

Ohio State President Kristina M. Johnson Speaks Up In Support Of Football Season



Ohio State President Kristina M. Johnson shared the same message as athletic director Gene Smith and head football coach Ryan Day – she wants the Buckeyes to return to action.

Although there were rumors that Johnson had been a part of a 12-2 vote in favor of canceling the season, blaming her for the season's postponement, she has supported a season since the beginning.

While Johnson has not publicly discussed specific dates in regards to returning to play, she continues to drive the program-wide theme of fighting for a season.

"I understand how painful and frustrating it is for players to have worked so hard to be at this place and this performance," Johnson said on WOSU's All Sides with Ann Fisher. "But I have to step back and say also that we need to put safety first. So both considerations.

"Of course, we want to be safe, and at the Ohio State University I have full faith and confidence that we've created a program that does keep our players safe and would allow the ability to compete."

Johnson confirmed a report from cleveland.com that said she had preferred to delay the Big Ten's decision instead of pushing forward and canceling the season altogether. The newly appointed school president told Fisher she was "disappointed" with the vote, adding, "It is what it is."

ESPN reported that Johnson was one of three presidents or chancellors in the Big Ten to have voted against outright postponing the season. Ohio State, Iowa and Nebraska were reportedly the three programs that lost an 11-3 vote against postponing the season at the time of the vote.

When Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren spoke with U.S. President Donald Trump on Sept. 1, the possibility of acquiring equipment for rapid COVID-19 testing was reportedly a primary topic discussed. Johnson said medical improvements, like rapid testing, was part of the reason she did not want to make a final vote in August.

"We do understand that there are ways to make sure we've got a clean playing field, and that's what you want to make sure of," Johnson said. "If you're going to have contact sports, you have to make sure that individuals that are doing that are not infectious, and that they can play. I believe that we have the kind of protocols that will allow us to do that."

In an interview with NBC4, Johnson discussed how returning to playing sports in the fall might not mean what everyone expects, emphasizing the importance of following COVID-19 protocols en route to an eventual athletic season.

"Fall is a long period of time," Johnson said. "Fall goes 'til December 20th. I see that there's a path to football. People talk about winter, early spring, late fall, winter, those things are all being worked out.

"Again, I come back to our campuses need to be safe, and that means in the performances as well as in the classrooms, we're working very hard to do that. And if we all do our part, wear a mask, stay six feet apart, wash our hands, then I think that we've got the procedures in place to go forward."

Unsure of when a decision will be made about the return of Big Ten football, Johnson said there are groups within the conference working on a day-to-day basis to come up with a plan.

"There's a medical committee, there's a scheduling committee, and these committees are working very diligently every day about how to put in place those protocols that will keep it safe," Johnson said. "So as soon as possible. It's certainly something that we'll be watching with the commissioner, and integrating obviously our views and those of our colleagues."

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