

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Big Ten Commissioner

Commissioner Press Conference



PRESENTED BY
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TONY PETITTI: Good morning. Welcome to Lucas Oil Stadium for the 52nd annual Big Ten Football Media Days presented by Old National Bank. Thank you to the Indiana Sports Corp, Jim Irsay and the Colts, and the City of Indianapolis for your incredible hospitality.

In just over four months, nearly 70,000 fans will pack these seats for the Discover Big Ten Football Championship Game broadcast on CBS for the first time. I'm proud to announce today that Lucas Oil Stadium will be the home of the Big Ten Football Championship Game for another four seasons, through 2028.

I'm also happy to be the first to share with you that the National Football Foundation will be presenting the John L. Toner Athletic Director of the Year Award to Warde Manuel from the University of Michigan.

Congratulations, Warde, on this well-deserved recognition.

Warde will also begin his term as the College Football Playoff Selection Committee chair this season.

We are now just ten days away from welcoming our four new members to the Big Ten Conference: the University of Oregon, UCLA, USC, and the University of Washington.

Before we look ahead, let's look back at a remarkable year from our more than 10,000 student-athletes across 28 sports.

Last year was an incredible year in women's sports, in large part because of what happened in the Big Ten. It began in August with Volleyball Day in Nebraska where more than 92,000 fans, the largest crowd to ever gather for a women's sporting event, packed Memorial Stadium.

Then in October a woman's college basketball attendance record was shattered when more than 55,000 Iowa fans filled Kinnick Stadium. Just two weeks later Wisconsin and Minnesota met in the most viewed volleyball match in television history, only to see that number topped by Nebraska and Texas in December's NCAA Championship. That match was played in front of the largest indoor crowd

in college volleyball history.

Iowa set records for the most watched women's basketball game ever on seven different networks during the season. Their Elite Eight, Final Four, and National Championship games each set new records for the most watched event in the sport's history, and the final against South Carolina was the most watched basketball game, men's or women's, college or pro, since 2019.

You really can't tell the story of last year in sports without acknowledging the woman who now plays right here in Indianapolis. Caitlin Clark led the Hawkeyes to a title at a sold-out Big Ten women's basketball tournament and was the National Player of the Year in women's college basketball.

In volleyball, Sarah Franklin from Wisconsin was named AVCA Player of the Year, and Izzy Scane from Northwestern earned her second straight Player of the Year honor in college Lacrosse.

On the men's side, Purdue's Zach Edey gave the Big Ten a sweep of college basketball's Player of the Year awards, and Aaron Brooks is not only a four-time national champion and U.S. Olympian, he was the eighth straight Big Ten wrestler to win the Hodge Trophy while leading Penn State to the NCAA Championship.

In all, Big Ten teams and student-athletes won 20 individual national championships and five team titles during the year, including Michigan's College Football Playoff championship.

In the classroom, the conference's 14 schools totaled 80 Academic All-Americans and five NCAA Elite 90 honorees. The Big Ten Network, the first of its kind, set viewership records in basketball, volleyball, soccer, baseball, gymnastics, and cross country this past season.

Our digital presence has been rebuilt and is growing, with more than 800 million impressions, twice as many engagements, and a 220% increase in video views over the last 12 months.



Competitively, our student-athletes continue to excel not only in college but on professional and international stages as well. 141 Big Ten student-athletes were selected in professional drafts, and we will have 116 United States Olympians, the most of any conference, in the Paris Summer Olympic Games, including 30 returning medalists.

Every one of our 18 member institutions will be represented on Team USA, in addition to a huge presence on international rosters that brings the total number of Big Ten athletes in Paris to more than 325.

On August 2nd we officially welcome the University of Oregon, UCLA, USC, and the University of Washington into the Big Ten Conference. These AAU member institutions are leaders in scholarship, innovation, scientific advancements and athletic excellence. Together they have won 302 NCAA team championships and will have 49 Olympians on Team USA in Paris.

