

 November 6, 2020

Good morning Commissioners, and following is the weekly update:

**Outside the NWAC**

So far, Oregon State’s athletic programs have had incredible success dealing with the coronavirus pandemic as they begin practices and prepare for an upcoming season. “We’ve done 4,000 antigen tests since Sept. 25 when we started,” said Dr. Doug Aukerman, senior associate athletic director for sports medicine at Oregon State. “And we’ve had one true positive.”

The **Pac-12** rolls-out additional details of its testing plans as football heads back to the gridiron this weekend. Notably, once weekly PCR tests that will take place within 36 hours of kick or departure for the matchup, "Any positive daily point-of-care antigen test must be followed by a PCR test within 24 hours," as well as, "POCT on game day, results prior to contest."

Although college basketball has yet to tip off in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic is already impacting the sport. Most recently, one Pac-12 team has backed out of the Crossover Classic due to concerns about the virus. According to CBS Sports’ Matt Norlander, the Utah Utes will no longer participate in the Crossover Classic, which takes place in South Dakota. The Utes had concerns about South Dakota’s worsening spread of the coronavirus. A number of other big-name programs are still supposed to take part in the tournament, though.

Time will certainly tell, but recent spikes of COVID-19 have influenced the NCAA’s thinking regarding its most prestigious event, according to NCAA Senior VP of Basketball Dan Gavitt. “It’s certainly influenced our thinking,” Gavitt said Thursday morning when asked if recent COVID-19 outbreaks expedited the NCAA’s thinking about putting the 2021 NCAA Tournament in a bubble. “The contingency planning for the NCAA Tournament right now is just as significant as it was for the regular season.”

The **NCAA** is recommending that hoops officials be tested for COVID-19 three times per week on non-consecutive days. On weeks when officials are only working one game, the NCAA recommends considering a “minimum of one test before the game, either PCR within three days before the assignment or antigen/rapid PCR on the same day as the assignment.” The guidelines also include recommendations for host institutions on topics such as testing protocols, time of arrival for officials, locker room/meeting space availability and availability of showers, towels and water bottles.

The **Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference** (SIAC), announced that it will seek to cautiously and prudently move forward with the 2021 winter and spring sports schedule.  The SIAC men’s and women’s basketball schedule will begin on January 9 and will feature a 12-14 game conference schedule that will culminate with the SIAC Basketball Championship Tournament featuring all SIAC men and women teams

Pre-scheduled "idle weeks" built into the FB season have become "potential landmine(s)," according to reporting by **The Athletic,** as coaches now have to worry about student-athletes dispersing to different regions and spawning a COVID-19 outbreak among team personnel. **Cincinnati** HC Fickell, whose team had to postpone its matchup with **Tulsa** due to an increase in positive COVID cases following a bye week, proposes that teams proceed with caution: “Yes, you have to make sacrifices. Yes, you have to limit contact. But some way, somehow, things are going to happen. We’ve got to continue to reiterate the sacrifices our guys have to make. It’s hard to tell them not to see their family, or if they come to the game don’t give them a hug afterward. If those things happen, those things happen. We can’t live our life in fear, but we have to be conscious of what it is we do when we’re out there.”

**NACDA** hosted a conversation with award-winning motivational speaker, author & writing coach Alex Montoya yesterday. Of note from Montoya, "It all begins by waking up this day and just being thankful. If a boy from Colombia born missing three of his limbs can come to this country and make his dream come true, why can’t you? There is no adversity great enough, there is no challenge great enough, if we really believe in what we’re doing. [...] Maintain the passion that keeps you inspired. Not only can we have a successful career, but we can change the world through athletics."

**NWAC NEWS**

Throughout the last month you have been made aware of Oregon Governor Brown’s stance on returning to play for institutions of higher education. Her stance up until Wednesday was that only the University of Oregon and Oregon State University may return to compete in “High Contact Sports.” High Contact Sports as defined by the governor’s office is basketball, football, wrestling, etc. For NWAC specifically, our basketball falls into that category. It seems based on the pressure mounting (I shared in last week’s newsletter that  **the Oregonian’s** John Canzano, noted 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) that she has changed her mind.

Following is a statement released from Governor Brown on Wednesday, “Since March Madness was unceremoniously canceled last spring, it’s been clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a large impact on Oregon’s athletes. Oregon faces a number of serious challenges, including getting Oregon kids back into classrooms, making sure Oregon families who lost everything to wildfires have a warm place to call home, keeping businesses open and stopping the spread of COVID-19. I am focused on doing what is best for Oregon, and keeping Oregonians healthy and safe from this disease. But in a pandemic that has had a devastating impact on the mental and social health and well-being of Oregon’s youth, I know that sports are important, too. I wish I could tell Oregonian athletes that it was safe for all sports to resume—but as Oregon’s COVID-19 case counts, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to rise, that is not what the health experts are telling me.

 “Because Oregon’s NCAA Division I schools have brought forward COVID-19 health and safety plans requesting the opportunity to resume practice and competition, I am extending the Pac-12 exemption for college athletics to all Division I schools in Oregon because it is only fair to give Portland State University and the University of Portland the same opportunity that Oregon’s Pac-12 schools have had. I want to stress that this exemption does not automatically grant these programs the ability to practice and play. They must first work with the doctors and health experts at the Oregon Health Authority and demonstrate that they have met the same standards of health and safety as Oregon’s other Division I programs.”

 “With COVID-19 spreading at an alarming rate, college programs below the Division I level, as well as high school and youth sports teams, still may not play contact sports. While the Pac-12 and other Division I teams are implementing daily testing, quarantine and isolation protocols, and other health and safety measures that will help  mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19, there is no way to eliminate that risk. Contact sports in general remain a high-risk activity according to public health experts, and we must continue to do all we can to slow the transmission of the disease.  “So much of this pandemic has been unfair. I hope that, in the future, I will have better news for our youth athletes. But first, we need to get COVID-19 under control.”

