

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Kevin Warren

Big Ten Commissioner

Commissioner Press Conference



DIANA SABAU: Thank you, Jon. Good morning. It is amazing to see so many familiar faces here today. I'm Diana Sabau, the deputy commissioner and your chief sports officer of the Big Ten conference. As a life-long athletics practitioner I got to meet and know many of you through my time at The Ohio State University where I served as a senior deputy commissioner -- athletics director, excuse me, and had the blessing of working and overseeing of football Buckeye program.

Before we bring the commissioner to the stage this morning I wanted to share a story with you. When Kevin Warren first took the reins and leadership of this Big Ten conference, he began the journey visiting campuses. And one cold snowy Saturday morning in Columbus, Ohio, I sat with him in the basement of Congress Hall as we watched the Pistol competition. The very next weekend our paths crossed again as we were in Wisconsin celebrating women's ice hockey with Wisconsin and Ohio State series. It was through this time that I began to listen to Kevin Warren and learn of his deep level of care, his commitment to our student-athletes, his attention to detail, his intentional approach to our academic missions.

Today when our football student-athletes are here it was important to Commissioner Warren that we provide them with a space to relax, to enjoy the day, to have proper nutrition and hydration, to have a gaming area, and to have some recovery devices so that when they return to campus they don't miss a beat from being here today and spending time with you. It's those intentional leadership initiatives that set Kevin Warren apart. I am proud as a leader to stand here today to work alongside with this Big Ten conference, as he serves all with grace and humility and deeply understanding what it means to be a student athlete. We're all here today because of our student-athletes. I'm thankful for our presidents and chancellors who chose a path less taken by empowering a business leader to lead a conference in these changing times. He protects their dreams.

And as we embark today and tomorrow through our football media days, I, too, like you, used to attend this event yearly, so it's special. This game of football is

special to so many. So as we introduce and start our countdown to kickoff video and introduce our conference commissioner, I would just like you to welcome him as the sixth commissioner of the Big Ten conference and to his first official football media days. Thank you.

(Applause.) (Video played.)

KEVIN WARREN: Good morning. Welcome to the Big Ten Conference Football Media Days. This is a first for me. As you know, we didn't have one last year, but it really is a pleasure to stand before you today, and it's been incredible to learn so many of your faces and spend time with you. So it's good to see a lot of the media members here today. So welcome. I look forward to spending a few moments with you regarding some comments and then also to answer some questions.

It also is special to be able to have this event broadcast live on Big Ten Network, who is an incredible partner of ours, and so all of our fans across the globe and in the United States can watch this live.

I'm grateful to the Irsay family, the Indianapolis Colts, and the Indiana Sports Corporation. I'm also happy to see many of our network partners here today who have become not only business associates, but mainly partners and friends. So our individuals from Fox, who I've seen, the Big Ten network, ABC, ESPN, CBS, and Sirius XM Big Ten radio.

It is also enlightening for me to see many of our bowl partners here and I just am so appreciative that you all traveled from both near and far to join us today in Indianapolis for our Big Ten media football days.

Our bowl partners are really special, just like our network partners, but our bowl partners provide our student-athletes with the opportunities to really enjoy what it means to participate in a bowl game, to travel, to experience new items and new experiences across the country. So I will always be appreciative of our bowl partners, again, so thank you for coming in today here today.



I also want to thank our chancellors and presidents and our athletic directors for really allowing us to bring together 14 exceptional head football coaches and 42 student-athletes here at our media days.

One other item, before I get into my formal comments, is I want to congratulate our more than 170 Big Ten athletes and coaches from 37 countries who will be representing us at the Tokyo Olympic games, which is incredibly, incredibly special for the Big Ten conference.

So I really want to focus on three major themes today. Number one, and that is to respect the 125-year tradition of our conference; Number two, to protect our conference and our constituents; and number three, to successfully transform the conference as college athletics continues to evolve and grow literally on a daily basis.

