

 October 30, 2020

Good morning Commissioners, and following is the weekly update:

**Outside the NWAC**

I am sure your remember Lori Thomas who was one the guest presenters at our recent fall in-service. Following is an announcement from her office: The **Heart of America Athletic Conference** Council of Presidents has voted to move the league's soccer postseason tournaments to the spring. The cross country and women's volleyball championships are currently slated to still take place this fall. This decision will allow conference institutions to extend their regular-season and provide additional make-up dates for games that were previously postponed due to COVID-19 concerns. Institutions will now have until November 24 to finish out the conference slate, with no league games taking place in the spring except for those that occur in the postseason tournament.

The Mountain West announced yesterday the 2021 regular season formats for baseball, volleyball and women’s soccer. These formats, which were approved by the MW directors of athletics, provide student-athletes with the opportunity to conduct a Conference season while managing the challenges of the COVID-19 virus. These scheduling formats are subject to change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in accordance with state, county and local health guidelines. Regular-season formats can be found below:

**BASEBALL**

* A 36-game Conference schedule in a double round-robin format taking place over 14 weeks (Feb. 27-May 29).
* 3-game series scheduled for Saturday (double header) and Sunday, except for Easter weekend and the final weekend, which will be played on Friday (double header) and Saturday.
* Each institution has two open dates.
* The regular-season champion will be the Mountain West’s NCAA tournament automatic qualifier.
* Each institution is permitted to play nonconference games.

**VOLLEYBALL**

* A 16-match Conference-only schedule taking place over nine weeks (Feb. 5-April 3).
* Each institution will play six opponents twice and four opponents once.
* Using a hybrid scheduling format, the first seven weeks will feature teams facing the same opponent twice in one weekend at one site. Travel partners will play the final two weeks of the season.
* The regular-season champion will be the Mountain West’s NCAA tournament automatic qualifier.

**WOMEN’S SOCCER**

* A 10-match Conference-only schedule in a divisional double round-robin format taking place over a six-week period (March 5-April 11).
* Matches will be played on Friday and Sunday.
* A single match will take place on Sat., April 17, at a campus site between the two division winners to determine the Conference automatic qualifier to the NCAA tournament.

The NCAA pushed back the basketball season to open with a Nov. 25 start date that allows teams to schedule a maximum of 27 games, fewer than in recent years. There will be no preseason scrimmages or exhibition games. The West Coast Conference is seriously considering a bubble format in Las Vegas for its league season, and Mountain West Commissioner Craig Thompson admitted the WCC might have company. “We’ve spent some time talking about it, reading about the West Coast Conference’s bubble concept,” Thompson said on radio with the Las Vegas Sports Network. The proposed WCC model is to bring all 10 teams to Las Vegas for 2½ weeks for eight games each, return to their campuses for a couple weeks without games, then back to Sin City for the second half of the 16-game conference schedule.

**It is being reported** that “in the same week that the **BIg Ten’s** 21-day isolation policy ensnared one of the league’s high-profile players, some of the nation’s most acclaimed sports cardiologists published a paper that may undermine the B10 return-to-play rule less than two months after its adoption.” The report indicates that the cardiac abnormalities physicians feared are rare enough among athletes that doctors are no longer recommending cardiac screenings for those who with mild or no symptoms. Co-author Dr. Martinez: “The vast majority of athletes are falling into the asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic group. The yield and events [of heart abnormalities] are small based on limited outcome data. We are seeing that in the **NCAA** and professional sports.” He adds, per the data, less than 1% of COVID-positive athletes who experienced mild or no symptoms are showing signs of myocarditis. Northwestern President Schapiro notes that at the time the decision was made, myocarditis was “everywhere in the news. “Doctors said 21 days. I’m an economist by trade. Who am I to tell an expert, ‘Why 21 and not 20 or 10 or 14??”

**NWAC NEWS**

As we continue to focus on trying to return play, the concern about Oregon schools outside of UO and OSU not getting the same opportunities as the two big Oregon schools, seems to be gathering steam. University of **Portland** AD Scott Leykamis exploring out-of-state options that would allow his MBB and WBB programs to hold practices and host games. I know some of our NWAC member colleges have been contacted. **The Oregonian’s** John Canzano, who notes that Governor Brown did not give UP the same exception she afforded to **Oregon** and **Oregon State** even though the Pilots submitted protocols which mirrored UO’s and OSU’s. Brown’s office explained that it is not approving new exemptions and advised UP to try again in six to 12 weeks. Canzano: “If the aim of our state government is to keep students safe and limit the spread of the virus, chasing people across state lines doesn’t feel like the right tactic. Consistent and clear guidelines would be a good start. Daily testing, too. If UP can exactly copy the protocols approved at Oregon and OSU, doesn’t it work for everyone?”

**Portland State** AD Valerie Cleary says it's "glaringly obvious" the Governor's office is holding **Oregon** & **Oregon State** to a different standard than PSU & **Portland.** On the idea the Vikings could drive over to Vancouver, WA for full-contact scrimmages, something it can't do in-state now, "nothing is ever that simple." More, "Make no mistake about it; I AM COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING OUR STUDENT-ATHLETES in their academic and athletic endeavors while keeping their health and safety as the number one priority.”

