

Gene Smith Still In Favor Of Eliminating Big Ten Divisions



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith spoke to the media Thursday on the heels of the Big Ten announcing the conference's new media rights deal, and Smith made another push for the conference to eliminate divisions.

"To me, I'd go (to no divisions) next week," he said. "But obviously it's a process. I've gotten to the point where I'm comfortable going no divisions. In that, we need to talk about tiebreakers and those types of things."

Smith said an important aspect of whether or not to get rid of divisions is discussions with the conference's television partners.

As announced Thursday, that now includes CBS, FOX, NBC and Peacock. The former three will be on a rotation broadcasting the Big Ten Championship Game, with CBS carrying the game in 2024 and 2028, FOX broadcasting the game in 2023, 2025, 2027 and 2029, and NBC showing the game in 2026.

"We've got to get down to the details around that," Smith said. "I also want to hear what our television partners have to say, which is why we waited until we knew who they are. I don't know what their perspectives are. I want to hear it. So I'm in favor of it. I think it'd be better for us, particularly when UCLA and USC gets into the mix."

The Big Ten has flirted with eliminating divisions throughout the offseason. Several reasons have been proposed, such as increasing the conference's likelihood of a College Football Playoff berth, as well as the domination of the East Division over the West Division since their introduction in the 2014 season. The East Division has an unblemished 8-0 record in the conference championship game, with an average margin of victory of 20 points.

If the conference were to do away with divisions, several options would be on the table for the Big Ten Championship Game, but the likely choice would be to go the way of the Big 12 and Pac-12, who both send the top two teams in the conference by winning percentage to their championship game.

No divisions would also impact regular-season scheduling, of which the conference currently has a nine-game conference slate for member teams. That could all change soon with the potential elimination of

divisions as well as the addition of USC and UCLA to the Big Ten in 2024.

“We’ve talked about no divisions but we haven’t finalized that decision. We need to come together and finalize that decision. We need to bring in (USC) Mike Bohn and (UCLA AD) Martin Jarmond into those conversations and start meetings around that,” Smith said. “We need to finalize, if we go no divisions, what’s our tiebreakers? There’s just so many different things we need to ultimately get to that we just haven’t gotten to yet because we’re so focused on (media rights).”