So first, to respect the tradition of the Big Ten conference. We are a powerful force in college athletics. We are a powerful force in college football. And I expect our Big Ten teams to do very well in our bowl games. I expect them to compete for the National Championship every single season. And since the first season of college football in 1869, Big Ten schools have accumulated more National Championships than any other FBS conference. We also have had more Heisman Trophy winners, 19, than any other FBS conferences. Legends such as Archie Griffith, Eddie George, Howard Cassady, Allen Ameche, Ron Dayne, who was coached by Barry Alvarez, Desmond Howard, Charles Woodson, and now Kinnick, just to name a few.

Interestingly enough, 16 of our former Big Ten student-athletes have been inducted to the pro football Hall of Fame. That number will grow to 66 here in a couple weeks when Charles Woodson of the University of Michigan will become the 11th Michigan Wolverine to be enshrined in Canton.

However, our success on the football field, our success in our athletic programs of the Big Ten conference really transcends football and the traditions of football. In 2021 alone, seven of our Big Ten student-athletes were named national Player of the Year, all the way from Luka Garza at the University of Iowa, and Cole Caufield from the University of Wisconsin. We set many records during this past season for both men's and women's sports. We sent more teams to the NCAA tournament in our men's basketball and our women's basketball than we had ever done before. The wrestling team at the University of Iowa won its 24th National Championship and Michigan won its first women's National Championship in gymnastics.

I am also equally proud of the academic success of our Big

Ten student-athletes. They truly are student-athletes. We ranked No. 1 in the history of college athletics in the number of academic All-Americans. And during the 2021 academic year 5,183 of our Big Ten student-athletes were named All-Academic Big Ten. And we had five student-athletes earn the prestigious NCAA Elite 90 award. One special student athlete who I have had the incredible opportunity to becoming close to is Marissa Mueller, a track and field student athlete at the University of Iowa, who was awarded a 2021 Rhodes Scholarship, which is amazing.

This morning is a special day. It's special for me. It's special for our conference. It's special for our network partners. It's special for our bowl partners. It's special for our chancellors and presidents, our athletic directors, our faculty athletic representatives, our senior women administrators, but most of all, it's special for our student-athletes and their families. This is the start of our season. One of the main reasons why this morning is special to me is that I have the distinct honor and pleasure to announce to you today that Barry Alvarez, who basically epitomizes success, integrity, hard work, creativity, intelligence, and leadership in the Big Ten conference. He's a member of the College Football Hall of Fame, the Rose Bowl Hall of Fame, the Orange Bowl Hall of Fame, and the Wisconsin Hall of Fame. He has over 40 years of college athletics experience, has agreed to join the Big Ten conference as our special advisor for football. Coach.

(Applause.)

I trust Barry Alvarez implicitly. I have known him since the days that I was a law student at the University of Notre Dame and he was the defensive coordinator. He means everything to this conference and we're so grateful that's agreed to join us at the conference office. He'll be working on projects such as college football potential expansion, building relationships with our media partners, health and safety issues, scheduling issues, bowl partnerships. And I am grateful that his incredible wife, Cindy, has continued to support him, encourage him, and empower him to work after his retirement, and I am so grateful that Coach Alvarez has agreed to join the Big Ten Conference.

And, Coach, I'm looking forward to working with you and your leadership. I appreciate everything that you've meant to me and to the conference.

Number two, as I said, to protect the conference. Seventy-one days into my tenure as commissioner of the Big Ten conference, which started on January 2nd of 2020, the reality of protecting our student-athletes, the Big Ten conference, and our constituents took on a whole new meaning because we faced the global pandemic. We



