

Gene Smith “Excited” About Big Ten Eliminating Divisions In New Scheduling Model



The Big Ten announced on Thursday the conference’s new scheduling model, which includes the elimination of divisions and several protected rivalries, and announced home-and-away opponents for the 2024 and 2025 football season.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said on the Big Ten Network after the schedule’s unveiling that he is “excited” for the Big Ten to no longer have divisions, which means the conference’s top two teams based on record will compete in the Big Ten Championship Game.

“Those two teams demonstrated through their body of work that they’ve earned an opportunity to compete in the championship game,” Smith said. “When you run the gauntlet for the regular conference season and you end up being number one and number two in the standings, you’ve earned that right. So I’m excited about having no divisions. I think divisions served us well, in our history and our transition to this space. Now, this opportunity to play a kind of semi-round robin is actually better.”

As part of the new model, Ohio State has a protected rivalry with Michigan, and the teams will continue to play every season. That is the only protected rivalry for the Buckeyes, though, making it so that Ohio State will no longer have annual matchups with teams like Indiana, Michigan State and Penn State.

“I’m OK with it,” Smith said. “Penn State had developed into a competitive rivalry for us. Unlike the other 11 protected games in this model, where you have some history and tradition around those competitions. You look at the three that Iowa protected or that Illinois protected or the fact that we protected Michigan, those are historical rivalries, deep-rooted rivalries.

“The Penn State rivalry for us was a competitive rivalry,” he continued. “And so in order to meet the balance of trying to make sure that every team, every school had an opportunity over a four-year period to play at every place at least twice, you had to sacrifice some things.”

With the conference pitting the top two teams, it leaves the possibility that Ohio State and Michigan – which will remain on the final week of the regular season – could play in back-to-back weeks.

“We agreed to that for the betterment of the whole, the betterment of the league, relative to our overall scheduling format, and our television partners,” Smith said. “At the end of the day, we needed to accept

that as a possibility.”