hospitality and the great city of Dallas.

The two groups I really want to thank are the players. We're two conference champions playing against each other, and I don't think that should ever be lost in the conversation piece of what college football is really all about. So I know Coach Helton feels the same about his squad. They won the Pac-12 championship.

And the Ohio State Buckeyes went and won the most difficult conference and division in college football. So thanks to everybody. But, really, special thanks to our players that got us here to play in this great game against a great team. Two traditionally very strong programs that I'm sure the country is going to look forward to watching this game. So thank you.

Q. You talked about two conference champions, the tradition. And everyone remembers Ohio State and USC, those great games at the Rose Bowl when you're both conference champions. Now you're at the Cotton Bowl. What does that say? The tradition lives on just in a different location?

COACH MEYER: It sure does. This is what the fans and really America wanted the playoff and I think it's great. We've been in the playoff twice, and it makes every game count obviously.

And I have never been to the Rose Bowl. That's the one bowl game I've never been to. So hopefully get there some day.

But this is a great bowl game. Traditionally it's been -- I was here in 1987 when Ohio State played Texas A&M. And then we were here for the College Football Playoff championship a couple years ago.

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I think it's what the fans want. The fans wanted to have a playoff, and it's worked out great. The great thing about this is you're going to see the Pac-12 champion against Big Ten champion on a great venue. And that's what college -- that's why college football is so strong right now.

Q. Urban, you've set a very high standard since you've been at Ohio State. Would a third loss, which you haven't suffered in a while, at all tarnish this season?

COACH MEYER: Sure, it would. I think our job is to go win the conference championship and go win a bowl game. I'm not sure "tarnish" is the right word. I would be disappointed and move on to next year. I think as I get older and more experienced, we're going to move forward; we don't look back. So we're going to do all we can to go win this game.

Q. Coach Helton, if you would, just talk about the Ohio State team that you're playing, some of the things you've seen and your observations about what has made them such a good team.

COACH HELTON: Without question, the most complete team we faced. Extremely well-coached on both sides of the football.

I look at it defensively, and the number of opportunities you get are few because they're able to get off the field, only giving up about 290 yards a game, 19 points.

And the depth is what stands out to you, especially on the defensive front. To be able to have a guy coming off the bench basically as a pass rusher in [Nick] Bosa and leading your team in sacks is beyond impressive.

Offensively, so many weapons across the field. It starts with the quarterback. Being a quarterback coach by trade, I'm just so impressed with J.T. [Barrett]. His experience, his leadership, his dynamics and charisma on the field are just evident. And to be a guy that that can rush for 700 yards and still beat a 3,000-yard passer, that's pretty darn special. And then you've got to try to stop J.K. [Dobbins] and Mike [Weber] along with that, with about six receivers who are as good as anybody in the country. A very complete football team, a very well-coached football team. We'll have our hands full Friday night.

Q. Urban, kind of following up on that, I know you said a lot about J.T. [Barrett]. In a short, succinct way, now that he's back in his home state playing his 50th and final game, what would you like to see, what would you like to say about him?

COACH MEYER: J.T., as we got ready to play the Big Ten championship, he in 2014 was injured and wasn't able to hoist the trophy in Indianapolis. That's when Cardale Jones took over.

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The following two years we went to the playoff but weren't able to win a championship. So J.T. wasn't able to do that. I still think at the end of the day, quarterbacks are all measured -- I think yards are great and et cetera, but how you really are measured as a quarterback is how many championships you won. So I really wanted to see him get that championship.

And then to now be an opportunity to win the Cotton Bowl championship. So J.T. has done it all for us. Now it's an opportunity to close out his career in his home state and say he's a Cotton Bowl champion.

Q. Clay, can you talk how Sam Darnold has developed over these past three years.

COACH HELTON: Yeah. I think any time that you're in the realm of being a quarterback in Los Angeles, California, in that type of media market, being watched on a daily basis, and you handle it with the class and character that that young man has, I think, is beyond impressive. Not only has he grown and matured as a quarterback but to see his maturity as a person is just evident.

And I'm in agreement with Coach [Urban] Meyer as far as quarterbacks are back there and they're all measured by winning football games. And not only J.T. [Barrett] but Sam [Darnold], both these two kids, when they go out there, they're just winners. They find ways to win for their team. And every time that Sam's had that opportunity when it's been the bright lights on the brightest stage, he's accomplished it. So he's one of those guys when you go through your career, you only get a few opportunities to coach a guy like that. We've been blessed to be able to coach Sam Darnold.