faced COVID 19, which had never happened ever in the history of our world. To operate a conference in a global pandemic, to try to plan sporting events, we had to keep in mind that our most important item that we needed to focus on was the health and safety of our student-athletes. This was a very complicated and complex time in our nation, in our world, in college athletics. It was complicated for all of us. Many of us loss loved ones to COVID 19. This was not a perfect time for us in the conference, but it was productive. We learned -- I know I personally learned many important lessons and I feel that we grew stronger together as a conference. And I have to say, during our COVID 19 period, we were responsible at the conference office for creating, planning, and implementing 18 sports schedules across the conference, and thanks to leadership across our 14 institutions, the collective work of our sports medicine committee, our return to competition task force, which was chaired by Dr. Jim Borchers at The Ohio State University, and Sandy Barbour, the athletics director at Penn State University, and the task force for emerging infectious diseases, which was chaired by Dr. Chris Kratochvil at the University of Nebraska. We were able to complete 1,843 out of the 2,000 games and competitions that were scheduled. That constitutes 92 percent success rate that our student-athletes were able to participate in. And that only comes from just tremendous dedication and teamwork.

So when we gather on days like today, I look forward to the fall when I can get back out to campus, visit the 14 member institutions, spend time with our key constituents on our campuses, watch our student-athletes play. We have talented student-athletes in our athletic programs. And as I said, from the moment that I accepted this job in the summer of 2019, I embraced the fiduciary responsibility to protect the physical and mental wellness of our student-athletes.

Continuing our commitment to protect the physical and mental wellness of our student-athletes, prior to the upcoming fall season, we will announce the hiring of a chief medical officer. The Big Ten continues to illustrate the importance of diversity in our leadership ranks, at the conference office, and on our campuses. Since formally becoming commissioner in January of 2020, we have had five new chancellors and presidents start in the Big Ten conference, three women, and two men of color. Kristina Johnson at The Ohio State University, Barbara Wilson at the University of Iowa, Pamela Whitten at Indiana University, Darryll Pines at the University of Maryland, and Jonathan Holloway at Rutgers University, which means eight of our 14 chancellors or presidents are women and men of color. Five women, and three men of color.

I will always emphasize and stress the importance of

diversity, equity, and inclusion, and I'm incredibly pleased with the strides that we have made in this area. For example, in addition to football, from a basketball standpoint, we had three jobs open during the 2021 basketball hiring cycle. Those three jobs went to men of color. Mike Woodson at Indiana University, Ben Johnson at the University of Minnesota, and Micah Shrewsberry at Penn State University.

The one job in our women's basketball ranks that was open went to Marisa Moseley at the University of Wisconsin where Coach Alvarez led that athletic department. And most recently, Northwestern University made history by hiring Derrick Gragg as the first black athletic director in the history of Northwestern University.

Also during the hiring cycle, the Big Ten conference became stronger from a football standpoint. Coach Bret Bielema at Illinois University, Trev Alberts, the new athletics director at Nebraska, and Chris McIntosh, the new athletics director at Wisconsin. All of these men are smart, dedicated, former football student-athletes who love the Big Ten and who will make this conference even stronger and better. We have diversity of color. We have diversity of gender in our athletics directors ranks also.

Our conference is also committed to gender and equity and we look forward to working through issues involving gender equity and making sure that we're doing everything we possibly can in our conference to make the world a better place and make it equal for both men and women to participate.

We're building a diverse group in our Big Ten conference office also. As you heard from Diana Sabau we hired a woman to be our deputy commissioner and chief sports officer. Another woman in Erica McKinley to be the first chief legal officer and general counsel, from an African American woman standpoint, in the history of the Big Ten conference.

We have another gentleman, Omar Brown, a man of color, to be senior vice president of people and culture. We're building a diverse team from the entry level ranks to our senior leadership in the Big Ten office. I am so proud of what we're doing across our campuses. And the Big Ten Equality Coalition is diligently working to make strides to combat hate and racism and to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

One other item that was a proud moment for us in the Big Ten conference was our first game, when the University of Michigan played Minnesota, is that we had the first all black officiating crew. Not only on the field, but also in the replay booth. And I have to thank Bill Carollo, our head of



officials, for leading that effort and making that happen.