On one hand, she has shown that she is willing to make an exception. On the other hand, all other collegiate sports, K-12 sports, and other sports are still are on hold when it comes to “High Contact Sport.” With that said, it seems that NWAC member colleges who have basketball student-athletes on campus should not be holding practices in which there is contact or/ intra-squad scrimmages in a 5 on 5 manner.

Earlier this week Dr. Scott and I talked about this situation and it is clear that this is an example of the “haves and have nots.” She is working with the Community College Presidents of Oregon to write a letter to Governor Brown asking Brown to at least give the other colleges in Oregon the same opportunity she is giving the D1 schools.

Yesterday the Oregon Health Authority released the following information which may be why the Governor may be reluctant, “Today, we reported 805 new COVID-19 cases in Oregon; sadly, this is another record daily case count. The cause of today’s cases is still under investigation, but data from recent weeks continues to show that increased spread is due to small informal gatherings rather than large workplace or other outbreaks, according to Dean Sidelinger, state health officer at OHA. “COVID-19 is spreading in Oregon at an unprecedented rate, driven in no small measure by in-person, indoor social gatherings. You are most likely to get COVID-19 from your family and friends,” said Governor Kate Brown.

 Oregonians have made tremendous sacrifices to help each other throughout this pandemic, which is why Oregon has done relatively better than many other states at containing COVID-19. “Today’s high case count, combined with recent high counts, continue to show that COVID-19 is spreading more rapidly in Oregon than we had hoped,” Sidelinger said. “All this data leads us to conclude that Oregonians are circulating more in their communities. They are letting their guard down – and doing so as the weather turns colder. They are also spending more time indoors. Our tools to manage such spread rely on Oregonians getting more strict with themselves: not gathering or attending parties of any kind, wearing face coverings when outside the household, and physically distancing at all times.”

Earlier this week Dr. Scott (President, SWOC) and I talked about this situation and it is clear that this is an example of the “haves and have nots.” She is working with the Community College Presidents of Oregon to write a letter to Governor Brown asking Brown to at least give the other colleges in Oregon the same opportunity she is giving the D1 schools.

Monday I attended the weekly meeting with representatives from with the State of Washington and the ICP working on a draft of higher education guidelines and frankly my optimism is being tested. It will now be coming up on two weeks that the Washington State Department of Health said that the final version of the State of Washington Return to Play Guidelines would be announced. We were told on 10/19/20 that the draft was close. On 10/26 we were told by the end of the week the guidelines would be published, and on Monday 11/2 we were told it would be any day now. I do know that the Department of Health was concerned that one day last week was the highest day of cases in Washington since March. So that may be causing the delay.

Yesterday I shared The Executive Board voted to approve the following waiver language: *For the 2020-2021 NWAC sports season, NWAC student-athletes regardless of the amount of games/matches played will not be charged a year of eligibility. The awarding of a grant in aid/tuition waiver along with the waiver is solely at the discretion of each member college.  Returning sophomore student-athletes who are granted a season waiver/grant in aid tuition waiver will NOT count towards the maximum allowable grant in aid awards per sport 2021-2022.*

The waiver should provide some stability as we move forward and **please be advised that all safety protocols, adjustments to schedules, travel, etc. that was put in place this year due to the pandemic stay in place.** In less than 24 hours I have already heard that some people believe that practices, games, travel, etc. can go back to the way things were prior to the pandemic. That cannot be further from the truth! Additionally, current academic and eligibility requirements are in effect for student-athletes to compete in the 2020-2021 regular and post seasons. Throughout the year the conference will continue to assess academic and participation requirements for 2021-2022. Any proposed changes will go to the Executive Board for their review, adoption, and approval.

Earlier this week at the West Region meeting and after frank and robust discussions, the WR commissioners voted unanimously to not participate in non-league contests for 2020-2021. They have legitimately wrestled with this for the last few meetings and ultimately decided to go in that direction. I appreciate their efforts in making a tough but sound decision.

NWAC just signed a three year agreement with Home Town Ticketing (HTT) to be the “Official Online Ticketing Partner for our conference. This is an exciting opportunity for our conference as we look to the future. HTT is the fastest growing digital ticketing provider in both K-12 and collegiate spaces, serving schools, districts, college conferences, high school conferences and state associations at no cost. A press release will be forthcoming and I would encourage you to look at HTT as an opportunity for your institution on a variety of levels.

Received news yesterday from WWCC AD Jeff Reinland that the Warriors will be bringing their student-athletes back on campus in January. The addition of WWCC coming back to campus in the winter now brings the number of 32 of our 36 member colleges looking like they will be ready to go in the winter.

**In conclusion,** this week I came across an article in the Harvard Business Review titled, **“What Are We Here For?”** Following are thoughts from that article and I have made some adjustments to it. Hopefully you will get the practicality of the message.☺

This question is essential for every leader to answer if you want to keep people engaged and focused, especially in times of change and uncertainty. So how can you provide a motivating answer to this question? It can’t come from you and your fellow executives alone. Determining your department’s purpose should involve staff, student-athletes and key stakeholders/supporters of your program. So convene these parties, perhaps in small focus groups, and ask them what they need and expect of your organization now; especially in these turbulent times. Then turn their feedback into a narrative of what success — and failure — looks like. Now is not a time to cling to an old plan. Instead, galvanize those you serve to shape your athletic department’s purpose and future. When you take a collaborative approach, it's more legitimate, more motivating, and more likely to subvert the status quo.

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PS There will no newsletter next week as I will be gone from 11/12-11/19. Gone but will be checking emails and will respond as necessary.