

Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith Discusses Return To Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Limiting Capacity At Ohio Stadium



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith spent nearly one full hour on a teleconference with reporters on Wednesday afternoon, at which time he discussed the Buckeyes' looming return to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, the possibility of limiting capacity at Ohio Stadium and more.

Here's a bullet-point recap of what Smith had to say:

- Smith previously said he could not envision having a football season without fans, but now acknowledged that is "an ongoing conversation that all of us are having." Added he's warmed up to the idea, but is optimistic that it won't be necessary.
- Smith said its possible given the size of Ohio Stadium to follow social distancing policies to still have a significant number of fans in attendance. One such concepts would likely reduce capacity to 20,000-22,000 fans, though they're still very early in that process.
- Smith said he is hopeful all 14 Big Ten school are able to play this year, but added the conference should be flexible to not penalize other schools if they cannot field a team this fall. Hopes that is the case across the country, as well. "The perfect scenario is we have a national solution with consistency. Perhaps conference-only (schedule) with the same amount of games."
- Smith said Ohio State has not discussed what would be done in the event of a student-athlete testing positive for coronavirus during the season, adding they'll let medical experts decide on that.
- Smith hopes they'll have a decision later today or early tomorrow from the NCAA council regarding the possible resumption of organized team activities on June 1.
- "The reality is most of us are trying to live in the moment," Smith said.
- Smith on the planned reopening of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on June 8: "We're still waiting on the vote, but we will have limited access to those facilities and the players will go through protocols." Added student-athletes will have to sign up to work out at specific times to limited the amount of people inside at any given time and so that the facilities can be cleaned between workout groups, which will be limited to 10 players. They'll also have to have their temperature taken before entering.
- Smith believes a final decision on the football schedule should be made by early July. "We need to

take into consideration not just Ohio, but all other states.”

- Smith on the June 8 reopening: “We already have some players that are here, that are local. It’s a mix. We think the facilities that we have with the safety protocols we can put in are the safest places (compared to local gyms or other athletic facilities).”
- Smith said Ohio State supports the Big Ten possibly extending the prohibition of organized team activities through June 30 but obviously hopes they allow voluntary workouts on June 1.
- Hypothetically asked if a player tests positive following the June 8 reopening, Smith stressed again that he would defer to the medical staff. He did, however, admit they might “have to decide to shut it down.”
- Smith said he believes the players are safer on campus than at home because they can be monitored by professionals, echoing the sentiments of center Josh Myers.
- Smith once again said the six-week startup with an additional week for transitional purposes is the best-case scenario as Ohio State looks to begin the season. “Could it slide to five weeks or four weeks? No question.”
- Smith admitted he’s not yet 100 percent comfortable with football being played without a vaccine, but he continues to educate himself on different tactics that can be employed and is optimistic he’ll get there.
- Smith said no decisions have been made about possibly cutting sports due to the financial impact of the virus, but added it has forced them to consider all possibilities. “We have some cost-containment measures that we have been discussing internally.”
- Smith believes it’s “unrealistic” to play football with protective face masks. “I think if someone tells us that has to happen, in my view, based on what I know, we won’t be playing.”
- Smith said winter sports could still happen if, hypothetically, fall sports cannot, though he pointed out there could be a significant financial impact if there is no football season to help fund the other sports.
- Asked about possibly flipping the location of the Ohio State-Oregon home-and-home series, Smith said he has not discussed such a scenario with Ducks athletic director Rob Mullens. “I’m not so sure I would do that,” he said, pointing out how Ohio State would only have six home games in 2021 if that happened.
- Smith said he’s hopeful all 12 games on the 2020 schedule will be played, but is comfortable with as few as eight games. “(The) kids want to play. Whatever we can do to give them that change, I want to bend over backwards to give them that chance.” Added he’d have to consult Ohio State’s legal team if the season needs to be shortened by a few non-conference games as to whether or not there are clauses in the contract that would apply to such a situation.
- Smith said contractual obligations with television partners are secondary to the health and safety of the student-athletes. “I think we need to be thoughtful about the human part of this thing, first and foremost.”

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