In addition to an announcement about Barry Alvarez joining the conference, which is special, we have another special announcement regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion because we're proud to announce the creation of the George and Viola Taliaferro fellowship, which is incredibly, incredibly special in the office of the commissioner. This fellowship will allow young people who strive to get an opportunity to work in college athletics, to build a career. They will be hired at the Big-Ten conference. And the reason why this is so special is that what George and Viola Taliaferro have meant to Indiana University, to the Big Ten conference is spectacular. George was the first black man to be drafted, ever, in the National Football League. And Viola Taliaferro had an incredible year in law, as a lawyer, as a judge. And so for George to have played his college football at Indiana University and to have been drafted by the Chicago Bears makes today incredibly special. But what really make it's special is that their four daughters are here today. Renee and Donna and Linda and Terri have all made the trip to come here today. And I just want to tell you from the bottom of my heart, I am so grateful. I am so humbled. I'm so honored to be able to name the commissioner's fellowship after your parents for what they have stood for, what they have meant to this conference. I keep your dad's trophy on my credenza because I said, I always want George to have my back. And one of my proudest moments was when I attended Indiana University last year is when I had an opportunity to go touch that statue. And whether it's rain, snow, sleet, or sun, he has always stood proud. So congratulations to your family. God speed to your family. God bless your father and God bless your mother and thank you for making the time to come here today.

(Applause.)

The third item regarding transforming the conference. It's clear that we're at an inflection point in college athletics, so the future will demand innovation, collaboration, and transformation. This has been a landmark year as far as student athlete empowerment. On June 21st of 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court in the Austin ruling, changed the landscape of college athletics forever. Forever.

And also, on July 1st of 2021, in the first time in over 150 years of college athletics, student-athletes gained the opportunity to be able to compensate for their name, image, and likeness, which I still believe needs federal legislation. We in the Big Ten conference embrace the empowerment of all of our student-athletes from social justice initiatives to NIL. Our student-athletes in the Big Ten conference, which you'll be able to see over the next couple days, are bright, hard working, intelligent, creative,

and resilient.

That being said, is why the mental health and wellness of our student-athletes has been critically important to me personally, to our conference, and will remain a top priority for our conference.

In May of 2020 we announced the formation of our Big Ten conference mental health and wellness cabinet to basically ensure a comprehensive program of mental health programs for our student-athletes. We will continually focus on the mental health and wellness of our student-athletes as we move forward.

Also driving this transformation in college athletics is the future structure and operations of the NCAA and its role in college athletics, as well as projects such as the potential expansion of the college football playoff system.

In evaluating the future role of the NCAA, I strongly believe that environments like we're in now that are complex, that are complicated, that are critical, provides us the opportunities to create a landscape, a platform, to really evaluate what college athletics, what role should the NCAA play, what should it look like as we go forward. And so what I would challenge all of us to do is to not to be critical, but to be thoughtful, to really do our homework, to come together, to evaluate what structure will work best to service the needs of our student-athletes and our many partners, which is critically important.

And regarding the College Football Playoff system and the potential expansion, I greatly appreciate the hard work of Bill Hancock and his staff. I also greatly appreciate the hard work of president Eric Barron of Penn State University and his colleagues who serve on the College Football Playoff Board of Managers. And I also appreciate the hard work, dedication, of my peers and colleagues who serve on the College Football Playoff Management Committee.

That said, I am focused on picking the appropriate time to really spend the time, energy, and effort with the necessary constituents to determine when the right time is and what we need to do, how we need to structure any potential expansion of College Football Playoffs. We need to talk to our chancellors and presidents, our athletic directors, our faculty athletic representatives, our senior women administrators, our coaches, our bowl partners, our network partners, our fans, but most importantly, our student-athletes and their families.

Our network partners in the Big Ten are special. I thank them for believing in us. The last 15 months showed us what it really means to be a good partner and for us to be creative. We had nearly a hundred million viewers watch



Big Ten football. We had eight million viewers watch the Big Ten football championship game that was held here. These numbers truly show how much our fans love Big Ten football, how much Big Ten football is special to them. And it's amazing that only 37 days from today is our first Big Ten game this year, when Illinois will play Nebraska to kick off the 2021 football season.

