

## College Football

## Playoff abandons plan for New Years Eve semifinals

By RALPH D. RUSSO  
Associated Press

The College Football Playoff has abandoned a plan to play most of its semifinals on New Year's Eves after television ratings tumbled last year, moving the dates of future games to ensure they will be played either on a weekend or a holiday.

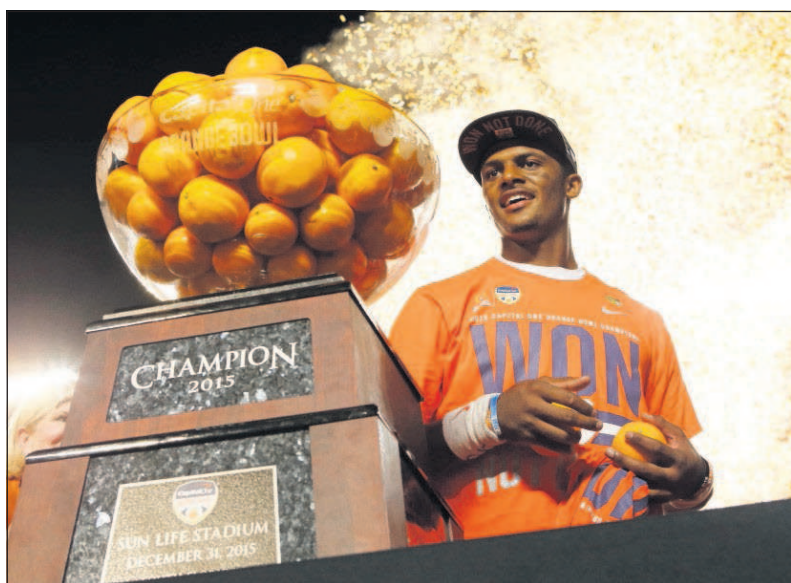
The changes will start with the 2018 season. The TV ratings for last year's semifinal games played on Thursday, Dec. 31, dropped 36 percent from the semifinals played the season before on New Year's Day.

This season's semifinals are still set for Saturday, Dec. 31. Next season's playoff is scheduled to be back on Jan. 1. In 2018, the games initially scheduled to be played on New Year's Eve, will now be played Saturday, Dec. 29.

The 2019 games will move to Saturday, Dec. 28.

The other seasons affected by the change are 2024, when the semifinals will be moved to Saturday, Dec. 28, and 2025, when the games will be played on Saturday, Dec. 27.

"We had a healthy discussion with a lot of people who love college football and we concluded that making these changes would be the right thing to do for our fans," College Football Playoff Executive Director Bill Hancock said in a



In this Dec. 31, 2015, file photo, Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson (4) poses with the Orange Bowl trophy following an NCAA college football semifinal playoff game against Oklahoma, in Miami Gardens, Fla.

statement.

In a phone interview with the AP, Hancock said after looking at data provided by ESPN that considered all the factors that contributed to the drop in ratings, such as the lopsided scores and participating teams, it was clear the single greatest factor was when the games were played.

Hancock said several options for altering the schedule were discussed, including giving the

College Football Playoff a permanent home on New Year's Day, but that didn't get far.

"It was clear from the get go that our group wanted to honor the traditions of the game, including the Rose Bowl, including the Sugar Bowl getting back to New Year's Day, which they really cherish," Hancock said. "That one didn't stay on the table for long."

Big Ten Commissioner Jim

Delany, whose conference is partners with the Rose Bowl along with the Pac-12, said earlier this week the Rose Bowl would not be giving up its traditional New Year's Day afternoon time slot. The Big 12 and Southeastern Conference now have a similar partnership with the Sugar Bowl and have locked up the time slot after the Rose Bowl.

Hancock said it was important to keep the semifinals in what he called the holiday period between Christmas and New Year's Day because it best allows fans to travel to the games.

ESPN's Burke Magnus, executive vice president, programming and scheduling, said the network, which is paying about \$470 million annually for the media rights to College Football Playoff, was pleased with the decision.