Q. Urban, there's been some reports that you may have found a tenth assistant coach to hire early next month. I don't know if there's anything official on your end. But what is that position going to do for your program? What's the value of adding one more staff member? And is there a plan in place for the next couple weeks?

COACH MEYER: Not really. There's been some conversation. There's nothing been finalized. Like most college coaches, we're trying to figure out how this is going to work. And I just want to do right by Ohio State.

And we usually have transition. I think we're going to escape that this year. But I'm like most other coaches that right now are just trying to put that the puzzle together and do the very best for our university and our program. So I've got some ideas, but there's nothing been finalized. And we'll certainly wait until after the bowl game.

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Q. Urban, how much time have you been able to spend on evaluating Dwayne Haskins, Jr., Joe Burrow, and Tate Martell this pre-season? Because obviously in the spring it's going to be a huge battle.

COACH MEYER: Sure is, every day. And excited to watch them go. I really respect all three players, and that's the kind of depth that you need. We saw what happened several years ago when some third-string quarterback jumped in there and did pretty good for those final three games. So they all have somewhat different skill sets, which is a little bit of a challenge for us. But it's also a lot of fun to go coach those guys.

And they've been outstanding the last few weeks because we've been giving a lot of reps, too. I usually keep the young guys afterwards. Let the old guys go in and keep the young guys out and we practice some extra reps during bowl practice. We always have. You realize how good those three guys could possibly be.

Q. Along the same lines, a lot of this bowl preparation has been about looking for younger players. You're going to have a lot of turnover next year. Who are the young guys that have kind of caught your eye, that developed during this bowl prep?

COACH MEYER: I've never looked at it. Bowl preparation is about going to win a game. I hear people say, "It's all about developing young players." That's not what we do. I'll keep some guys afterwards and work with them.

But bowl preparation is about going to play a team that if you're not ready, they'll beat you and beat you bad. So I want to make sure that -- bowl preparation at Ohio State is about doing everything you possibly can to go win that game.

Now, afterwards we work with some young guys. But that's not what bowl practice is. I hear coaches say that sometimes, and I disagree with that. This is a game. This is an opportunity to go win a game against two conference champions.

So I just always try to stop that when I hear that, "bowl preparation is about development of young players." Not necessarily. We're going to try to go win a game. If we develop young guys along the road, that's our job. That's part of it.

Q. Coach Helton, we see the sack numbers about your defense. if you would, talk about what makes your defense so special.

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COACH HELTON: I think one, we're very fortunate to have Clancy Pendergast as as our defensive coordinator and what he brings to the table on a weekly basis. He's done a great job of fitting our personnel within his system. And to take young men like Uchenna Nwosu and Rasheem Green, it's not just one specific guy. It's a host of five, six guys. Somebody shows up different each and every week.

I think our kids truly believe in the system. They approach each game with a sense of enthusiasm because they know it's ultra aggressive, and that's Clancy's personality. But it's a bunch that has really bought in together, worked together, compete together, and celebrate together. I've never seen a bunch that's so happy for the other guy when he makes a play. And they kind of feed off each other.

They had a huge challenge coming into this year. They wanted to make a statement because numbers were down a little bit a year ago. They really took it to heart. And credit them and credit their coaches. I think they've done a wonderful job this year.

Q. For Clay, have you got any clarity with Porter [Gustin] and Jack Jones going into this game? Seems like Porter hasn't been able to do much.

COACH HELTON: I don't think Porter is going to be able to go in this game. And Jack is battling an ankle right now. It's day-to-day. He's got limited work this week. We'll see again today and then tomorrow in warmups. I think it will be more of a game-time decision.

Q. Coach Meyer, you've had a great career and you've seen a lot of quarterbacks. Who does Sam Darnold most remind you of? And what is the greatest challenge for your defense in dealing with him?

COACH MEYER: I see a streaky player, and I say that with a lot of respect. Once he gets on, that's the job of the defense not let him get on. The best pass defense is a pass rush. But I see a winner. I see a young man that's going to go down as one of the winningest quarterbacks in USC history and a guy that's got a great release, great size, and enough athleticism to make you pay if you're not secure in all the gaps. So excellent football player.

