

Penn State University Athletics Media Conference

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Sandy Barbour

Vice President of Intercollegiate Athletics
Press Conference



SANDY BARBOUR: I assume we're all here to talk about mobile ticketing? (Laughter.) Okay, got a little bit of a laugh.

Thanks, everybody, for being here on the opening of spring ball. Just a couple of opening comments from me and then obviously more than happy to take your questions.

I love Penn State. I have loved my eight years here, almost eight years, not quite at this point. It's been an incredible journey and really an honor and a privilege to serve this community, serve this university, and most importantly, serve our student-athletes.

As we got clear of the fall, the bowl game, the football season, the bowl game, finished up our volleyball search, women's volleyball search, our COVID numbers started to go down, and we all could kind of take a little bit of a breath, I really started reflecting and thinking about all of this, thinking about kind of where I was from a health and well-being standpoint and where my mind was.

I didn't get an opportunity to see my family over the holiday because of the bowl -- primarily the bowl and the search. I went and spent some time with my family late in January, and that really started my mind thinking.

As I kind of assessed where I was and started thinking about it in terms of the intersection with where Penn State was, and in particular our presidential transition, I really determined and decided that not only was it the best decision for me and the right time for me, but that it was probably a pretty good time for Penn State. So that's where my decision came from.

I want to say, I want to be really clear about something, and that is that I think that Neeli Bendapudi is going to be fantastic for Penn State. You all know how I feel about Eric Barron and what he has done for Penn State and by extension Penn State athletics, but I am really looking forward to watching what Neeli's leadership, what Penn State will do under Neeli's leadership, what Penn State

athletics will do under Neeli's leadership, because I think she is fantastic. I think she will provide really strong and determined leadership for Penn State that will be very good not only for Penn State but for Penn State athletics.

I think she gets it. She understands the power of athletics and what it can do for a campus, and I think she intends to leverage that to the max, and I for one am very excited to see what that is.

One last thing while we're here, we do have in the room my and our intercollegiate athletics leadership team, and I just want to say that the privilege has been all mine to serve alongside these phenomenal men and women -- I started to say young men and young women. A couple of you are. But I consider it my great honor.

They are fantastic, and will continue to serve Penn State in a first-class and really impactful way. I just want to very publicly -- there will be other opportunities to do that, but very publicly want to say thank you to my team.

Q. It said you would be done in the summer. Will you go to the end of the school year? Will you go close to the start of next school year, and what will the transition phase be like in terms of the transition, and do you want to be a part of the search for your replacement?

SANDY BARBOUR: I've indicated to both Dr. Barron and Dr. Bendapudi that I certainly informed them of this decision in time for them to have some good runway -- well, for Neeli to have the runway to hire somebody before I leave, and obviously until we have somebody else in place, I'll continue to lead this department and make decisions, as has always been appropriate, and as I've told our entire department, you all know me and know that I'm all in it, and I'm probably going to be working my tail off until the last day and maybe leaving the office somewhere around 8:00 or 9:00 at night. I don't know.

Obviously this is Neeli's decision as to who comes next, and whatever is appropriate for me to -- if asked, to provide input, I'll certainly do that. I love Penn State and want only what's best for Penn State.



Q. A big part of what you were able to do during your tenure involves facilities, upgrading facilities, improving facilities. What are some of the highlights to you? Are there things you weren't able to quite get done before retiring that you would like to maybe have been able to get done?

SANDY BARBOUR: Yeah, our plans and the master plan, the 20-year master plan was exactly that at least, and there are lots of things we didn't get done. I certainly wish that we could have gotten more done there.

But again, we purposefully set out to be pretty ambitious, but having said that, everything in that plan, our programs and our student-athletes need, and they need sooner than later. So I certainly would encourage all of our supporters to think about how they can help with that.

But certainly I'll always be very proud of the fact that the Morgan Academic Center renovation was our first capital project in my time and our time here. I think that sent all the right messages. I think it's had something to do -- I don't think it's a huge piece, but it's had something to do with the records that we've set in terms of the academic performance of our student-athletes. They feel a certain sense of pride in walking in there and that the facility itself certainly signals that Penn State cares very deeply about what they do academically.

Certainly the various different phases of Lasch and what we've been able to accomplish there I think have been very, very important, obviously a big stage underway at this point, and then some smaller things to come. Panzer Stadium for lacrosse obviously was a huge piece for that program, what we've done -- the renovation with men's and women's basketball and their locker rooms in the PJC and their strength and conditioning and sports medicine facilities are probably the biggest ones, but there have been lots of little ones that have made a difference.