"They did engage in a really thoughtful analysis of what could make the CFP more fan friendly and ultimately they got to the right place, which we're happy about," Magnus said.

Magnus said ESPN was not directly involved in the decision nor did it exert any pressure on the CFP to change its schedule. He said there was also no pressure from advertisers.

"No, it never went anywhere near that kind of conversation," Magnus said in a phone interview.

"There was never any ultimatum issued."

The first College Football Playoff set ratings records for ESPN on New Year's Day 2015. The semifinal between Oregon and Florida State was played at the Rose Bowl and Alabama and Ohio State played at Sugar Bowl, with the Rose kicking off at about 5:20 p.m. ET.

The semifinals moved to New Year's Eve last season for the first of eight initially scheduled times throughout the 12-year contract the CFP has with ESPN.

College football officials said they were going to start a new tradition on New Year's Eve and that people would incorporate watching big games into their party plans. The initial returns showed that was not happening. Not only did the games have to compete with parties at night, but much of the country was still working when the Orange Bowl between Clemson and Oklahoma kicked off around 4:30 ET. That was 3:30 local time in Oklahoma.

"We tried to do something special with New Year's Eve, even when it fell on a weekday," Hancock said. "But after studying this to see if it worked, we think we can do better. These adjustments will allow more people to experience the games they enjoy so much. For these four years, our previous call is reversed."

## SCHNEIDER:

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the Seahawks were preparing to begin training camp Saturday. The team announced last Sunday that Schneider had agreed to an extension and two days later announced a three-year extension for coach Pete Carroll, keeping the tandem in charge of Seattle's football operations at least through 2019.

They knew little of each other when Carroll and Schneider were hired in January 2010. Since then, the pair has led the Seahawks to success never before seen in franchise history.

"I think the times you appreciate it are the times that are tough and you have to make tough decisions," Schneider said. "Coach Carroll, he doesn't have to have this philosophy. He's Pete Carroll, right? And I'm John Schneider. This guy won national championships and was basically running Los Angeles for a couple years. He could have come into this thing like guns blazing and it's my way or the highway. That's not his philosophical approach at all."

Schneider arrived in Seattle a relative unknown and unproven as a general manger. What he's created now entering his seventh season in charge is a football operations department that rivals any in the NFL, with a team coming off four straight playoff appearances and expectations entering this season of being a contender in the NFC.

Schneider will be 50 years old when his contract finally expires after the 2021 season.

"When you're asking the shelf-life of it, I think as long as you're challenging yourself and you never feel like you have all the answers, then I think the shelf-life is endless," Schneider said. "If you start thinking you have all the answers and you've got everything figured out ... that's when you're kind of screwed."

Contrary to rumblings that have followed Schneider throughout his tenure with Seattle, he said there is no clause in his extension that would allow the Wisconsin native to return to his home state and take over in Green Bay if the opportunity presents itself. He's in Seattle for the long haul, and that's fine by him.

"There's been lots of whispers about a lot of things," Schneider said. "It's a small league and I'm from a small home town."

Last season, Schneider and the Seahawks were caught by surprise when Kam Chancellor held out from training camp because he was unhappy with his contract before reporting after missing the first two games of the season. Defensive end Michael Bennett has also expressed displeasure with his current contract but Schneider expects Bennett to report Friday.

"I do expect him. I haven't heard otherwise," he said.

Schneider said running back Thomas Rawls and tight end Jimmy Graham are not expected to practice when the Seahawks take the field for the first time Saturday. The team is still considering whether to place the two on the physically unable to perform list for the start of camp as they recover from injuries suffered late last season.

Schneider reiterated that both are expected to be ready for the opener on Sept. 11 against Miami.

"We're going to be very, very careful with those guys," he said.

## PGA: Twenty players shot a 68 or better on Thursday

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trated that he returned to Baltusrol late in the day with his putter.