And the guy that -- I know we're talking about Sam. But their tailback now, we haven't heard as much about him. And I started watching him on videotape and it's hard to say he's not as good. We faced [Saaquon] Barkley at Penn State, who is terrific. Will be a top-ten pick. This guy is outstanding, Ron Jones, outstanding player.

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Q. Urban, you spoke about the last few weeks, the most important thing has been preparing for this bowl game, not developing new, younger players. But you've also had to juggle the recruiting game in the last few weeks with this new early signing period. How hard has that been to juggle recruiting and preparing for the bowl game at the same time? And if you could, elaborate on your thoughts of the new early signing period.

COACH MEYER: Sure. I'm not sure "awful" is the right word because we turned out okay. But it was -- that was a lot of -- I never worked like that in December. Normally you're recruiting getting things ready for January. You have a couple official visits and you move on. And it was every night in that plane somewhere, and you're trying to squeeze in those official visits.

We did very good. I'm very pleased with who we got for the majority. Other than a couple, we're exactly where we needed to be.

Now what's going to be intriguing is what happens afterwards. We're still having those conversations: What do you do in the month of January? I imagine it's going to be mostly junior recruiting. And I imagine most teams have two or three -- I think we have maybe two spots left; that's it.

But it was very difficult and more difficult on our coaches than me because you know -- and our players. We have a very mature team. There's been a couple practices we've only got five or six guys there and trying to schedule that.

So at first I was very much opposed to it. I think it remains to be seen. I think we did very well. So we'll see what happens down the road.

Q. Clay, I had a question about both of these two programs have players that are talented enough to consider the NFL after three years. But now with the signing period in December, how do you plan a roster when you don't know who's staying or going since the deadline is in January?

COACH HELTON: It's a little bit of a guessing game, and your numbers are built on that. I think one of the things that happens especially at a place like USC and Ohio State is you're competing for the best players across the country. And some of those players aren't going to make their decision until February. That's what we've seen.

So you have to do a great job of not worrying about filling out numbers and saying, hey, the midterm signing date, let's go sign all 25 guys. You better get the best players for you and your

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group.

I thought when you look back at what we were able to accomplish this past signing period, very happy with it because we were able to get the guys who we felt, one, fit our systems but extremely talented individuals but still leaving ourselves numbers to be able to go compete for the best of the best come February. And those guys are still out there and still on our radar and battles that we need to win.

It is a little bit of a juggling act, a little bit of a guessing game. But for the first time through, I was extremely pleased with how it went for our football club.

Q. Urban, great quarterbacks are hard for everybody to defend. But when you see Deshaun Watson in the bowl game last year, Baker Mayfield this year, are there any lessons learned about they're going to make plays but is there anything better you guys can do, your defense can do, to try to handle the elite, elite quarterbacks like this?

COACH MEYER: Certainly there is. Early in the season we were very young in the back end of our defense and they were much improved. If you remember Indiana, the first half of that game, too, was a mess. You had to replace three starters in the back end of our defense. They really improved and played much better as the season went along.

To answer your question, are there things we can do better? Of course there is. The best pass defense to always keep in mind is somehow getting your hands on that quarterback and disrupt it. Sam [Darnold], if you give him time, with the receivers they have, you won't stop him. That's not going to happen and you can't design a coverage that's going to take away these excellent receivers and a top-two pick in the NFL draft.

It's the ability to disrupt the quarterback, make him reset his feet, make him move, get a hand on him. That's going to be key to this game and any time you face a very good quarterback. In those games we weren't able to do that.

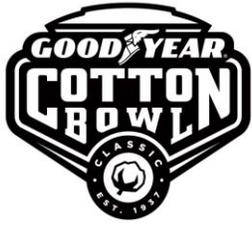
Q. I want to touch on the tradition of family you guys have at USC and particularly for you as you look at your upper classmen who have helped really elevate the program back to its prestigious level. Rose Bowl victory last year, that was fantastic. Conference championship. You're here today against Ohio State. What do those guys mean to you? And what are you hearing this week as you're here at the Cotton Bowl?

COACH HELTON: That's probably what I'm most proud of our first two years here at USC. Having been at USC for eight years, I was always blown away by the Trojan family and what

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that meant. It is a true family. The kids make fun of me. I must say "brotherhood" a thousand times a week but it is. It's about playing for your brother.

I think when you play for your family, you're preaching unselfishness and you're preaching, Hey, the team's success is more important than individual success. That individual success is just a by-product of what we accomplish as a team.