But having said that, there's still some big ones on the horizon. I know that Penn State in total is taking those very seriously. Certainly we had a setback as it related to COVID that kind of ate up some of our reserves that we were trying to build up to help us address some of those needs, but I know that those improvements are on the horizon. We've made some inroads with donors that are contemplating gifts to help us with those things, and certainly I and I know my successor will continue to encourage those folks to make facilities a priority.

Q. Did you get as far as you wanted in the master plan regarding Beaver Stadium, and in 10 years when you come back, what's Beaver Stadium going to look like then? Or will it even be there?

SANDY BARBOUR: I would say the Beaver Stadium piece is on the timeline that we thought. We never thought that was going to be -- we never said that was going to be in the first five. That needed some runway and some time to accomplish or to undertake the studies and do the kinds of things that you need to be ready for that.

I think that that is -- the Beaver Stadium piece, although obviously a huge piece, that's right on the timeline I think we probably all anticipated.

Yes, I'm looking forward to coming back in some period of time and seeing the renovated Beaver Stadium.

Q. When it comes to the facilities component, why was it so important for Penn State and Pegula Ice Arena to host a Women's Frozen Four this past weekend?

SANDY BARBOUR: Yeah, what a great question. Having been there yesterday it was a great showcase for women's collegiate hockey and what a great showcase for Pegula and the four teams that certainly attended. I talked to representatives of all of those teams over the weekend, and they were just blown away.

We have our eye on taking our place in the Frozen Final Four, taking our place amongst the best in women's college hockey, and the opportunity to show off Pegula, show off our hospitality, shout-out to Jen James and everyone who worked on that, once again, Penn State comes away from that as kind of being known as best in class, best in the business in terms of hosting high-level events like that.

All of that accrues from a recruiting standpoint, from a stature in college women's ice hockey. All of that accrues very positively to Penn State. It was an important thing for us.

Q. Just curious what's next for you. Is this a retirement? Do you see any role -- will you be an AD again or involved with college athletics? Where do you expect to live?

SANDY BARBOUR: Appreciate the question, and I would appreciate being invited back to be a knit wit. I'm sure that's going to open me up to all kinds of follow-on comments.

Yeah, great question. You all know, you've read it and I have -- when I signed the extension in 2019, I said, this is my last AD job, and nothing has changed about that.



I only know one way, and I've been doing it that one way for 41 years, first as a coach and then as an administrator, and I think there comes a time when you just can't do it the way you expect to, and again, that was part of my decision.

I will not be an AD again. I'm going to close that chapter. There certainly there's some things that I have in mind that I want to do. I definitely want to teach. I did a little bit of teaching along the way at some times and really enjoyed it, and you all know how I feel about students and their opportunities, and I'd love to have the opportunity to get in the classroom, where it's kind of like being a coach again.

Other than that, I have no idea. I want to take some time and just do some things maybe at my own pace, and then I'll figure it out. Maybe there will be some consulting. Maybe there will be some cause work that I'll now have the time to do.

Where will I be? I'm going to stay in State College at least for a year. I've got people that I've come to know and enjoy and care for that I want to spend some time with that I otherwise haven't had the opportunity. I want to enjoy Happy Valley. And then probably late next spring I'll move west because I think as most of you know that's where a majority of my family is, and I did make the decision that that's where I was going to go.

Q. How do you want to be remembered here? When people think about your tenure and the things that you were able to accomplish, how do you hope they remember you?

SANDY BARBOUR: Well, you know, obviously that's a question for others to answer is how I will be remembered.

You know, I think it's really around on behalf of Penn State kind of having impact on students and their opportunities, having kind of rallying or gathering a community, whether it's the campus community or it's our alumni, or 750,000 living alumni that it's such a point of difference for Penn State.

I hope it's kind of being the leader of a department that really made all of our stakeholders proud, and in the way that we represented them, the way that our student-athletes -- under the leadership of our coaches and under the leadership of our department, how our student-athletes wearing the blue and white, made them proud, and then for students, giving them opportunities.

I said with Brian Tripp on Wednesday, that early on in particularly my AD career, I'll be very honest, I kind of bristled at being a role model for women, being a great female AD. I didn't want to be a great female AD. I wanted

to be a great AD. I wanted to be known as a great AD.

