



July 30, 2020

Dear Josh Whitman, Scott Dolson, Gary Barta, Damon Evans, Warde Manuel, Bill Beekman, Mark Coyle, Bill Moos, Jim Phillips, Gene Smith, Sandy Barbour, Mike Bobinski, Pat Hobbs and Barry Alvarez:

As August 2020 approaches, much uncertainty remains surrounding the COVID-19 virus that entered our lives during the first few months of the calendar year. As the Big Ten Conference moves closer to regularly scheduled start dates for fall classes and fall sports, the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in—not only as a Conference, but as a society—is inherently uncertain. We write to share our perspective on certain issues, decisions, and the process regarding the timeline by which decisions will be made.

Health and Safety is of Paramount Importance. The health and safety of our students, student-athletes, and everyone associated with our Big Ten university communities has been and will remain our primary focus. We remain hopeful to compete this fall in men’s and women’s cross country, field hockey, football, men’s and women’s soccer, and women’s volleyball, understanding that we must operate in a manner that seeks to address the challenges that COVID-19 presents. If we determine as a Conference that it is not prudent to compete in the fall of 2020, we will not do so, much like our decision in March 2020 to cancel the Men’s Basketball Tournament in Indianapolis. Our final decision will be rooted in guidance from medical experts and in consultation with institutional leadership, student-athletes, coaches and appropriate federal, state, and local authorities.

Timing. We want to say as clearly as we can that we understand the frustration associated with the circumstances created by the COVID-19 virus. The pandemic has made it challenging to provide information as early as we would like, but it is important for us to be thorough and transparent. We will not, and cannot, proceed with preseason camp until we are certain that we can do so safely and that will depend, in part, on testing. Once we have everything in place to execute our testing protocols effectively, including the appropriate number of tests secured for all fall sports, we can make a decision as to whether preseason camp will begin as currently scheduled. We anticipate making that decision within the next 5 days.

Medical Expertise. We are blessed to have 14 world-class Big Ten research institutions with the resources and expertise to address this pandemic over the past four months, including the Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases (“Task Force”) and the Big Ten Sports Medicine Committee (“Committee”). The Task Force has engaged in extensive research and sharing of materials and conversations with federal, state and local governments, professional and international sports organizations, and medical agencies in order to track and better understand the daily updates surrounding this pandemic. In June 2020, Big Ten institutions developed local policies and protocols for the safe return to voluntary workouts. In July 2020, additional activities have been carefully monitored to promote the safety and well-being of our student-athletes. As the beginning of the fall 2020 season approaches, we will continue to gather additional information, evaluate emerging data and technologies, and seek to implement the highest standards of testing and other safety measures.

Conference-Wide Protocols. We will release our Big Ten Conference medical policies and protocols during the week of August 3, 2020. These protocols are being finalized by the Task Force with significant advisement from the Committee. Policies and protocols will include medical standardized testing requirements that will be consistently evaluated to ensure we are accounting for current medical recommendations. We believe that the implementation of these protocols will help us mitigate risk as we seek to safely resume athletic activity and competition.



Optional Participation and Scholarship Protection. The Big Ten Conference has announced that participation in fall sports is optional. We recognize that some student-athletes, and/or parents, do not feel safe proceeding with the upcoming season. If anyone currently on campus participating in team activities believes that the safest place to be is at home, then that is exactly where we want you to be. Big Ten student-athletes who elect not to participate in intercollegiate athletics at any time during the 2020 summer and/or the 2020-21 academic year due to concerns about COVID-19 will continue to have their scholarship honored by their institution and will remain in good standing with their team. Other important decisions, such as the impact on future eligibility or team financial aid limits, will be addressed at a later date. We cannot emphasize enough that participation at any time throughout the 2020 season is voluntary.

Fall Schedules. Scheduling for fall sports remains fluid and the Big Ten Conference will create a Conference-only schedule for the sports of men's and women's cross country, field hockey, football, men's and women's soccer, and women's volleyball. Administrators, coaches, and Conference staff have been working daily to create schedules that provide the appropriate levels of flexibility to respond in real-time to necessary changes. Many options are under consideration within each sport, and we expect these updated schedules to be released in August 2020. While we remain hopeful for a start in September 2020, flexibility has been created within our scheduling models to accommodate necessary adjustments. Consistent with our collective need to be adaptable to changes in circumstances and evolving medical knowledge, even issuing a schedule does not guarantee that competition will occur.

We have heard from so many of you that the opportunity to compete in intercollegiate athletics is important to the experience and development of our student-athletes. We know how much this matters and recognize that these years are often some of the most formative and impactful years of a student-athlete's life. What motivates us is giving the exceptionally talented young men and women in the Big Ten Conference the opportunity to fulfill their dreams and affording them the chance to compete at the highest levels of intercollegiate athletics. But being a student-athlete is not just about the performance that happens on the field, it is equally about the learning and growth that occurs off of it. Hard work. Singularity of focus. Grit. Resilience. Commitment to a cause larger than one's self. Though we remain hopeful to compete in a Conference-only schedule this fall, we cannot guarantee that will happen. We can assure you that we will be informed by guidance from our esteemed medical experts and will do our best to keep you all informed in the face of rapidly changing circumstances. However the season ultimately unfolds, these are the values that must be strengthened in this uncertain time; these are the values that have been wisely instilled within our student-athletes from a young age and these are the values that will serve these young men and women in building lives of great success and purpose.

Respectfully,

Dr. Chris Kratochvil

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Kevin Warren

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