Stenson had his struggles on the greens, too, but he was rolling right along at the end with three birdies over his last seven holes for a 67, leaving him only two shots out of the lead as he tries to become the first player since Ben Hogan in 1953 to win back-to-back majors at age 40.

"It's going to be a great season for me," Stenson said. "But at the same time, I want to give myself a chance to try to make it the best season."

Walker's year has been so mediocre that he has finished within five shots of the winner only once this year, at Torrey Pines. He is on the verge of falling out of the top 50 in the world ranking and hasn't given as much thought to Ryder Cup with qualifying a month away from ending.

"I'm a good putter," Walker said. "Like good shooters, just keep shooting. I'm just going to keep putting, and they're going to start going in."

Walker wound up with a one-shot lead over two-time major champion Martin Kaymer, Emiliano Grillo and Ross Fisher. Kaymer had the best score in the afternoon, when the blend of poa annua and bent grass on the Baltusrol greens became a little



Jordan Spieth watches his tee shot on the first hole during the first round of the PGA Championship golf tournament at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., Thursday, July 28, 2016.

more difficult to navigate.

"I feel like all year it's just been real stale and stagnant," Walker said. "It's just ebbs and flows of golf. Just haven't been scoring. ... It's frustrating. I would have loved to have had a better year than I've had so far to this point, but I know there's always time to play well at the end of the year."

Even with afternoon gusts that approached 20 mph, and the late threat of rain, Baltusrol still allowed for good scoring.

Twenty players were at 68 or better, a list that included defending champion Jason Day.

Jordan Spieth only regrets one hole, the par-4 seventh, when he

lost his ball so far to the right he had to chip back into thick rough and wound up three-putting for a double bogey. That was his lone mistake. He rolled in big putts on the 15th for par, 16th for birdie and closed with a two-putt birdie to get back to even-par 70.

Day played in the morning group with McIlroy and Phil Mickelson, and he was the only player without much stress. Mickelson, just 11 days after that magnificent duel with Stenson at Royal Troon, was 4 over through 11 holes when he rallied with a trio of birdies late in his round to salvage a 71.

"It's not the start I wanted.

It's not indicative of how I'm playing," he said. "But I'm back to where tomorrow, if I play the way I've been playing, I should be OK."

Grillo had a chance to at least join Walker in the lead when he was at 4 under with the final two holes par 5s. He made par on both. Fisher made birdie on the two closing par 5s for his 66. Kaymer started his afternoon round on the back nine and kept it together with two pars, including a 35-yard bunker shot on No. 8 to within 3 feet.

"There's nothing easy on the golf course today," Kaymer said. "I just didn't miss many fairways and therefore, you can create some birdie chances. But at the end of the day you still need to make the putts."

Walker kept the ball in play off the tee until late in his round, and he was particularly sharp with his scrambling out by getting up-and-down six times.

Johnson, meanwhile, was all over the place.

Dressed in black and clean-shaven, he took a double bogey from the trees and by missing a short putt on No. 3. He added three more bogeys with wild drives. He drilled a bunker shot into the lip on No. 11 for a double bogey. And he ended his round by chipping up the par-5 18th, the easiest at Baltusrol, for a bogey.

## SHRINE GAME: Practices begin on Monday at EOU

Continued from 1B

mates and some rivals one more time on the prep football field. Joining Vera on the field will be Heppner's Patrick Collins and C.J. Kindle, Stanfield's Jarred Warren, and Weston-McEwen's Devon Rhoades, adding to the more than 3,000 prep athletes that have taken part in the game since its debut in 1952.

"To be chosen for this game is a huge honor," Collins said. "I have the ability to represent my family and my community for one last time to cap off my prep football career exactly how I had always dreamed of. It's a one last hoo-rah as a Heppner Mustang."

The five Eastern Oregon athletes will be playing for the East team and will be coached by Gary Thorson of Sisters, Dave Thompson of

Coquille, Jon Helmandollar of Toledo, and Bill Blevins of Sherman. The East team leads the head-to-head matchup 29-25-3 all-time.