I think over time I've really come around to that in that I can't and don't want to run away from that because I have the opportunity to sit here, because I have the opportunity to sit in a seat and there are girls and young women that have the opportunity to say I can be an AD.

I've come to embrace that because I think that's really important. That's certainly a part of how I hope that I'm seen.

Q. We talked a little bit at the bowl game about your role in the football oversight committee and some of the priorities you had at that point in time. As that chapter gets ready to wind down, what progress have you made between December and now with that group?

SANDY BARBOUR: Well, I actually have an FOC ad com call at 4:00. I will tell you, that is a role that I've really enjoyed. It's a great group of men and women, ADs across the country in the FBS and the Power Five, in the FCS. The NCAA staff is terrific.

We've made significant progress, I think, from a recruiting standpoint, trying to shift to this -- now all of it hasn't been announced, but trying to make sure that we're keeping track and kind of rolling with this new landscape, and then obviously always from a health and safety standpoint.

Always more work to be done and always needing to kind of keep abreast of where the landscape is and what's going on and be able to pivot.

Obviously during COVID we had to pivot really, really quickly. I didn't particularly enjoy that time, and I wasn't the chair, but tip of the cap, and it has nothing to do with its leadership, it has to do with the men and women on that committee. A lot of heavy lifting there and great work.

Q. What would you tell your successor about the relationship between the words yes and no when it comes to the things that come across your desk, and if you could approach anything differently a second time around, what might those things be and what would you tell your successor about maybe the things you've learned retroactively?

SANDY BARBOUR: Well, I mean, that's any leader. That's anybody running a large organization. It's about priorities, what makes a difference, what are our priorities, what's important to this department, what's important to the university and what's important to our community. Sometimes those conflict.

I don't think that Penn State is really any different as it relates to that question. I think it was the intersection of yes and no? Is that -- okay, I think that's leadership and I think that's any large complex organization, and understanding that you're not going to keep everybody -- everybody is not going to be happy with you all at once.

Q. When you see what Micah was able to do last season with the hoops team, what did you see that reinforced to you that he was the right guy for the job, and what do you see as the immediate future for Penn State men's basketball?

SANDY BARBOUR: Yeah, let me take the last part. I think the sky's the limit. I think what Micah Shrewsbury and his staff and the guys did this year was pretty amazing. You think about the timeline for he and the staff to keep guys from transferring, bring in some turnovers, maybe even the most amazing thing, the recruiting class that he signed, that they signed in November that will be here soon.

Then we go through the season, you see the way the guys bought in and the way they played. They played so, so, so hard in a program that's always been known for the guys playing hard, but I think Micah took it -- Micah and the guys took it to a new level. I'm really excited to watch what they'll do. Just the enthusiasm with the tournament run and the Big Ten tournament run and the kind of outpouring of support and love from the guys to Micah, Micah to the guys, from our Penn State men's basketball enthusiasts.

Hard to believe we were three games under .500 and feeling that good. Now, remember, we missed three games due to COVID. We fairly easily could have been .500.

But the sky's the limit. I think Micah Shrewsbury is going to do great things at Penn State. I was obviously very bullish on Micah when we hired him, and I'm even more so now.

Q. You had mentioned the facility plans. There was recently a survey sent out to fans about Beaver Stadium. At this point, when can fans see something or expect to see something tangible with the renovation? What do you think that timeline looks like?

SANDY BARBOUR: Yeah, the survey is part of -- we have contracted with CAAI to really help us understand what kind of actual tangible interest there is in different products in the stadium, and frankly, to be able to piece together a financial model to actually do the work, what's the financial

-- what's the appetite in terms of what people might consider paying for it. So that's that piece while Populous does some additional design work, and then I think the next steps are to go to President-Elect Bendapudi once she is the president and figure out what we're going to do moving forward and how, and then I think our fans will start to -- I don't know that they're going to see anything tangible in the immediate future. As a matter of fact I know they're not. But they'll start to hear about what the timeline for seeing that might be.

Q. Cael Sanderson just led his team to another national title. Where do Penn State and him stand at this point in terms of contracts, and could you envision a situation where you might do a long-term deal with him similar to what you did with James Franklin?

SANDY BARBOUR: You know, the conversations with Cael, obviously I and we think the world of Cael and what he's been able to do with that program. You know, talking about making the Penn State family proud, not only what they do but how they do it, and certainly those kinds of conversations are always on the mind or in the works.