On the football field, they've combined for ten Heisman Trophies, 73 College Football Hall of Famers, 41 Rose Bowl Championships, and 173 first round NFL Draft picks, including six just this year.

Our staff has focused on working with all four institutions to ensure they hit the ground running this summer. This includes extensive collaboration with our coaching groups on scheduling and championship formats, marketing and branding alignment and integration into the Big Ten Academic Alliance.

They join us during the most transformative period in college sports. Over the past year, the Big Ten continued its active engagement in helping chart a new path for college athletics. Working with our chancellors, presidents and administrators, and alongside our conference colleagues, we formalized expansion of the College Football Playoff.

In May we reached an initial agreement on an historic settlement that will allow student-athletes to benefit from expanded scholarships and from institutionally provided financial benefits.

Additional transparency into third-party NIL deals and market norms will help stabilize college athletics and protect student-athletes.

While significant strides have been made, there's still much to do. Changes to governance models and operational rules must be debated and implemented. State and local laws that create an uneven playing field still must be addressed. Litigation and administrative proceedings that seek to classify student-athletes regardless of sport or

school as employees.

We continue to work with Congress and our colleagues to address these challenges, and we are optimistic that we will build on the momentum of the past year.

The goal remains to provide Big Ten student-athletes with a world-class education and the opportunity to compete at the highest level against the very best competition.

Today we're here at Lucas Oil Stadium to celebrate and prepare for the upcoming football season. College football has never been stronger, especially in the Big Ten Conference. Over the next three days, you'll have the opportunity to hear from our head coaches and three student-athletes from each of our 18 schools.

First, let's welcome our seven new head coaches: Curt Cignetti of Indiana, Sherrone Moore of Michigan, Jonathan Smith of Michigan State, Dan Lanning of Oregon, DeShaun Foster of UCLA, Lincoln Riley of USC, and Jedd Fisch of Washington.

No sport is better at bringing people together than college football. During the 2023 season, our 18 member schools appeared in 51 games that had at least 70,000 people in attendance, including 20 that exceeded 100,000.

Michigan's win over Ohio State was the most-watched regular season college football game since 2011 and the fourth most-watched since 1993. Michigan's Rose Bowl victory was a top ten cable telecast of all time in front of the game's biggest crowd since 1998.

This season will be our first with a full slate of games on three broadcast networks, along with cable and direct-to-consumer options, providing fans with the ability to watch Big Ten football in multiple ways.

Last season 44 of the 50 most-watched college football games were on over-the-air broadcast networks. This year Big Ten teams will appear on broadcast networks more than 60 times, the most in college football.

Fans will watch Big Ten football on Fox on Friday nights and Saturday at noon, on CBS at 3:30 and on NBC at 7:30, in addition to an array of games airing exclusively on the Big Ten Network, FS1, and Peacock.

Our new line-up has more premiere matchups week to week than ever before: Ohio State at Oregon, Penn State at USC, Washington at Iowa. And that's just on October 12th. All in addition to the Big Ten rivalries our fans have come to know and love.



Our teams are battling for the right to return here on December 7th, the first time the No. 1 and No. 2 teams in the overall standings will square off for the Big Ten Championship.

The new expanded College Football Playoff will give more Big Ten teams the opportunity to compete for a national championship.

This season we're excited to utilize technology to advance the sport of football. Over the last several years, the Big Ten Conference, steered by vice president for football administration, A.J. Edds, has championed legislation permitting coach-to-player helmet communication and the use of sideline video by student-athletes and coaches, both of which will be introduced this fall.

This season we're proud to partner with Apple. The iPad is the ideal solution for our coaches and student-athletes to watch in-game video.

We're excited to have both of these innovations on display here at Lucas Oil so our media, coaches, and players have the opportunity for a hands-on experience.

