

Gene Smith, Kevin Warren Release Statements Regarding Fall Season Postponement



Both the Big Ten conference and Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith have released statements this evening to provide some clarity on the conference's decision to postpone the fall football season, and on the next steps moving forward, eight days after the season was officially postponed.

In the Big Ten letter, commissioner Kevin Warren expands on the reasoning behind the Big Ten's decision, stating that the conference presidents voted overwhelmingly in favor of postponing the fall season.

"The vote by the Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors (COP/C) was overwhelmingly in support of postponing fall sports and will not be revisited," the letter reads. "The decision was thorough and deliberative, and based on sound feedback, guidance and advice from medical experts.

"We understand the disappointment and questions surrounding the timing of our decision to postpone fall sports, especially in light of releasing a football schedule only six days prior to that decision. From the beginning, we consistently communicated our commitment to cautiously proceed one day at a time with the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes at the center of our decision-making process. That is why we took simultaneous paths in releasing the football schedule, while also diligently monitoring the spread of the virus, testing, and medical concerns as student-athletes were transitioning to full-contact practice."

It goes on to explain some of the medical advice that the conference received.

- "Transmission rates continue to rise at an alarming rate with little indication from medical experts that our campuses, communities or country could gain control of the spread of the virus prior to the start of competition.
 - As our teams were ramping up for more intense practices, many of our medical staffs did not think the interventions we had planned would be adequate to decrease the potential spread even with very regular testing.
 - As the general student body comes back to campus, spread to student-athletes could reintroduce infection into our athletics community.
- There is simply too much we do not know about the virus, recovery from infection, and longer-term effects. While the data on cardiomyopathy is preliminary and incomplete, the uncertain risk was unacceptable at this time.
- Concerns surrounding contact tracing still exist, including the inability to social distance in

contact sports pursuant to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. While risk mitigation processes (e.g., physical distancing, face coverings, proper hygiene, etc.) can be implemented across campus for the student body population, it became clear those processes could not be fully implemented in contact sports.

- With the start of full-contact practices and competitions, it became increasingly clear that contact tracing and quarantining would risk frequent and significant disruptions to the practice and competition calendar.
- Accurate and widely available rapid testing may help mitigate those concerns, but access to accurate tests is currently limited.
- Significant concerns also exist regarding the testing supply chain, generally, for many of our institutions.”

The letter concludes stating that the Big Ten resolves to winter/spring models for postponed fall seasons.

“To that end, the Big Ten Conference has assembled a Return to Competition Task Force consisting of members from the COP/C, sports medicine and university medical personnel, Athletic Directors, Head Coaches, Faculty Athletic Representatives and Senior Women Administrators to plan for the return of fall sports competition as soon as possible. In evaluating winter/spring models, we will explore many factors including the number of football games that can reasonably be played from a health perspective in a full calendar year while maintaining a premier competitive experience for our student-athletes culminating in a Big Ten Championship. The Big Ten Conference will continue to collect feedback from student-athletes, families, and other constituents and remains in active discussions with its television partners regarding all future plans.”

In the statement from Ohio State released shortly after, Smith echoes many of those sentiments, while putting to bed the idea that Ohio State is actively searching for ways to play football this fall.

“While a decision has been made by the presidents of the Big Ten Conference to postpone the fall season, we view this as a temporary delay, and Dr. (Kristina) Johnson has directed us to prepare for the possibility of bringing at least some of our fall sports back to practice and competition by the end of the year,” Smith said. “We are actively planning for the winter and spring seasons for all sports, including the return of football.

“As an athletics director at a Big Ten institution, I will always be respectful of our conference as it provides an outstanding platform for our student-athletes to pursue the championship experience. The health and safety of all our students, coaches and support staff is our highest priority. The conference has established the Big Ten Return to Competition Task Force to develop plans for winter and spring competition models. I want to thank Dr. Johnson for her participation on this task force.

“We are focused on creating an environment for our student-athletes to continue to have a quality educational experience at Ohio State this fall. All services will continue to be available, including academic support, strength and conditioning training, sports psychology assistance and skill instruction, to name a few.

“We are hopeful our medical experts will continue to learn more about COVID-19 and its effects, our society at large will respond to the requests to implement measures/protocols that contribute to a safe and healthy environment for all, and our research scientists will be successful in their quest to develop a vaccine.”