So the word "family" is used over and over and over again. And I think that's where our biggest change has been on our football team, is not worrying about us as an individual but worrying about us as an entire group and playing for each other. That's what I'm most proud of.

This last game is going to be special. There's a lot of guys I've been with now some five, six years. To see them play their last game in this venue against a great Ohio State football team, there's a lot of emotions that go with that.

Q. As Urban Meyer refers to the second uncles who get involved sometimes, at this point of time in the year with players you might decide to be leaving and stuff, are both of your teams going to be full 100% attendance as far as playing, the guys who might be leaving, et cetera? And are you surprised by that?

COACH MEYER: I want to clarify it's "third uncle" is the term I use quite often. Those are people who shouldn't have any conversation with anything because they don't know.

So I just wanted to clarify that. (Laughter)

Yeah, we anticipate we'll be full -- ready to go play and everybody's playing.

COACH HELTON: Yeah. I've always thought that it's so special to have the opportunity to play with your brothers one last time. I think each case is in its own individual nature.

But I'm so thankful in this realm of having made decisions whether to play or not play, we're going into the second year of this and being able to say, "You know what? Every guy that has the ability to play is going to be out there playing." This is a big game for both universities and both fan bases. We know how special it is as a team. And I know our kids are really, really excited to be out there. So, yes, they'll be out there.

Q. I was just wondering, you played for your father back in Houston and you saw his style and influence of coaching. Does that direct your style of coaching and your approach to this game?

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COACH HELTON: I learned everything from my dad. My dad is my hero, my mentor, and I still call him three times a week. I think any gentleman or any coach that's had over 40 years of experience both at NFL and college level and has that much love and compassion for you, you listen to. And he's a guy that -- as a matter of fact, he's flying in today. I can't wait to give him a big hug.

But he's had a lot to do with -- he's taught me how to be a husband, how to be a father and how to raise kids in the college game. So very, very thankful and blessed to have him in my life. Thank you for that question.

Q. Urban, this is the last game for any of the guys from the 2013 recruiting class that you had. So many of them are already in the NFL, having success. And then guys like J.T. [Barrett] and Billy Price. Just as you think about that group that you and your staff were able to bring in at that time, how -- what have they done overall? We've asked you about it a million times over the years. But that 2013 class, in the end, how would you describe what they did for Ohio State football?

COACH MEYER: Good question. I remember the introductory press conference talking about my home state and making the great state of Ohio proud in everything we do on and off the field. They have. They haven't been perfect, but they've been pretty close. And they've won a lot of football games. They've done it the right way. You don't hear about any issues we have to deal with off the field.

The graduation rate is going to be 100. Every one of those players is going to graduate. Something we started several years ago. The real-life Wednesday program, every one of them with job opportunities waiting for them.

I can't imagine -- I remember talking to Kirk Herbstreit and Chris Spielman many, many times throughout that fall when I was with ESPN. Not being disrespectful of any other universities, but Ohio State is a very proud program that you're expected to represent the university the right way. And I think that group in particular have, and I want to make sure they'll never be forgotten because I know I'll never forget them.

Q. If I could follow up quickly about one of the guys in that group. Eli Apple has had some issues in the NFL the past couple weeks. What is your take on that, knowing Eli like you do?

COACH MEYER: Eli was fantastic for us, zero issues. I don't really know. I know he came back to see us, and we chatted for a little bit. As soon as this game is over, I'm going to try to get in the middle of that one and find out because of our love we have for Eli. I know our players

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have talked to him a little bit.

It's unfair for me to comment on the situation. But you guys covered Eli for three years, and Eli was fantastic for us, a team player and always put team before self and became one of the best corners in college football.

Q. Urban, it seems that Larry Johnson felt like he needed to address his future, put out that he wasn't going to be retiring, or sticking around. Did you have concerns that that wasn't going to be the case with him? I'm sure that you're obviously happy to have him back given what he's provided that unit the last couple years.

COACH MEYER: Larry is fantastic. And when a coach talks -- when schools go talk about your staff or other things, I don't understand that. That's something we don't do. We have plenty to sell. I didn't even know when that was going on because I don't get involved in that.

But when he came to me and said, "I need to do this" or because some school is using this against me, first of all, I'm, like, Really? So they all now know your career plans.

