

Big Ten Football Media Days

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Tony Petitti

Big Ten Commissioner

Commissioner Press Conference



TONY PETITTI: Good morning, and welcome to the 2025 Discover Big Ten Football Media Days. Next week our teams open training camp, and just 37 days from today Rutgers, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Wisconsin will kick off their seasons and the first full weekend of a 2025-26 college football season.

Among the 18 head coaches you'll hear from over the next three days, I want to especially welcome new Purdue coach Barry Odom to the conference.

Thank you to our hosts, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. This is the Big Ten Conference's debut in the city that will host our 2027 women's and 2028 men's basketball tournaments.

This year we're excited to announce new and expanded partnerships and platforms to strengthen our conference and deepen the impact of our corporate partners. These relationships reflect our shared commitment to innovation, fan engagement, and delivering value to our student-athletes and schools.

This fall will be the second year of the We Give Blood Drive in partnership with Abbott, attacking the worst blood shortage in a generation. Last year more than 20,000 Big Ten fans donated blood and saved more than 60,000 lives, and the University of Nebraska won a \$1 million prize to support student health initiatives.

This year we'll be kicking off the competition on August 27 with the winner announced December 6th at the 2025 Discover Big Ten Football Championship game in Indianapolis, airing on Fox.

Last month we announced a new collaboration with PayPal and Venmo that allowed our schools to securely and efficiently distribute payments to student-athletes on July 1st. This year Venmo will present a new Big Ten rivalry series that will highlight some of the most storied matchups in college sports across football and men's and women's basketball.

The 2024-'25 season was a remarkable one for the Big

Ten, for our student-athletes, our coaches, administrators, and fans. During their historic first Big Ten season, USC, UCLA, Washington, and Oregon combined for 19 conference titles, including Oregon's 2024 Big Ten football Championship.

Big Ten members won 13 national championships in football, field hockey, women's volleyball, men's water polo, men's gymnastics, women's ice hockey, men and women's indoor track and field, men and women's wrestling, women's golf, men's outdoor track and field and rowing.

We had nine national runners-up, including men and women's lacrosse and women's gymnastics, and national semifinalists in men's soccer, women's basketball, and men's ice hockey. We also reached the Baseball and Softball World Series in the same season for the first time since 2019.

It was an equally impactful year off the field for our members with the approval of the House settlement and the implementation of a new model for collegiate athletics.

We continue to work with our colleagues in the A4 and college athletics to ensure the new model provides the intended benefits for student-athletes while providing a sustainable, transparent, and fair system of competition.

Our administrators and coaches have made it very clear. We are committed to the new model. Now let's focus on football.

The Big Ten played in eight of the 11 College Football Playoff games last season, and we had both teams in the Rose Bowl quarterfinal game. On the way to the ninth national championship, Ohio State defeated the ninth, seventh, fifth, and top-seeded teams in the 12-team bracket giving the Big Ten back-to-back titles.

Last year the four most viewed college football games of the season featured Big Ten teams, as did seven of the top 10 and 12 of the top 20. Each of our three broadcast television partners -- CBS, Fox, and NBC -- had at least one Big Ten matchup with more than 9.5 million viewers. 21 of our games are more than 5 million viewers, and 40



had at least 3 million viewers.

As for the '25 season, this week you'll hear from our coaches and an outstanding group of players. It's clear Big Ten football has never been deeper or stronger.

I know there's been a great deal of talk about the future CFP format, and I'm sure you'll have questions for me. First, I would like to talk about the process.

In the spring of 2024 the member conferences came together to negotiate a media deal with ESPN. Prior to concluding that deal, an agreement was reached that set forth revenue sharing from the College Football Playoff to the conferences and Notre Dame.

At the time there was a lot of discussion about future formats and the number of teams in the playoff. A specific decision on format was not reached. Instead, it was agreed that the Big Ten and SEC would control changes to the CFP format and the selection committee process after considering feedback from the membership.

Like the revenue share parameters, the Big Ten and SEC's format control is set forth clearly in the agreement that all members signed. With respect to format, the Big Ten has been consistent in its strong preference for a playoff system that allocates spots based on conference standings and the results of play-in games.

We want to better connect the regular season and the post-season. A critical goal of any post-season format, regardless of sport, is to keep as many teams alive as deep into the season as possible. We want more conference games to matter in November. Also, the playoff format should not function as a disincentive to schedule tough, nonconference games.

As we said throughout this process, we are open to considering any format ideas that come from our colleagues or the CFP staff, but to be clear, formats that increase the discretion and role of the CFP Selection Committee will have a difficult time getting support from the Big Ten.

I want to leave more time for questions, so thank you all for being here, especially our 18 head coaches and 54 student-athletes representing their schools. As I said, I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Commissioner Petitti.

