

OSU athletes set to resume voluntary workouts again

By **Joey Kaufman**
The Columbus Dispatch

COLUMBUS Ohio State will permit voluntary workouts in football and six other varsity sports to restart on Wednesday after they had been briefly suspended following multiple positive COVID-19 tests among athletes.

The school said its decision to restart workouts followed a round of testing conducted the previous day among all athletes in seven sports — football, men’s and women’s basketball, field hockey, men’s and women’s soccer and women’s volleyball.

Aggregate testing numbers have not been disclosed by OSU, which has cited privacy reasons. Without figures, it is not known if any more athletes tested positive this week.

In a statement, athletic director Gene Smith said the athletes would

be further tested on a routine basis and the safety of the workouts would continue to be re-evaluated.

“Our Buckeyes are excited to be headed into a new school year and were disappointed last week when we had to temporarily suspend training,” Smith said.

“These young people come from across the nation and the world to be part of our Ohio State family, and we do everything we can to create a safe, healthy environment so that they have a chance to study and compete. Our medical team will continue to evaluate, and we will share decisions as we move forward.”

Athletes who test positive for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate for at least 14 days, either at their home or a designated room on campus if they have a roommate.

Football players first returned for on-campus

voluntary workouts on June 8 when Ohio State reopened the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and Schumaker Complex for use, before men’s and women’s basketball players were back the following week.

Athletes from field hockey, men’s and women’s soccer and women’s volleyball returned June 22.

When Ohio State halted voluntary workouts on July 8, it became the first Big Ten school to suspend its offseason training program. Maryland took the same step three days later when it announced that nine athletes and staff members had tested positive for COVID-19.

On Monday, the NCAA allowed football teams to transition from voluntary workouts to mandatory activities with coaches that include walk-throughs, weight training, conditioning and film study.

COMMENTARY

College football, even in mighty SEC, in real trouble

Dan Wolken
USA Today

The strangest part of the last four months in college football has been watching the so-called leaders of the sport’s most powerful conference acting as if some of the fundamental facts we’ve learned about COVID-19 do not apply to their enterprise.

As recently as mid-May, Alabama athletics director Greg Byrne said in an interview with the SEC Network that the “hope and plan right now is to play this fall with a full schedule and a full stadium” even as construction workers at Bryant-Denny Stadium were falling ill in clusters.

A month after that, Texas A&M’s Ross Bjork expressed optimism that the 50 percent capacity limit imposed by Gov. Greg Abbott for sporting events would be significantly increased by the time football season rolled around.

There was even a suggestion, as states like Georgia and Florida came out of lockdown, that the SEC might play on this fall while other leagues lagged behind.

All the while, SEC schools rushed to get football players back on campus in early June. Against all logic, the infectious disease expert who was helping to write the league’s guidelines for those workouts did not recommend frequent COVID-19 testing, leading several schools to initially say they would only test players who were symptomatic.

“The problem is, with our testing, it doesn’t tell us anything,” Dr. Stevan Whitt of the University of Missouri told The Athletic in arguably the most regrettable public comment from any medical official working in sports during the entire pandemic.

But on Monday, all the delusion ended as SEC athletics directors emerged from an in-person meeting in Birmingham. Though the league will wait at least a couple more weeks before canceling non-conference games like the Big Ten and Pac-12 have already done, the truth was finally laid bare: The SEC is very much at risk

of some drastic decisions if the current COVID-19 trajectory across the league’s footprint isn’t reversed.

“(There were) a couple phone calls last week where you realize exactly what you can see — that the public health trends are not what we had hoped, not what we were seeing in May and June,” commissioner Greg Sankey said Monday on the Paul Finebaum Show. “There has to be more intent, more focus on heeding the guidance that has been provided on distancing, on gathering, on face masks, on hand sanitization. As I understand treatments are better, but we still have a lot of unknowns and those are realities. And everyone of those conversations has ended with, ‘It’ll be important to watch what happens over the next two or three weeks.’”

The subtext of that comment could not be more clear. For all the airtime devoted to COVID-19 misinformation merchants who cherry-pick statistics to suggest this virus is no big deal and engage in performative what-aboutism to try and discredit public health officials, the virus will determine whether SEC football is played — not the other way around.

Few things are more important to the culture and economy of southern states as college football, but even the most craven college president or conference commissioner would have a hard time putting an unpaid, amateur athlete on the field for the sake of a television contract when a dangerous virus is still out of control and hospital resources in small college towns might be scarce.

“We have to see change in public health trend to build the comfort that we’ll have an opportunity to compete this fall,” Sankey told Finebaum.

It might have been helpful if people who work in college athletics had hammered that point home months ago instead of waiting until the last possible moment to make clear that the behavior of fans was going to directly impact whether their favorite teams would be able to play this season.