I'd love to be that parent because if my kids were recruited where someone comes in my home and starts talking about Clay Helton, I'm like, "What are you talking about? You don't know the man." I felt like I was not involved in that when Larry said that. Sure, go ahead, Larry, and do what you got to do. We support you 100%.

Q. For Coach Meyer, as I understand it, 11 of your 22 starters for this game have their degrees in hand. How rare is that to be with a group that has accomplished that? And what does that mean for them to go on to whatever their next step is and have that degree in hand?

COACH MEYER: There's a softball question! Make sure we give him the microphone. (Laughter)

I don't imagine it will be on everybody's blog. You know, it's amazing. We had nine juniors leave for the NFL draft two years ago, six last year, and then the guys you just mentioned, the fifth-year guys. Billy Price is going to leave with a master's degree. Some guys have already got progress towards a master's degree.

And that's what goes back to the same question about the 2013 group. It's a very strong, healthy program because we recruited the right kind of guys. And no one is ever claiming to be perfect or we would have never lost a game. But I think when you look at this era of what those kids did for Ohio State, for the great state of Ohio, for their families, and for college football, it's going to

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be very positive memories for what those kids have done.

And more than just great players but who they are. And I can't wait to get around them. It's one of those deals -- listening to Clay talk about his program is -- there's times in our careers that you are not excited about getting to work. And there's other times where you just go as fast as you can to get there and see your players. That's this kind of group.

Q. You talked in the past Urban about trying to get in touch with Ezekiel Elliott and some of the issues he had. Over the summer, being here in Dallas, have you had a chance to be in touch with him or do you anticipate that at all?

COACH MEYER: I texted him and then also I anticipate he's going to be with us for the game.

Q. Urban, you guys have spent a lot of time recruiting Southern California. USC has been recruiting in Ohio the past few years. How often do you bump into USC, and how tough has it been day-to-day in the recruiting process trying to out-recruit against USC?

COACH MEYER: Not very often. I think we have our home turf and our footprint and same with USC. We'll go out there and cherry pick like USC does. And if we believe you're a first-round draft pick or an elite, elite player that has some type of tie -- Marcus Ball had a lot of ties to Ohio with his aunt who lived there in Columbus.

Wyatt Davis is a young man who came to play for us and is going to have a great career for us, we anticipate, that just had some ties that he always followed Ohio State. It has to be a unique situation to travel that far. To say we blanket the state of California, we don't do that.

Q. Clay, you spent a lot of time the last few years in Cleveland and Cincinnati. Given the way Ohio State has had a pretty solid track record of keeping their best players at home, why did you feel it was worth your time or worth USC's time to go up and recruit Ohio the way you guys have?

COACH HELTON: We have the same philosophy as Coach [Urban] Meyer. To be able to leave the west coast, one, it has to be a first-round draft pick talent that we feel that good. And, two, there has to be some type of fit that we feel we can drag a young man thousands of miles away.

When we look at it geographically and where we recruit, our studies have shown there's 125 Power 5 players signed a year in Southern California. We're either going to sign those young

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men or we are going to be playing against them in our conference.

So when you look at our breakdown on a typical year of signing 25 men, anywhere from 20 to 22 are going to be West Coast.

And then you have guys coming from other areas. Leonard Williams coming from Daytona Beach, Florida. Maybe a Nelson Agholor coming from Tampa, Florida. There was just the right fit. There was something about USC that fit them to make them come that far away.

We don't branch out a ton outside. But there are the times that you look up and Ronald Jones always wanted to be at USC his whole life. You develop that relationship. It's a terrific fit. And all of a sudden you get a young man from McKinney, Texas, to come out to California. So when you have those opportunities, you take them. But you have to be able to defend your area, your geographical area first.

Q. Urban, leadership among the players is such a big part of your program. You losing obviously the '13 class, a lot of the '14 class. How do you feel about next year's group of leaders? Who do you think they'll be? And how much of an issue is that?

COACH MEYER: I feel pretty good. That remains to be seen. The group of players and leaders we've had, they haven't had to lead very much. It's anxious to see. I still don't know who exactly is going to be coming back. There's a group I hope comes back because as good a player they are, they're even better people and leaders. I can't tell you that now. But January and February there will be good conversations about that.

Q. Circling back to where we started and Coach [Urban] Meyer's answer, does it seem strange to you that USC and Ohio State are playing again now in the Cotton Bowl and certainly not going to be three yards and a cloud of dust this time?

