

Ohio State's Ryan Day, Gene Smith, Dr. Jim Borchers Address COVID Situation



Following the Nov. 27 announcement that Ohio State's game against Illinois was canceled, Ohio State's head football coach Ryan Day, athletic director Gene Smith, head team physician Dr. Jim Borchers spoke to members of the media via Zoom, addressing the program's COVID situation.

What follows is a bullet-point breakdown paraphrasing what Day, Smith, and Borchers said:

- Gene Smith: Thank you all. Thank you to our television partners at Fox. Thank you to President Johnson. We are in the midst of a pandemic. We live in Franklin County, which is a level four area. We're learning a lot great deal as we go through this environment. Thank you to the coaches and support staffs. Thank you to our players for their patience and understanding. The positivity rates were concerning enough that we felt we had to take a pause to mitigate the risk. We did not reach the Big Ten threshold. We want to continue to focus on the health and safety of our players. We want to do what we can to possibly give them a chance to compete next weekend. It's not about the Big Ten Championship or the CFP, or how many games we need to play, it's about the health and safety of our student-athletes and giving them a chance to possibly play next week. I want to thank Dr. Jim Borchers, coach Ryan Day, and coach Larry Johnson.
- Dr. Jim Borchers: We live in one of the most hardhead areas of the country with COVID-19. Franklin County has been struggling. COVID rates are increasing in Franklin County. This has challenged us. Our student-athletes and coaches have done great since August. With this pause, we enhanced our testing protocols from the Big Ten protocols to include additional PCR testing. During this time, our goal has always been to ensure the health and safety of our student-athletes. Of the individuals that have been tested positive, they are all doing well and no one is requiring significant medical attention. We will continue to follow all the guidelines we have been following when it comes to isolation.
- Ryan Day: I wanted to say thank you to all those who have reached out. It means a lot. It's been a very emotional and difficult week for the program when you think about Thanksgiving and being away from our families and then we have the positive tests. You hold your breath every day with the testing. For those of us that have tested positive, our concern is with the players and staff that have. Our priority is to keep everyone safe. They are quarantining. We're hoping to get these tests

back and then turn our focus to Michigan State. We are going to keep communicating through Zoom. Thank you for your support. This certainly is a very trying week for all of us.

What happens to players who are affected in terms of training and maintenance?

- Day: They'll be out for 10 days in self-isolation, then it becomes the protocol in getting back to shape, part of that is the cardiac MRI to make sure they are clear of myocarditis.

Still practicing this week with positive tests coming in?

- Borchers: We never reached a threshold where we couldn't play or practice until Friday afternoon. It's been incredibly important that we've been able to communicate with Gene Smith and Coach Day throughout the week. It's been an incredibly unusual and difficult week, but we've made all decisions with an abundance of caution.

Could the 21-day period be revisited?

- Smith: No. The conversations have not occurred. I understand the question, but that's not where we're at. My concern today is making sure our players get fed and if they need help, they can see a sports psychologist. I'm not concerned with that at this period.

What did you change this week to allow you to continue practicing?

- Day: We moved our meeting to virtual during the week. Really for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, we didn't put helmets on and we had to wear masks for a walk through with trash cans instead of bodies. We weren't going body against body.

What's next?

- Smith: We need to continue to test and see that there are no more positive tests that occur. We need to make sure that we're working with the conference office. The main thing is to watch our positivity rate. We know where we are right now.
- Borchers: We will focus day to day on the testing of our athletes and all the other issues around their health and safety when it comes to participation.

Timeline?

- Borchers: We didn't really have any concerns until Wednesday and as we started to see things we had not seen before, it was not enough to make us pause but it made us more careful. It was not until Friday's testing and enhanced testing Friday that made it clear we could not play.
- Smith: We had made adjustments on Friday to fly up on Saturday and play. But as more testing results came in Friday, we realized we would not be able to take part.

Preparing for next game against Michigan State?

- Smith: It's kind of fluid, we're going to have to go day by day. We'll test again tomorrow and see where we are tomorrow. It's going to be day by day. There's too much uncertainty here. There may be a point where we have to say we can't compete strategically.
- Day: I think you could get it done by practicing Thursday, with a good hard practice on Thursday and then a walk-through on Friday.

How are you dealing with this?

- Day: I'm resting comfortably. I have an extremely heavy heart though. There have been sacrifices made by many. There has been anxiety all season surrounding the testing. And it's been hard to have this happen the week of Thanksgiving. It isn't fun, nothing about this is good. It is going to make us tougher though.

Not forced to cancel by Big Ten?

- Borchers: Friday we went beyond the population positivity rate threshold that was set by the Big Ten. We have not gone past the test positivity threshold set by the Big Ten. We would not have been forced to sit out, but we made that decision for the health and safety of our players.

Who tested positive?

- Borchers: I am not going to give you specific numbers. This has been a really tough time for them. We have no trends and no clusters among the team.

Retuning to play?

- Smith: We don't know when we will be allowed back. The approval process is through us, not the Big Ten. So, we have to continue to monitor our testing and make a decision.
- Borchers: We have said all along that we will be driven on the data we have. We will not try to forecast what that data will be, because that gets us into trouble.

Big Ten thresholds or Ohio State thresholds?

- Smith: The thresholds that the Big Ten has in place, I don't think any team in our league has actually hit those, I might be wrong. We're making the decision based on what we see. We're seeing a community-type of spread, not clusters. The standards that the thresholds define are guideposts. We know that you're safe in our facilities, but we still live in a community in Franklin County.
- Borchers: We put those thresholds to provide some guidance, and the expectation was as institutions would be making decisions to pause. It shouldn't be a hard, 'Just go and play at all costs.' And that's what made our decision yesterday.

Did you hit 7.5 percent population positivity rate?

- Borchers: The population positivity rate is 7.5 percent of our 170. We had a large enough number of positive tests yesterday where we had to shut down. We would have to reach the threshold for the test positivity rate in order for the Big Ten to shut us down.
- Borchers: We certainly have looked at data and what has happened with other teams. We're going to continue to test and follow the data with our group, and we're going to move forward appropriately.

Smith: Thank you for all the hard work we do. We felt we needed to do this today even though all of us are slightly on edge. I just want to thank Ryan. I can't begin to share with you how hard his job is, I can't.

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