

Ohio State Announces Hiring Of Texas A&M's Ross Bjork As Athletic Director



Ohio State announced Tuesday that former Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork will take over the same position in Columbus, set to succeed Gene Smith when the longtime athletic director formally steps down later this summer.

"I have been extraordinarily fortunate to work with so many outstanding student-athletes, coaches, staff and university leaders throughout my career, and Ohio State represents the culmination of these efforts," Bjork said in a statement. "To be a part of Buckeye Nation, along with its storied traditions and long history of achievement, is a tremendous honor and a welcome challenge. I can't wait to get started."

Bjork had been athletic director at Texas A&M since 2019, and has held the same position at Ole Miss (2012-19) and Western Kentucky (2010-12). He has been in sports administration for over 25 years, also holding administrative roles at Albuquerque, Tulsa, Western Illinois, Missouri, Miami (Fla.) and UCLA dating back to 1994. A native of Dodge City, Kan., he graduated from Emporia State University in 1995 and earned his master's of athletic administration from Western Illinois in 1996.

"Few athletics directors have established such an impressive and strong record of success in athletics, in the classroom and throughout the community," new university president Ted Carter said. "The bar is incredibly high at Ohio State, and we have found in Ross a highly intelligent and effective leader - not to mention a fierce competitor."

During his time at Texas A&M, Bjork, who is 51 years old, made headlines for the university's aggressive approach to name, image and likeness, as well as a fully guaranteed \$95 million extension for then-football head coach Jimbo Fisher in September of 2021 that ended with Fisher being fired by Bjork and the Aggies this past November. One of Bjork's final moves as athletic director at Texas A&M was hiring former Duke head coach Mike Elko to fill the same position for the Aggies.

He has also raised the profile of Texas A&M's athletic department, generating the seventh-most revenue (\$193,139,619) in the NCAA during the 2022-23 academic year, according to USA Today, a category that was led by Ohio State with \$251,615,345 in revenue.

While at Ole Miss, he fired head football coach Hugh Freeze after several NCAA violations came to light under Bjork's watch that resulted in 33 wins being vacated, among other penalties, and later oversaw the hiring of head coach Matt Luke, who ended up being fired after three seasons and just a 15-21

record.

Bjork's hiring is the first major decision by Carter, who began his tenure on Jan. 1. Many had speculated that Ohio State would look toward Smith's extensive tree of administrative hires - including Washington State athletic director Pat Chun, who was reportedly a finalist - but the Buckeyes are instead going outside for the hire, as Bjork has no connection to Ohio State.

He will officially take over for Ohio State's athletic department later this summer, as Smith's formal retirement is set for June 30. Smith had been at the helm of the athletic department since 2005 and announced his retirement this past August. Bjork will be the ninth athletic director in Ohio State history.

"Ross is uniquely equipped to step into our Buckeye community and make an immediate impact," Smith said. "As I have said, Ohio State has afforded me the professional opportunity of a lifetime, and I am forever grateful. My final, important project over the next several months will be to work with Ross to ensure a smooth and effective transition with our student-athletes, coaches, department staff and university leaders."

Once he takes the department over from Smith, Bjork will be tasked with leading Ohio State through a challenging time in college athletics as well as a potential period of change for the Buckeyes. Beyond NIL, the transfer portal and conference/playoff expansion, football head coach Ryan Day's status has been called into question heading into next season after three consecutive losses to Michigan, while men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann - in his seventh season at Ohio State - has yet to win a conference championship or make it past the opening weekend of the NCAA Tournament.