Q. Curious on this topic: As somebody who's been an advocate for college sports, women's sports and also inclusion, have you weighed in on the Lia Thomas story or just your thoughts?

SANDY BARBOUR: Well, I will say I'm on the NCAA council, which we've had lots of discussions about this, and I certainly have been an advocate for the NCAA taking a look at its rules that I think at the point that we change them in January had been on the books for over 10 years, so they certainly were antiquated from a science -- evolution, scientific standpoint.

You know, it's a complicated issue that obviously has brought about a whole lot of voices on a number of different sides of it. I wish the NCAA had looked at its policies earlier.

You know, I feel for the young women in that program who are thrust into a controversy not of their making. They just want to support a teammate. But they certainly have been, and Lia certainly deserves the opportunity to be exactly who she is.

The competitive swimming piece gets complicated.

Q. As athletic director of Penn State, what's your biggest challenge, Penn State's biggest challenge regarding NIL?

SANDY BARBOUR: You know, I think a lot of it is sorting through what's real and what isn't real. We know what it was supposed to be from an educational and an opportunity foundation, and then kind of dealing with where the gap is between what it actually is and will it settle out. I would say for us, we've done a tremendous job, and we can always do better, but we've done a tremendous job from the education piece. You all have heard me talk about the resources that we have here at Penn State that frankly some of them came out of the woodwork that have been very helpful, and we need to continue to build those out on behalf of student-athletes. But for instance, what kind of background as we put personnel in place to help our students, what kind of background are we looking for, because I'll tell you, six months ago I would have said it was one thing, and today I say it's something else.

As we put people in place, do you then six months from now, is it going to be something different? So I think that's a huge challenge, and it's balancing the place it plays in recruiting, both prospective student-athletes out of high school and either turnovers or retaining your own student-athletes.

I think that's kind of a head scratcher but one that if we're all going to compete, we've got to pay attention to.

Q. Where do you see Penn State athletics going in the next five years, and what will you miss most about this place?

SANDY BARBOUR: Well, thanks for that great question. You know, where is Penn State going to be in five years? I think we're poised to do phenomenal things. We have great coaches. We have great coaches that are great fits for Penn State. That's part of not only are they technically sound in their sport, but they get Penn State, they understand Penn State, they understand that piece I was talking about before in terms of 750,000 living alumni and what fits here in terms of making those that support us in so many different ways, making them proud.

You know, the facilities piece is getting knocked off piece by piece. This is just such an incredible place with great history of success, both in the classroom and in our athletic programs that I think whoever takes over this program is really going to be very fortunate based on the people that they will be surrounded by, student-athletes, coaches, administration, support staff, this campus. I can't say enough about my teammates, other administrators across campus and how supportive they are of intercollegiate athletics.

I think the pieces are here. Some of them need -- we need to keep pushing on a lot of different things, and the

facilities piece is one of them, ways for intercollegiate athletics to maybe garner revenue in different ways. Just because we've never done it before doesn't mean it's a bad thing, and so I think from a mindset standpoint, as a campus, we need to continue to wrap our head around that.

You know, I love this place. It's really special, and it's because of the people. It's because of the values. It's because of the character. It's because of the priority that we place on education. Yeah, we want to win, and we think we can win everything. We think we can win in everything we do, but we're not going to sacrifice the values, the character, the education piece. You know, it's really been a privilege, and for me to have the opportunity to cap off my career as an athletic director and this be the ultimate spot, the end, I'm really, really fortunate.

What I'll miss is I'll miss the people. That's part of why I'm staying for some time. I want to have an opportunity to spend some time with people, not necessarily just for proper goodbyes but just to enjoy.

Yeah, I'll miss 107,000 in Beaver Stadium. I'll miss a raucous Rec Hall or the BJC when it's got the right amount of people in it rocking and rolling for wrestling or either of our basketballs or an occasional fencing match, too. I'll miss the student-athletes. I'll miss the opportunity to be walking across campus or some of the messages that I've gotten from our student-athletes, our Penn State student-athletes, not that the other messages that I've gotten don't mean anything because they do, they mean a lot, but the messages that I've gotten from current and recent Penn State graduates thanking me for things that I didn't even know I did, the ways I had impact on them that I didn't know necessarily, that I'll miss, and frankly that's why we in this business do it is to impact them and help set them up for success. I'll miss those opportunities.

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