Next month we look forward to unveiling the Big Ten's new state-of-the-art centralized replay center. It is the most comprehensive of its kind with 18 dedicated replay bays and six dedicated medical observation stations that will allow our staff to review plays while at the same time monitoring health and safety.

Finally, thank you to our media, our fans, our coaches, and student-athletes. The Big Ten Conference has never been stronger. I look forward to all of your questions. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Commissioner Petitti.

Q. You mentioned obviously the four expansion teams all on the West Coast. Now that the Big Ten is kind of all over the country, these students being -- or these athletes being students as well, how do you anticipate travel going as far as all the different games across the country? And if there are any issues with travel, is there any plans in place to kind of help them stay on track with school and things like that?

TONY PETITTI: First, I think it's important to understand that every sport is different. Every sport has its own regular season format, its own postseason format within the Big Ten. So we start from that place, right?

The process of building a schedule is collaborative. It involves our faculty reps, our administrators, our coaches,

all the way across, and ultimately going up to the top of our leadership at the presidential level.

We've taken a lot of care to try to minimize travel where we can. I will tell you that we feel really good about where we've ended up across all of our sports.

Having said that, I really believe that scheduling is something that has to be constantly evaluated by sport, and I anticipate that we'll get hopefully a lot more right these next couple of years with the way we've formatted and scheduled, but it's our responsibility and our job to listen to student-athletes, to listen to coaches to make sure that we're adjusting and making the changes we need.

While we feel really good about the work that we've done this past summer and that our team has led, I would anticipate that over time there will be changes. It just seems like it would be the natural progression.

Q. Commissioner, at Big 12 Media Day and Mountain West Media Day, both commissioners talked about how they wanted to have a bigger imprint, a bigger footprint in Vegas and Los Angeles, not just with games and scheduling and what's going to be on TV, but mostly around a lot of flagship events. Obviously you just talked about how Big Ten Championship is going to stay here for the next four years. What's the plan, if any, in regards to having more events on the West Coast, L.A., Vegas in particular?

TONY PETITTI: Great, thank you. What I'll say is, given the footprint of the conference, the cities that are now interested in hosting Big Ten championships has clearly expanded. And I think it's -- we're really comfortable with the decision to stay with football here in Indianapolis in the next four seasons. We think it's the right thing to do.

Having said that, I think you'll begin to see us expand. I think it's important to make sure that markets around the country get to experience Big Ten championships. It's a really good way to connect the conference. I think over time you'll start to see the geographic footprint expand, keeping in mind competitive issues.

Obviously after our championships, teams go into the NCAA tournaments and championships as well. Keeping all that in mind. I think you can fully expect that over time you'll see the footprint of how we host championships change and grow.

Q. Last year you were kind of put in an untenable position there midseason having to make a ruling on a situation involving Michigan football. Just nine months down the line, if you could reflect back on how



that situation unfolded and how difficult that was, who you relied upon with that? Then, also, if you can provide any insight as to when or if to expect anything from the NCAA on that?

TONY PETITTI: Thank you. I'll take the second part first. I don't know of a timetable. I'm not aware yet when the NCAA will come to any final determination, whatever that might be.

But as to the first part, I can tell you that it was a collaborative process inside the conference office with staff first, trying to understand, gather information. There was a lot of cooperation with the NCAA in terms of the information that we had access to, working with our administrators and ultimately our presidents and chancellors as well.

It was a completely collaborative process. Look, I understand, having come from MLB and watching some of the discipline things that happened there, it's a difficult process when you're forced into a situation where you have to decide what to do with a member. That's part of it. You go into that with a lot of respect and try and understand and do what's fair and protect the entire conference.

That was the approach we took, and I stand by the results of the decision we made.

Q. I wanted to ask you about specifically expansion. What do you feel like these four schools bring this league to enrich this league? My second question would be expansion seems to be a relevant topic nationally even now. What's the Big Ten's position currently on expansion when we see some turmoil that's happening within the ACC currently?

