

Gene Smith Unsure About Moving Location Of Ohio State-Oregon



Ohio State may have to take on Oregon in Eugene on September 12 without any fans in the stands, as athletic director Gene Smith explained on Wednesday that he was unsure on any sort of efforts to move to game elsewhere.

Smith said during his nearly hour long conference call with media that he has spoken with Oregon athletic director Rob Mullens recently, but that the topic of potentially moving the first half of Ohio State and Oregon's upcoming home-and-home series was not broached. Smith did joke, however, about wanting to just play both of the scheduled legs of the series in Columbus.

"We can just play both of them here, two years in a row," Smith joked. "Rob and I did not talk about that. I called him I think maybe two days after their Governor's announcement just to see if I can get clarity and obviously that position has been changed, or at least walked back on to some degree. So we, we did not talk about that scenario."

He went on to explain that he hadn't yet put much thought towards the idea of moving the game, stating that the press conference served as the first time that he's really considered it. He also mentioned that moving the game would likely require a change in 2021, when Ohio State is set to host the Ducks.

"This is the first time I've thought about it, so I'm not so sure I've got a strong opinion on it," Smith said. "Because we would be probably giving up a game next year, in 2021, which would make it harder for us. So I'm not so sure I would do that."

Any sort of push for a move away from Autzen Stadium would likely be a result of Oregon governor Kate Brown's statement on May 7, in which she stated that the Oregon Health Authority is advising against large gatherings like sporting event crowds through at least September.

"There is some difficult news to share. Large gatherings, including live sporting events with audiences, concerts, festivals, and conventions will not be able to return until we have a reliable treatment or prevention like a vaccine," Brown said.

"The Oregon Health Authority is advising that any large gathering, at least through September, should be canceled or significantly modified."

While the statement does not make clear if that ruling would continue through the entire month of September, it does cast enough of a shadow on the matchup between Ohio State and Oregon to merit some backup plan considerations. It likely wouldn't end the game entirely, but could create a fan-free environment, which Smith said he's still warming up to, and that playing without fans is "an ongoing conversation that all of us are having."

The Buckeye AD seems to be in support of at least some fans in the stands this fall, as he mentioned a plan that Ohio State has considered of allowing roughly 20,000-22,000 fans into Ohio Stadium this fall, to allow for social distancing requirements to be met.

While moving the highly anticipated matchup with Oregon doesn't seem to be on the table for the Buckeyes, the potential of no non-conference games this fall was mentioned by Smith as something he's put some thought into, and as something that he would support, with the need for national consistency.

"The perfect scenario is we have a national solution with consistency," Smith said. "Perhaps conference-only (schedule) with the same amount of games."

Regardless of what the solution ends up being, whether it's a full 12-game schedule without fans in the stands, a shortened schedule, or even the relocation of some games, Smith explained that he supports anything that will allow for games to be played safely.

"(The) kids want to play," Smith said. "Whatever we can do to give them that chance, I want to bend over backwards to give them that chance."