"It's going to be exciting," Vera added, "especially to play with different guys like the Heppner guys, Stanfield guys & Weston-McEwen guys that I have competed with over the years and now they're my teammates."

Team practices for the game kick-off on Monday afternoon at Eastern Oregon University, however, the players will meet up today in Portland for the annual trip to the Shriners Hospital for Children in Portland. The trip allows the athletes to meet with

## 2016 Shrine Game

•When: Saturday, Aug. 6, 7 p.m.  
•Where: Bulldog Stadium, Baker City  
•Tickets: \$15 reserved, \$12 general admission

both patients and staff and realize the true reason for playing in the game, which is to help raise money and awareness for the hospital.

"That's what it's all about," Vera

said. "I can't wait to hang out with the kids, there's nothing better than that."

Collins echoed Vera's sentiment.

"It's amazing how so many people can come together for such a great cause," he said. "It's a great feeling to know that this experience is more than just about a game. It's about relationships built, awareness spread, and hope for all."

The game kicks-off on Saturday

evening at 7 p.m. at Baker High School, but there are plenty of festivities going on beforehand. The day starts with a steak and pancake breakfast at Baker City Park from 7-10 a.m. followed by the Shrine Game parade at 11 a.m. Then from Noon to 6 p.m. Baker City Park is the site for a big pre-game tailgate that leads up to the game.

The game will also be taped and shown on Root Sports Northwest at a later date.

Tickets for the game are \$15 reserved seating and \$12 general admission and can be purchased online at EastWestShrineFootball.com or can be bought on-site.

Contact Eric Singer at [esinger@eastoregonian.com](mailto:esinger@eastoregonian.com) or (541) 966-0839. Follow him on Twitter @ByEricSinger.

## SOCCER: MLS teams fall to 9-4-1 in All-Star Game history

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next off Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain before he converted with a shot to the right upper corner of the net in the second minute of stoppage time in the first half. Giovanni dos Santos jumped on Droghda's back to celebrate.

Joel Campbell scored on a penalty kick in the 11th minute for Arsenal following Jelle Van Damme's yellow card for grabbing.

Campbell converted the penalty kick with his left-footed shot to the left of a diving Andre Blake of the Philadelphia Union.

There was a scare for the MLS team in the 22nd minute, when Dallas star Kellyn Acosta collided with Francis Coquelin. A trainer

came out as Acosta grabbed at his right ankle but he got to his feet and stayed in the game.

Blake stopped a free kick in the sixth minute for the MLS group, which regularly pushed into its offensive half.

San Jose Earthquakes forward Chris Wondolowski received a roaring ovation when he entered to play on his home field in Avaya Stadium in the 73rd minute, when Seattle Sounders star Clint Dempsey also came into the match.

Wondolowski had a shot soar over the crossbar from just inside the 18-yard box in the 82nd minute.

Landon Donovan, a 14-time MLS All-Star and former San Jose great, was on hand and posed for photos with MLS Commissioner Don Garber.

State-of-the-art Avaya Stadium, in its second season, is an 18,000-seat soccer-specific stadium boasting the largest outdoor bar in North America behind one goal — a huge hit before the game with fans clad in Arsenal gear.

Arsenal, managed by Arsene Wenger and preparing for the English Premier League season following a second-place finish in 2015-16, had huge sections of fans among the sellout crowd of 18,000 on a hot Bay Area day.

Five MLS players were back from the 2015 All-Star team. This year's group was coached by Earthquakes coach Dominic Kinnear.

MLS teams are 9-4-1 and have outscored opponents 25-23 in the league's summer showcase

event, including a 2-1 win against Tottenham Hotspur last year in Colorado.

The privately funded, \$100 million stadium broke ground in October 2012 and is known for its technological capabilities and other unique elements such as food truck options for concessions with an expansive grassy area for kids to play or watch a game on the huge video board.

The seats are also three different shades of blue with a few red ones mixed in to honor the colors of past Bay Area soccer teams. The steep seating provides an increased noise level and keeps fans closer to the action. There is also an all-standing section behind one goal.