TONY PETITTI: To the first question, I would say it's pretty clear when you look at the schedule that we've talked about unveiling here about the strength and depth of what we're doing.

I think the fit of the four is across -- obviously, we're here to talk about football. But when you go beyond that, you know, for our presidents and chancellors, the academic fit is really important, if you look at the strength in all other sports that the four new members bring.

So it's a complete match across many different factors. That's what made the decision to add Oregon, Washington, which was done by my staff, and then the decision that Kevin Warren and his staff did to add USC, UCLA.

I see great strength across matchups, the footprint that we'll have going forward. I think we've got to get a lot of

things right, but I feel really good about the way we're positioned for the future in terms of the health and strength of the conference.

With regard to the second part of your question about the future, look, we're focused on the 18 right now. That's what we're focused on. We had to do a lot of work. A lot of work had been done to integrate USC, UCLA. We started that work over immediately when we added Oregon and Washington. I think we're really comfortable where we are.

We've got to get this conference right, and that's what our focus is.

Q. You had mentioned Fox Sports as starting a Friday night schedule. Typically this is a night that colleges have stayed away from and given to high school sports. It seems this is a commitment long term to Friday nights. What are the benefits to having the college games on Friday night and any potential hurdles you might see?

TONY PETITTI: If you look at our footprint on Saturday, having the three broadcast partners supported by the cable presence and Big Ten Network, I think Friday is an opportunity for national exposure. I think you're going to see some programs there really embrace the opportunity to play on Friday.

Of course, we don't want to burden any one institution. We care about what happens at the stadium as well and what happens on campus. But if you look at it, it's an opportunity to get programs to showcase them as they build in matchups. I think for us to have that footprint is really terrific.

I think on the hurdle side, look, there are just traditional places that want to play more on Saturday. We understand and respect that. It's a league discussion that involves all 18 about the best way to format our schedule. Where coaches are embracing opportunities to have that exposure on Friday night, we try to lean into that. That's the way we approach it.

Where are we looking more likely to go, that will change over time. Collectively we understand we're all doing this together, and we've got to make every telecast opportunity work for the conference to be as strong and healthy as we can.

Q. This is the first time since 2019 there are no Big Ten Conference games in Week 1. Are you guys moving away from that, or was that just how the schedule shook out this year?



TONY PETITTI: I think it's the way the schedule shook out. I think there's a lot going on.

We obviously play nine conference games. We're trying to balance that. I think Kerry Kenny and our team have done a really remarkable job of coming up with a schedule that takes in so many factors, obviously the nonconference schedule, the competitive balance, travel, getting through the season.

I think the core of what we do is that we are in the grind of conference football in November, and that's like the primary piece. I'm more concerned about that run to the end of the season than necessarily conference games the first or second week.

Q. I'm curious, you mentioned the House settlement and the effect that that's going to have. Just what broad range on the schools in this conference do you see the decision-making there having on the role of collectives and NIL space? And particularly when you talk about revenue-sharing as well, is there any sort of plan or discussion around kind of a conference-wide plan for that for member schools?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, there's a lot to unpack in the House settlement. We expect it to be filed hopefully this week and then go through the process with Judge Wilken to get it to a final position sometime, we're hoping, in the next several months.

That new model is going to require a lot of changes in terms of how we operate. We now have a situation where schools can provide benefits directly to student-athletes. There's a cap on that system. We have to monitor what schools are spending, so you need a reporting system there that doesn't exist.

We need a process to evaluate true NIL deals. We want student-athletes to be able to take advantage of their name and likeness. We need to make sure that's what's really happening.

Look, the role of third parties to the extent that third parties can connect student-athletes to real NIL opportunities, that's a great thing. I think that's the priority.

In this new model, student-athletes will have sort of three areas that they can take advantage of. They'll still retain their scholarships, the academic benefits, the connection to academics that's vitally important. They'll be able to receive direct compensation from their institutions. Third, they'll be able to capitalize on NIL to the extent that their NIL rights have value either locally or nationally.