But the arrogance

with which too many people in this country approached COVID-19 from the beginning has also been a hallmark of the conversation around college football. Too many administrators have spent the last four months offering nothing but happy talk and publicly presenting the rosier possible scenario rather than speaking directly to the massive challenges of pulling off a season in a college environment where any type of bubble isn’t possible and there’s no financial incentive for the players to take the kinds of health risks their professional counterparts are being asked to take.

In fact, the mere suggestion that college football wouldn’t go off as planned has been met with outrage.

Go back to March 27 when Kirk Herbstreit, the most prominent TV analyst in the sport, told ESPN radio he would be “shocked” if the season happened this fall.

“From what I understand, people that I listen to, you’re 12 to 18 months from a vaccine,” Herbstreit said. “I don’t know how you let these guys go into locker rooms and let stadiums be filled up and how you can play ball. I just don’t know how you can do it with the optics of it.”

But rather than take it as a warning, Herbstreit got shouted down by fans who called him a fearmonger. Since then, he’s barely said anything about the coronavirus and others in a position of power decided it simply wasn’t worth the harassment to talk about the reality of this fall. As it turns out, Herbstreit was the smartest of them all.

Years down the road, when the history of how we got here is written, it will be filled with curiosities like Herbstreit being labeled an alarmist and athletics directors talking about full stadiums being fêted for their optimism when all evidence showed that the opposite was true.

Now the situation is too urgent to explain in any other way than the one that’s right in front of us: College football, even in the mighty SEC, is in real trouble.

AREA SPORTS IN BRIEF

Hoover High School postpones athletic hall of fame banquet

Hoover High School Athletic Director Tim Walker announced the school’s athletic hall of fame induction for 2020 has been postponed.

The recognition and induction banquet had been scheduled for Sept. 11-12, 2020. The Class of 2020 inductees include Phil Birney (Class of 1958), Don Hertler Jr. (’81), Jeff Hite (’78), Ashley (Muffet) Kovacs (’05), the late coach Mel Long, and Paul Papparone (’60).

“We want to be sure that we honor these very worthy inductees in a safe and appropriate manner,” Walker said in a statement. “A time for their induction will be announced at a future date when we are confident that we will be able to honor them appropriately for all that they have contributed to North Canton Hoover athletics.”

Colaric joins Mount Union’s sports information staff

Mount Union has named Kelsey Colaric assistant sports information director. Colaric spent the last two years working in the sports information office at St. Francis

University in Pennsylvania. She also worked in Mount Union’s sports information office as an undergraduate.

A Parma native, Colaric will be Mount Union’s primary contact for women’s basketball, softball, men’s and women’s golf, men’s and women’s tennis, men’s and women’s volleyball and men’s and women’s swimming and diving.

Casey Kropka will also return to Mount Union for his second year as an assistant sports information director. He will be the primary contact for men’s basketball, men’s and women’s soccer, men’s and women’s lacrosse, men’s and women’s track and field and men’s and women’s cross country.

Ritter, Mort earn wins at Northern Ohio PGA Junior event

East Sparta’s Connor Ritter and Alliance’s Zoe Mort won division titles during Tuesday’s Northern Ohio PGA Junior Golf event at Chippewa Golf Club in Doylestown.

Ritter fired a 4-under 67 to claim a five-stroke win in the boys ages 11-15 division. Mort shot 80 to win the girls 11-15 division by one stroke.

REPOSITORY STAFF REPORT

KNIGHTS

From Page C1

“Jacob Caniford had to win the mile and we had to win the 4-by-8,” Pederzoli said. Those two things had to happen for us to be in the conversation to be a contender. We knew we had the kids to do that.”

Caniford’s 1,600 win came on the heels of a fourth-place finish in the 3,200 in 2015. He and Cory Glines won the boys team’s 1,600 titles during the decade.

“He put the miles in and would do whatever you told him to do and then some,” Pederzoli said.

“You saw him as kid with a lot of potential coming up, but thought there’s no way we’re going to have a kid who is in the vicinity of being as good as Cory.”

“Jacob was. He was phenomenal his sophomore year and just took off. He was able to get it done.”

For the girls, the Knights already had

broken through in 2015 with a historic win — becoming the first Stark County girls team to win a team title.

Aquinas dominated the relays that year, winning three of them — 3,200 featuring Athena Welsh, Kacee Soehlnen, Kalee Soehlnen and Hannah Soehlnen, the 800 of Kacee Soehlnen, Megan Hoffman, Kalee Soehlnen and Rachael Adams, and the 400 of Hoffman, Adams, Aubrey Dempsey and Rosa Forchione.

Welsh added a win in the 1,600, while Kalee Soehlnen won the 800.

