

Per Penn State Doctor, 30-35 Percent Of Big Ten Athletes Who Tested Positive For COVID-19 Had Myocarditis



When Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren said he canceled the fall sports season because of “too much medical uncertainty and too many unknown health risks,” there were no specifics as to why the season had been ended.

New information has been uncovered regarding the link between COVID-19 and myocarditis, which is an inflammation of the heart muscle that can be fatal if left unchecked.

Penn State’s director of athletic medicine – Wayne Sebastianelli – said that cardiac MRI scans revealed that approximately one out of every three Big Ten athletes who tested positive for COVID-19 appeared to have myocarditis. Sebastianelli divulged the details during a State College Area school board of directors meeting on Sept. 3, as first reported by Parth Upadhyaya of Centre Daily Times.

“When we looked at our COVID-positive athletes, whether they were symptomatic or not, 30 to roughly 35 percent of their heart muscles (are) inflamed,” Sebastianelli said. “And we really just don’t know what to do with it right now. It’s still very early in the infection. Some of that has led to the Pac-12 and the Big Ten’s decision to sort of put a hiatus on what’s happening.”

One day prior to the Big Ten’s announcement that fall sports would be canceled on Aug. 11, ESPN reported that the long-term effects of myocarditis were discussed in meetings of presidents and chancellors, commissioners and athletic directors, and health advisory board members from the Big Ten and other conferences across the nation.

“You could have a very high-level athlete who’s got a very superior VO2 max [maximal oxygen uptake] and cardiac output who gets infected with COVID and can drop his or her VO2 max and cardiac output just by 10 percent, and that could make them go from elite status to average status,” Sebastianelli said. “We don’t know that. We don’t know how long that’s going to last.

“What we have seen is when people have been studied with cardiac MRI scans – symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID infections – is a level of inflammation in cardiac muscle that just is alarming.”

Sebastianelli said he has not spoken with Penn State President Eric Barron specifically about the link between COVID-19 and myocarditis, and that he thinks the issue extends well beyond the field of

sports.

"I have had no direct conversation with President Barron on this topic," Sebastianelli wrote in an email to Centre Daily Times, "but needless to say we all have concerns for the health and safety of every PSU student-athlete, as well as those at every level of competition; this is a public health issue."

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