



An Open Letter to the Big Ten Community:

I write on this occasion to share with you additional information regarding the Big Ten Conference's decision to postpone the 2020-21 fall sports season. We thoroughly understand and deeply value what sports mean to our student-athletes, their families, our coaches and our fans. The vote by the Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors (COP/C) was overwhelmingly in support of postponing fall sports and will not be revisited. The decision was thorough and deliberative, and based on sound feedback, guidance and advice from medical experts. Despite the decision to postpone fall sports, we continue our work to find a path forward that creates a healthy and safe environment for all Big Ten student-athletes to compete in the sports they love in a manner that helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protects both student-athletes and the surrounding communities.

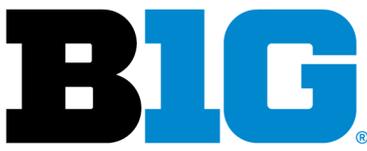
As you are well aware, we are facing a complicated global pandemic with the SARS-CoV-2 virus discovered in November 2019. The first medically confirmed cases did not appear in the United States until January 2020. Over the course of the past seven months, the U.S. has recorded more than 5.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 resulting in more than 170,000 deaths, with more than 22 million confirmed cases and 780,000 lives lost around the world.

We understand the disappointment and questions surrounding the timing of our decision to postpone fall sports, especially in light of releasing a football schedule only six days prior to that decision. From the beginning, we consistently communicated our commitment to cautiously proceed one day at a time with the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes at the center of our decision-making process. That is why we took simultaneous paths in releasing the football schedule, while also diligently monitoring the spread of the virus, testing, and medical concerns as student-athletes were transitioning to full-contact practice.

While several factors contributed to the decision to postpone the 2020-21 fall sports season, at the core of our decision was the knowledge that there was too much medical uncertainty and too many unknown health risks regarding SARS-CoV-2 infection and its impact on our student-athletes.

Listed below are the primary factors that led to the Big Ten COP/C decision:

- Transmission rates continue to rise at an alarming rate with little indication from medical experts that our campuses, communities or country could gain control of the spread of the virus prior to the start of competition.
 - As our teams were ramping up for more intense practices, many of our medical staffs did not think the interventions we had planned would be adequate to decrease the potential spread even with very regular testing.
 - As the general student body comes back to campus, spread to student-athletes could reintroduce infection into our athletics community.
- There is simply too much we do not know about the virus, recovery from infection, and longer-term effects. While the data on cardiomyopathy is preliminary and incomplete, the uncertain risk was unacceptable at this time.
- Concerns surrounding contact tracing still exist, including the inability to social distance in contact sports pursuant to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. While risk



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mitigation processes (e.g., physical distancing, face coverings, proper hygiene, etc.) can be implemented across campus for the student body population, it became clear those processes could not be fully implemented in contact sports.

- With the start of full-contact practices and competitions, it became increasingly clear that contact tracing and quarantining would risk frequent and significant disruptions to the practice and competition calendar.
- Accurate and widely available rapid testing may help mitigate those concerns, but access to accurate tests is currently limited.
- Significant concerns also exist regarding the testing supply chain, generally, for many of our institutions.

Financial considerations did not influence the COP/C decision, as the postponement will have enormous adverse financial implications. We understand the passion of the many student-athletes and their families who were disappointed by the decision, but also know there are many who have a great deal of concern and anxiety regarding the pandemic.

Moving forward, we will continue to build upon the framework that our medical experts have developed over the past five months while we take the opportunity to learn more about the virus and its effects. As we expand upon a plan to allow our student-athletes to compete as soon as it is safe to do so, we will keep our focus on creating protocols and standards set forth and established by our medical advisors that are responsive to the medical concerns evaluated by our COP/C.

To that end, the Big Ten Conference has assembled a Return to Competition Task Force consisting of members from the COP/C, sports medicine and university medical personnel, Athletic Directors, Head Coaches, Faculty Athletic Representatives and Senior Women Administrators to plan for the return of fall sports competition as soon as possible. In evaluating winter/spring models, we will explore many factors including the number of football games that can reasonably be played from a health perspective in a full calendar year while maintaining a premier competitive experience for our student-athletes culminating in a Big Ten Championship. The Big Ten Conference will continue to collect feedback from student-athletes, families, and other constituents and remains in active discussions with its television partners regarding all future plans.

We have tremendous appreciation and understanding regarding what participation in sports means to our student-athletes, their families, our campus communities and our fans. We will continue to make the best decisions possible for the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes. We appreciate the passion of the Big Ten community and will harness that energy towards providing the best possible experience for all Big Ten student-athletes.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Warren". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin Warren
Commissioner
Big Ten Conference