In 2016, five total event wins again helped put Aquinas in control of the girls meet.

It started with Welsh and the three Soehlnens again winning the 3,200 relay, this time in a Division III state-record 9:05.84. Kacee Soehlnen, Emma Pusateri, Kalee Soehlnen and Adams then won the 800 relay.

Welsh swept the 1,600 and 3,200. Kalee Soehlnen won the open 800 again.

“Everyone remembers Athena and Kalee, but there were a lot of girls who were major contributors,” Crawford said.

Welsh ended her high school career as one of Aquinas’ most decorated athletes in any sport. She won three state championships in the 1,600, one in the 3,200 and was part of three title-winning 3,200 relays.

The 1,600 and 3,200 titles won by Welsh in 2016 helped her become only the second Stark County runner to sweep the distance events at state.

“Athena was really good at logging all her miles,” Crawford said. “She put in 6,000 miles from the day she started freshman cross country until she graduated.”

“Nobody should look at her and say, ‘Oh, you’re lucky and you were born with good genes.’ Anybody who puts in those miles is going to get pretty good.”

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OHSAA

From Page C1

we really feel that it is the school’s decision on whether they will have sports or not, just like every other extracurricular activity. We don’t think it is the Ohio High School Athletic Association’s place to say yay or nay to sports. Our main focus is on our tournaments, and we control, so to speak, those.”

Goldring said the OHSAA will follow the lead of Ohio Governor Mike DeWine.

“We really have to take directive from the Governor’s office and his team and his medical staff,” Goldring said. “If there is going to be delays in the season, if there is going to be postponements in the season, if there is going to be items placed in place where only non-contact sports are permitted during the fall, then we have to pivot and look at our different options moving forward. But right now, just to be clear, and this is the message that we have shared with our membership is that we are looking to start our practices as they are normally scheduled on August 1 and our seasons to follow.”

Goldring spoke as there is a continued increase

in cases of COVID-19 in Ohio and across the United States, and as school districts consider online and in-person education options. He said each school in Ohio makes its own decisions on how to handle a positive COVID-19 case in its district.

“Some people may quarantine only that student, some people may quarantine that class, some people may decide to go virtual only for their entire school if they have a positive case,” Goldring said. “... We are facing uncertain and unprecedented times, but our No. 1 priority is the health, safety and well being of our student-athletes and all those associated with our programs.”

Goldring shared the importance of “education-based athletics” and the importance of “students participating in athletics,” but also wants to make sure everyone is healthy.

“We are hearing from a lot of athletes and parents that ‘You don’t understand about the social and emotional impact not having sports can have for our child,’” Goldring said. “Well, believe it or not, most of us are parents and we are invested in sports just as they are. We understand that seasons

have been lost because of the pandemic with the end of the winter and the spring season. We are doing everything we can to try to ensure that our seasons take place, but there is no turning back on the fact that the health, the safety and the well being of our students and others associated with our games is our No. 1 priority.”

Goldring said the OHSAA is “open to all suggestions and all possibilities,” such as “shorter regular seasons and shorter tournaments.”

Another issue is that OHSAA did not receive any revenue from the canceled state basketball and wrestling tournaments in the winter, and from the canceled spring sports season.

The OHSAA fiscal year begins Aug. 1.

“How do you plan your budget when you basically have had two seasons of no income and the possibility of a third season. Who knows what is going to happen,” Goldring said.

Goldring also mentioned the possibility of stadiums and gyms having smaller capacities due to social distancing measures in place, and that the football playoffs could be fewer than the normal five rounds.

5K

From Page C1

Ohio,” Jim Chaney, executive race director for the Pro Football Hall of Fame Marathon, said in a statement. “Runners and walkers of all abilities are encouraged to participate and will earn an event shirt, a commemorative finisher medal, an event bib and the chance for a variety of prizes. We expect thousands to run together alone across the country on the morning of Saturday, Sept. 19.”

Each runner randomly

will be placed on one of 10 teams that represents a specific decade of the NFL. There is a friendly team score competition based on finishing place. All members of the winning team will receive a special commemorative item. An awards ceremony will take place virtually at 4 p.m., Sept. 19, on Facebook Live.

This 5K race is the Ohio championship for the Road Runners Club of America.

The race beneficiary is the Timken Family Cancer Center, a 77,600-square-foot treatment facility

that soon will be under construction on the Aultman Hospital campus.

As the coronavirus pandemic evolves, additional safety procedures will be released as it relates to in-person runners. If the race cannot take place in-person, all runners and walkers would participate virtually on their own.

The fee to participate in the race is \$40 for adult runners and walkers and \$20 for youth. To learn more and to register for the race visit www.hofmarathon.com/centennial-5k.