So in closing, many people asked me what I learned last year. One of the things I learned is the importance of people, the importance of relationships. And what makes college football special is our people and our relationships. One other person I would really like to thank is Morty Schapiro, president of Northwestern University, who has served as my board chair of the chancellors and presidents group since I've been here.

I would also like to thank Chancellor Rebecca Blank from the University of Wisconsin who has agreed to serve as the new board chair for our chancellors and presidents.

So it was important for me today to celebrate this conference, its history, its tradition, and we will continually work through all of these issues in college athletics to be creative, to be thoughtful, to be humble, to be honest, to be hard working, to be innovative so we can do all that we can to make sure we keep the main thing the main thing and that is to create an environment for our student-athletes to have an incredible experience, to get a world class education on one of our 14 campuses, to compete at the highest level from an athletics standpoint, to be in the position to compete and win National Championships.

With that, I would like to thank my wife, Greta, who has been steadfast by my side for many, many years. We're coming up on our 30th wedding anniversary and I'm so grateful, Greta, for your love, support, and dedication and your toughness and honesty.

And also, Mai Davis, who's been my executive assistant for 31 years. So it's people like this who helped me, along with our daughter, Peri, and our son, Powers, to make sure I recognize that this is truly a blessing to be involved in the Big Ten conference.

So on behalf of our nearly 10,000 student-athletes, our 6.4 million active living alumni, John Griffith, Tug Wilson, William Reed, Wayne Duke, and Jim Delany, I would like to thank you for taking the time to come to our football media days. I would like to thank you for showing me on many days how much you loved me last year, and I appreciate that because I would rather be in an environment like this when people do love and care about what we're doing in the Big Ten instead of the opposite. So I am grateful and it's an honor to serve the Big Ten conference. It's an honor

to be here today and I wish you two great days of gathering information and I pray that you remain healthy, happy, and productive. So with that I'll open it up for questions.

Q. I want to ask you a question about what's in the news. Yesterday there were reports out that Texas and Oklahoma might be considering joining the SEC. I wanted to get your reaction to those reports that have been confirmed now by a lot of different media organizations and ask: Does that possibility prompt the Big Ten to initiate the process of considering expansion?

KEVIN WARREN: That's a great question. I mean, I think one of the things that we recognize, obviously, we are here to celebrate the Big Ten. We are here to celebrate our coaches and student-athletes today, which I would love to focus on that.

But with that question, that being said, I think what we have seen, as I talked about in my comments, we're at an inflection point in college athletics. So whether it's name, image, and likeness, whether it's the Austin case, whether it's potential college football playoff expansion, whether it's schools from one conference joining another conference, these are the kind of issues that we all will be dealing with here this year and for many years in the future.

And so, again, that's the world that we live in right now and I know from where we sit we're always constantly evaluating what's in the best interests of the conference. It will be interesting to see how that story that you mentioned yesterday, how that evolves and where it lands, but I think that reiterates where we are in college athletics and that's why I'm so grateful that Barry Alvarez has decided to join us because these are all the kind of things that just, collectively, that we as a conference will be able to kind of talk to and think through and consult with our director of athletics and our chancellors and presidents and our many individuals on our campus. So thank you for that question.

Q. With the potential for college football playoff expansion as early as 2023, what's the Big Ten's position regarding divisional play, scheduling, will there be a full evaluation of those, and how long do you think that will take before there would be a final determination?

KEVIN WARREN: Yeah, that's a wonderful question. Those are all the issues that we have to work through. One of the things I'm most excited about and, although we're still dealing with issues of COVID 19 or variants, is to be able to get back to the work of college athletics. So all those items that you raise, from scheduling to divisions to college football expansion, all those different things, they,



one thing impacts another. It all impacts each other.

So this fall, I've already started this summer of having these conversations within our internal Big Ten family in regards to their viewpoints from college football expansion, gathering information, as they called it, kind of the next couple of months are really gathering information to decide what we feel is in the best interests. So I am really energized and excited. That's why I came here is to do everything we can to make this the best conference in college athletics, empower our student-athletes, and deal with issues like you're addressing.