We've got to build that model. That's going to require change and a tremendous amount of collaboration, first of all, coming into a consensus within the Big Ten, but then bringing that to our colleagues across the other conferences.

All of those things need to happen together, and I think the commissioners are committed to doing that. A lot of work ahead over the next, you know, several months.

But a lot of decisions will be made locally. This system is built to allow institutions to make individual decisions about what programs they want to support, how much they want to invest, what student-athletes get what, how many scholarships they offer, because we're eliminating scholarship limits.

All of those decisions will be made institution by institution, and I think that's the right way to do it.

Q. The first time since 2015 the Big Ten is defending a national title, adding a team that played for one last year in Washington. Oregon did as well. As the playoff expands, what will constitute a successful season year to year in this league in your view?

TONY PETITTI: The first thing I'll say is when I think about the postseason, I always start with the regular season. I want the regular season to have as many games as late as possible that are impactful.

We want as many teams competing as late in the season to earn a spot in the playoff, and I think that's the goal. I think if you think about the way postseasons work, they work in tandem with regular seasons.

What I'm excited about is that the fact that we've expanded the playoff gives more teams in the Big Ten the opportunity to compete later in the season. That's better on-site, on-campus, in terms of the excitement. It brings more programs into the hunt, and that's what fans want. Fans want their teams to be alive as late as possible. That's all you can hope for.

I think this format will allow us to do it. We'll see how it operates this year. We've been -- I've been pretty outspoken about the fact that we really want that regular season to work and connect to our postseason. To get through a Big Ten regular season is not easy. Being able to earn that based on your conference play and your record I think is a really critical part of what the playoffs should be.

Q. I wanted to ask you about roster limits. They keep



being talked about in this House settlement. Do you expect that number to be at 105? It's been reported that the Big Ten was hoping it would be on the larger end of the spectrum.

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, look, I'm not going to sort of point to a specific number right now. I think we're close to coming to consensus with all the conferences.

I'm not going to argue. I think we were maybe on the higher end. The reporting has been accurate about that. I think, ultimately, the goal is to come to something.

I think we're doing something for the first time. We're going into a season where the season is going to be longer. The playoff has expanded. There's more games. We're making decisions, and we're sort of going to have to see how it plays out.

I think we've been comfortable with the conversations. I will say in the process, because it's all sports, not just football, there's been a lot of great give-and-take among the commissioners. This is an interesting balance that affects campuses differently. The way we approached it was to try to bring consensus from our coaching groups, our administrators and bring that conversation to our colleagues across the conferences.

I think that room, it's been a really good process actually with my colleagues.

Q. You talked about the four former Pac-12 schools and what they bring to the conference and why they're such a good fit. When you are looking at membership moves like that, is there a primary factor that you and the presidents look at as making a school or university desirable to add?

TONY PETITTI: I think it's a holistic approach that starts with academics and the fit. That's a really big part of the legacy and the history of the Big Ten. That's important to our leadership.

Obviously these four schools check those boxes very well. I think the next factor is being strong in multiple sports is important.

Obviously the test of really being additive in football is critical. Are you bringing additional value to the conference on football? There's no secret that football is a large, large part of the revenue that's driven to support the whole ecosystem. We understand that. So when we are evaluating potential members, football sort of moves to the front of the line in terms of the athletic piece.

Q. Washington had to take out some loans against future earnings as full Big Ten members to make its budget work this year. How did that agreement come about with the Big Ten, and from your guys' perspective, why was that important, and how did it come together?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, I'm not going to address. I don't have enough detail in the structure they've had to finance what they need to do there locally.

I will say we've been supportive and understanding what they may need to make a transition. I think this was about a long-term home, and there might be some short-term things that have to be done to get them on the right footing to start.

I think they and we feel really good about the arc of where the conference is and what we can expect to deliver over time.

Thank you, everybody.

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