On Monday I met with representatives from with the State of Washington Group working on a draft of higher education guidelines. The group reviewed a second draft to return to practices and competition. There is to be one more review of the document by those outside our group, and we were told that a formal version could be released by the end of this week. What I have learned in all of this, is when deadlines are given they typically are not met as stated. Last week’s NWAC newsletter contained the main points of the draft, so please review last week’s newsletter to familiarize yourself with the details. It is pretty important information to know.

We asked the representative from Governor Inslee’s office if we would be willing to meet with the four executive directors of conferences in the PNW and representatives from Governor Brown’s office to help move the needle for Oregon colleges. He said yes, once the Washington policy is formalized. Following are additional points shared at Monday’s meeting:

* Be very leery of playing third party opponents. You do not know their safety protocols and it may be best to not entertain those type of teams.
* These are guidelines and not prescriptive.  It is the responsibility of institutions and conferences to have plans in place and execute.
* Institutional and athletic RTP guidelines should be on your websites.
* Strength and Conditioning Issues

\*If the public is using your strength and conditioning facilities that are used by student-athletes, then you follow the governor’s policy on public work out facilities.

\*If your strength and condition facilities are used solely by student-athletes, then use your school protocols and have additional measures in place.  This would pertain to intramurals as well.

As I have shared in previous newsletters we have an ad hoc committee working on language for a possible waiver for NWAC student-athletes for the 2020-2021 academic year. That language has been revised a couple of times and the latest draft has been sent to the Executive Board for their review. The EB will have a brief meeting on Thursday next week to discuss and potentially vote on the waiver language. We have been waiting to see what the four-year conferences will do regarding our waivers before we have formalized our plans. We are trying to understand and limit any of the seen or unforeseen consequences that may arise do the waiver.

On Wednesday of this week, NWAC hosted an esports webinar led by Jeff White, NJCAAE Executive Directors, Shelley Bannish and Jacob Beach from Centralia College, and Rick Ross and Charlie Morrow from Peninsula College. It was quite interesting and the opportunities and benefits seem rich. If you did not attend the webinar I would encourage you to review the webinar (it was recorded and let Donna or I know and we can sent you the link) and have discussions with your administration. Feel free to talk with Shelley, Rick or AD’s at SWOC, UCC, and GHC as they have esport teams as well.

After meeting with Dr. Robins (PenC President and represents the NWAC with WACTC) the NWAC will put together a survey that will be sent directly to the presidents. The intent is to get information as we prepare for winter and spring quarters and believe it is wise to bring the presidents on the gathering and the ultimate dissemination of this information.

Thank you for turning in your weekly COVID-19 reports. As we track cases, we are getting a better picture of what is transpiring on campuses. Overall the numbers seem to be good in terms of the number of active cases. The numbers can get skewed because in the last two reports, we have had big numbers though specific to two institutions. There notes at the bottom in which I try to give a brief but better picture of why the numbers are what they are. I cannot stress the importance of you riding herd on your student-athletes and coaches to not let up on following safety protocols. Error on the side of being conservative and don’t worry about the complaining of the temporary inconvenience of wearing a mask or practicing other social distancing measures.

Speaking of coaches, there are rumors that NWAC coaches may not be following safety protocols with their teams. If the rumors are true, this cannot happen. It short sided and extremely selfish. We cannot have a handful of coaches sink a ship carrying about 4000 student-athletes. It is imperative that you are fully aware of what is going on under your leadership. Please be aware of what your coaches and teams are doing. Acts of commission and omission just cannot be tolerated.

**In conclusion,** I came across an interview with Tom Michael, Director of Athletics at Eastern Illinois University. Following are excerpts that I hope you will find beneficial. In his time as the head of the department, he and his team have come to see [**the student-athlete experience**](https://collegead.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=61c4fe7ac5a0a938837995044&id=bfe1240720&e=ed9188d58c) as paramount to what they are doing at Eastern Illinois; helping in all facets of department life, from winning on the field to excelling in the classroom. *“I can see how the mental health side of things really comes into play right now. It gave me a really good perspective in regards to that as well. Some things have changed, but the experience of what it’s like balancing between being a student and an athlete is the same. We still had time management issues to overcome, there are still components they have to deal with on the athletic and academic side of things.”*

Part of what he likes to stress to his student-athletes is that [**they will never ask for them to put sports before academics or vice versa**](https://collegead.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=61c4fe7ac5a0a938837995044&id=475b41e351&e=ed9188d58c). Michael views all parts of the student-athlete experience as valuable components to the whole person. *“Kids may have changed over the years, but the student-athlete component is still there. Being part of a team, being coachable, what that means to their future. It’s all part of the Bigger Picture.”*

He says one of the things he [tells parents](https://collegead.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=61c4fe7ac5a0a938837995044&id=4f3e98d6f0&e=ed9188d58c) of recruits is **“we got to give them back better then we got them.” *“****This is something we talk to our coaches about frequently, these parents are entrusting their son or daughter with us for the next four or five years. We have to take seriously how important it is to give them back better; we have to make them better young men and young women and make sure they are prepared to be successful when they leave Eastern Illinois. At the end of the day, that student-athlete experience may potentially lead to them being our best recruiters.”*

Michael’s words speaks volumes, especially about giving student-athletes back better than when we got them. That should be foundational to what we are doing. Engage with your coaches and staff on how to do this. What a great discussion to have and to make a focal point of your athletic department. How can you go wrong or be faulted for using one of the greatest tools (athletics) to make student-athletes better? How about demonstrating and applying the principles he addresses. The choice is yours.

Marco