COACH HELTON: These are two very high-powered offenses. You look at Ohio State's offense, that's over 500 yards, 42 points a game. Weapons across the field. This is going to be an electric football game.

And it is one of those great games that I think that are out there that people are going to be watching from not only the two universities and the football teams. But I think about everything about this game, even our bands. You think about the tradition of how great these two bands are coming together, this is just a classic, classic matchup on every level.

And I think it's great for college football for this to be able to happen and to happen right here in

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Dallas, Texas, at the Cotton Bowl. How fun is that, to be able to say hey you got to compete against Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl. It's a special thing for our university.

Q. Urban you mentioned the three quarterbacks coming back next year for you guys have different styles in Tate [Martell] and Joe [Burrow]. I was just wondering, how tough is it to have a quarterback competition when you have three guys with different skill sets? How much does your offense change? If you're a pass-first guy or dual threat, if you see what I'm saying, is it going to be tough to have a quarterback competition and move forward in your program when you have guys with three, what seem to be, very different skill sets?

COACH MEYER: Yeah, I think there's an appropriate time to talk about that. The day before the Cotton Bowl is not one because I'm not -- I would not give it justice because I'm not thinking about that. So I think in the spring we'll have great conversations about that. And I've always believed that you fit your offense around your personnel. When I hear a coach say he just doesn't fit our scheme, change your scheme. We'll be fine whoever is the quarterback, and we'll adjust to that person. To go through each quarterback right now, I'm not prepared to do that.

Q. For Clay, you guys talked this season about how winning a conference title hasn't happened in nine years was important. So how important is winning this game in terms of making sure there's no sour kind of taste at the end of the season or having people forget about that just because it's a long off-season?

COACH HELTON: Well, I think you approach every game like we have, and we try to go 1-0 every week. And here's our opportunity to try to accomplish a 12th victory. That's special. A 12th win has only happened four times in 125 years for USC football.

So to be able to have that opportunity against a great Ohio State football team, it's a very important game for us. It's the next game and it happens to be our last as a football family. So it is our Super Bowl. It is our opportunity to go out and put our best foot forward.

We saw what being able to win a January Six bowl game -- excuse me, a January Six bowl game last year did for us, winning the Rose Bowl and how that momentum carried over into the off-season as well as recruiting. So you do go out there with every intention to put your best foot forward.

I've loved our preparation over the last two and a half weeks for this game. And hopefully we do, hopefully Friday night we put our best foot forward and hopefully accomplish our goal

Q. For both coaches, we get politically correct answers I think when this question is

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Head Coaches News Conference

USC Coach Clay Helton
Ohio State Coach Urban Meyer

Thursday, December 28, 2017
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presented, but I would really appreciate your take on it. When you see a matchup like we have here, these are winning teams. These are championship teams. You go to most state playoffs and high school. You see the champions go on to the playoffs. It's a natural process with some at-large teams added in.

But how do you feel -- do you feel like this game is evidence that while a four-team playoff is better than maybe the past situations, that when you see a game like this, two teams that really take the whole country -- you've got West Coast looking you've got the Midwest looking, does part of you say, "Maybe an eight-team playoff is something we should consider?"

COACH HELTON: Go ahead, Coach. (Laughter).

COACH MEYER: I just have been a part of those conversations. And we were in the playoff, and I just -- I think the thing to always keep in mind is there's really one group who really counts and that's the players. You start extending this thing and you start to talk about adding one more game and it's not just another game. It's two sledgehammers going at each other.

So I don't know. I don't see where that calendar would work. We're on the outside looking in twice. We're in the playoff twice, and twice we're right on the edge of not being in it. And I think if they extended the playoff -- but I don't see it happening. But, once again, no one has ever really -- you're the first guy to really ask my opinion.

I don't know. I don't see it. I think it's very strong right now. And a lot of televised sports are kind of going down in certain areas. College football is just hitting on all cylinders right now, so I don't know how much I'd change.

COACH HELTON: The playoff system has been great for our game. You see the excitement that it's created over the last couple years. And as a head coach, you really don't worry about things that you can't control. Right now we're a four-team playoff system. And you're talking about two teams that were in that controversy and in that discussion right down to the end and have the ability to have this game against two really premiere teams in the country, that's what you focus on.

And then you worry about next year and you try to become one of those four teams. And you try to take that next step from going from a conference champion to go ahead and being a playoff team. We're close but we're not close enough right now.

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