So I'm excited to work with our staff and Coach Alvarez and others to make sure that we're very methodical and thoughtful as we unpack those issues. But thank you for asking that question.

Q. A question about COVID. Obviously, you don't want to have anything like what happened last year. What, I understand that league presidents and chancellors are going to make the determination what the protocols and practices will be for that. Can you explain the decision for that and also the issue of forfeiting games if teams can't play?

KEVIN WARREN: Great question. On June 6th of 2021 during our semi-annual meeting with our chancellors and presidents it was voted for us to be able to create a decentralized process and procedure this year of handling COVID 19. So we have allowed our institutions to handle those issues.

One of the things that we're working on right now is the fact that our schools are finalizing their proposed policies and procedures for the fall. We'll get that information in early August. We'll combine it, and then we'll get together with our chancellors and presidents and other key constituents to make the determination as far as how we handle the fall.

I mean, one of the things I did learn last year is to make sure that we are methodical and thoughtful, that we bring people together. And so we're right where we wanted to be, is that it will be a decentralized decision-making process. As soon as we gather all the information from our schools in early August, we'll finalize our policies to make sure that we pressure test it as much as we possibly can and then we'll make sure that we release it to everyone in the media and in the public. But we will have that done prior to our first game 37 days away from today. So thank you for that question.

Q. In the past year you obviously went through a lot of personal turmoil. Can you kind of explain what the past year was for you and your family? And your son is now a Big Ten athlete as well. Can you kind of break

down how that happened and what that means to you?

KEVIN WARREN: Yeah. Thank you for the question. Last year, I'm a big believer, I probably have a different view, maybe I don't, but I have a different view just about life and about the journey of life, as you've heard, and I think we have talked about it before. And I say I was fortunate. I was fortunate at 10 and a half years old to get run over by a car. I should not have lived. So I have spent almost a year in traction and in a body cast. And when I say I was flat on my back, I was flat on my back. I had to drink, that's why today I can't use a straw anymore because I can't had to drink all of my meals and, out of a straw on, flat on my back. And it was a traumatic time in my life.

But I say I was fortunate because it was a time that made me grow up quickly and what that experience taught me is that I don't take any moment, any day, any relationship, any opportunity for granted. It grew my faith. It grew my belief in people. So although last year was really, I don't want to even say traumatic, it was one of the best years of my life because I always have a prayer on New Year's of going into each year, and my prayer on 2019 was that I wanted my prayer life to grow in 2020. Little did I know that it would grow at the rate that it did, but I can tell you right now that I'm a stronger person. My gratitude co-efficient is extremely high, and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to go through what we did last year and I'm also grateful that I had the belief system to hold true to my values and my promise to keep our student-athletes and their health and safety and wellness number one, which I believe that we did.

So last year, as I look back over my life, last year will be one of the years that I will look to that I continually grew as a person and that I'm grateful for to go through all the things that we went through. So I'm one of those people that always look for the positives. But for last year I wouldn't have had the number of meetings that I had with our athletic directors and our coaches and our chancellors and presidents and our fans, and so what it did is allowed me to really understand the importance of relationships, the importance of communications, but also to have a gratitude for life. And so I'm grateful for last year. I embrace it and I'm glad to be here today.

And regarding my son, Powers, as anyone knows, I love him. I deeply love him. I'm proud of him and to see him to grow up. And to grow up in Minnesota, I thought he was going to be a college hockey player. But to follow the path and to go to the South and go to Mississippi State, he went down there, the coach who recruited him left after the first year. He graduated in three and a half years. He battled through some injuries. He stayed positive. And so for him



to get the opportunity with his college degree in hand in three and a half years, to now go to Michigan State and have an opportunity to play two years of college football and work on his Masters, this is what this whole experience is about. When people say, What makes college athletics special? This was a young man that college athletics has been that driving force to pull him along academically. So he has his degree. I talked to him two nights ago. He's taking graduate classes and he is talking about papers that he's working on. He's matured, and it's been because of coaches in his life and his love for the game of college athletics that help has helped him to grow. So I'm proud of him. I'm happy for him. And I continually pray that he stays healthy and can continue to recognize his dream. So thank you for that question.

Q. Back to the question about COVID and forfeitures. I wanted to take a different approach here with that. Is there any thought about communicating with the other probably five conferences when it comes to football about trying to maybe build in some flexibility with the schedule this year if COVID 19 issues arise? Just so you make sure that there is not a competitive advantage when it comes to the post-season.

KEVIN WARREN: One of the things we have been fortunate about is that I have weekly calls with the other A five commissioners, that we stay up with each other. We communicate with each other. We're in this together. We're all in this together. So we'll continually communicate and do the best thing for our college athletic. But thank you for asking that question.

Q. In what ways has the challenges you faced in 2020 made you a better leader?

KEVIN WARREN: You know, I want to tell you how special it is to have you here. I know your story. Rutgers. But the biggest thing, I think, you took your first plane flight to come here today to Big Ten media days. I just, I want to thank you for that.

(Applause.)

And it's stories like that that make this game of college athletics special. That's why I'm here, that's why I will continually do the best job that I possibly can, and that's why I admire individuals like you. I learned so much last year. I learned so much about myself. I learned so much about others, but I also learned about the goodness of people and the importance of grace and gratitude and provide people with opportunities, and so I'll continually stay even keeled. I'll continually stay positive. I'll continually stay grateful. We'll work hard as a conference. We'll be transparent. And then there are areas that we'll

continually work on. I want to make sure that we are building that communication on all of our constituents. But the biggest thing I just want to continually represent the Big Ten and remember that our student-athletes are not only here to play sports, they're here to get an education, but they're also here to become better people, and everything that we can do to help them for that, it's worth it. But, again, I want to thank you for your time and your journey here today, and I look forward to seeing you come back here for the Big Ten Championship game and the CFP Championship game and to be my guest at game this year. So thank you.

Q. You had to make a lot of tough calls, especially in the first 18 months of being commissioner. If you had to look back on it, there's some regrets and did you understand and maybe where some of the criticism came from?

KEVIN WARREN: Yeah, you know, it's interesting and my wife, we have this conversation, what really is the essence of regret and what does that really mean. I don't have any regrets. I mean, quite naturally, we all look back over our lives and are there things we wish we would have maybe done a little bit differently, but if I had the chance to do it all over last year, I would do, make the same decisions that we made, because one of the things that I've always tried to focus on, and you heard me say it today, is making sure we keep our student-athletes at the center of all of our decisions, athletically, academically, regarding college football playoff expansion, relationships with our media partners, relationships with our bowl partners, all of those different things. If we put them at the epicenter of our decisions we're going to be okay. And we did that last year at the Big Ten. Maybe the communication wasn't as clean and perfect as it could have been at times, and I think you've seen improvement with that, that's one of the reasons why it's good to have people like John Schwartz here with us, but all in all as I look back last year was a year of gratitude, it was a very, very complicated time in our lives. I spent 15 years in Minnesota and so all the way from George Floyd to Breanna Taylor to Ahmaud Arbery, all the different things we had to work through, presidential election, people losing their jobs, COVID 19. When you add it all up, I think the biggest thing that I learned is the fact the importance of being grateful and also having a sense of grace, not only with ourselves but with others.

So I appreciate the question and I look forward to an incredible Big Ten football season. I look forward to seeing you as you know you can call me any time and communicate with me and I look forward to just kind of building these relationships and doing everything we can to not only make us proud in the conference, to make our schools proud but also to make you all proud that you



covered the Big Ten conference. So it's been a joy and a pleasure getting a chance to know you, it's been a joy and a pleasure spending some time with you today, I know I'll be around today doing a lot of interviews and I say this in closing, I say this seriously, I really do appreciate the sacrifices that you all make on a daily basis. It's not easy, you have significant others, you have children, you have parents, you have pets, you have other things in your life that are important, and for you to take the time to come here today, but also to cover us on a yearly basis really means a lot to me and for that I will be eternally grateful. So thank you very much and God bless you all.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....