Q. Commissioner, I was just wondering your take on -- I think it was last week's issues between the CSC, the guidance they gave about collectives. When is that

going to get resolved, and how urgent is it that that issue gets resolved?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, I appreciate the question. I think it's worth sort of talking about the relationship and the ongoing relationship that plaintiff's attorneys have in this process. The CSC is brand new. It's in the process of making rules. We've had an incredible group working on an implementation committee to provide guidance and help with rule-making. Some of that has to be in the process that goes past the plaintiff's lawyers. That's what happened in this case.

I don't think it's unpredictable, but there will be some moments like this where whether it's guidance or interpretation of rules, there's some discrepancy, but I think what's happened over the last few days, based on talking to our general counsel and others, that they're working together to try to get to the right resolution on this and then to move forward.

I don't think it will be the last time that there's some issue that comes up in the process. Again, I think people have to be patient when it comes to the CSC. The settlement, frankly, came later than we expected in terms of its approval. We're grateful that Judge Wilkins chose to approve it, but it did compress the time period.

It's a lot to catch up, and there's a lot for coaches and administrators to deal with, but I don't think it's unusual when you have something this different that there's going to be some bumps in the road to get to the right place. I think everybody is committed to get there.

Q. Is it a must in your mind that the power conferences play the same number of conference games, and if the SEC won't go to nine, would the Big Ten ever consider going back to eight?

TONY PETITTI: So, first, it's not a must. Each league will decide what they think the best conference schedule is for them. I think in a system where you have allocated spots, I think in talking to our athletic directors and coaches, I don't think we really care how many conference games any league is playing because you're qualified off your conference standings. That's up to you to run your own league and decide how you want to do it.

When you get to a system that's increasing the at-larges and the work of a selection committee, that's when you need to understand how we're competing in the regular season. Look, at the end of the day, it's really simple math. With 18 schools and nine conferences -- we're losing nine more games to start. At the end of the day, I think it's really relevant.



Will we consider, you know, more at-larges? Right now, I think the first thing is to really understand what everybody is doing in their conference schedule. But there's a second really critical part, which I mentioned in my remarks, which is what are we doing to get the selection process right? I think those two things go hand in hand. First is how many conference games are we playing? Then, secondly, what's the selection process going to be?

People talked about improving the committee's work. I believe the committee does a great job with what they have. I've yet to hear any member tell me more data will make the job easier. They have a lot of things in front of them. We went through a mock selection. We saw it. I just think those two things have to go hand in hand. First is the conference games, but again, if you go back to an allocated system, then I don't think we really care about how many conference games anybody plays.

Q. Have you given any guidance to your membership about the allocation of the revenue share with regards to Title IX? Most people, when you read the stories, they discuss more to the football and the men's basketball, but have you had those discussions with your membership and any guidance along those lines?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, there's been a lot of discussion, as you can imagine. The system was new. We've been working to implement it for basically more than a year at this point since we made the agreement in principle to approve the settlement in May of '24.

I think consistently throughout everywhere people are taking a market-based approach to how they allocate revenue share. One thing about the way this system is built, you know, each -- there's no obligation to get to any number, what sports you choose to support, how you allocate the money among your student-athletes. That's really a decision that's made institutionally.

In the Big Ten what we've focused on is letting our members make the decision that's right for their programs and right for their student-athletes, and then continue to provide the benefits that we've been doing and the support for all of the teams. Really it's an individual school decision about that, but I would tell you consistently you're seeing more of a revenue market-based approach in terms of how the revenue share is allocated among members.

Q. You've been talking about CFP format. You have a lot of constituents, coaches, ADs and so on. The public, the fans, have indicated overwhelmingly they do not want a system where certain conferences get more bids than others. At what point how much

emphasis, if at all, do what the public want come into decisions like this?

TONY PETITTI: Well, first, let's take issue with the way you're phrasing that. I'm not aware of massive studies with real research that have demonstrated that.

Q. It's not a scientific poll, but a poll I put on Twitter this morning. It was 76% for 5+11, 24% for the plan you guys want.

TONY PETITTI: We feel pretty strongly that fans will really gravitate to a play-in weekend. Providing games that are do-or-die on the field will drive fan interest. Whether there's enough information that fans have in any one poll about a new system will be, I'm not aware of how it was phrased or not.

I just believe, and in talking to our league, the weekend that we're talking about where you would have championship games and across all conferences, meaningful play-in games, I don't see how that's a bad thing for football, and I think fans will gravitate to it.

Q. You've talked about your concerns over subjectivity in an expanded playoff format, like a 5+11. Do you feel there were issues with subjectivity in the committee this past season that leads you to that conclusion?

TONY PETITTI: I think it's been really a hard thing to do for a long time. You go back to going back to the BCS and deciding who the two teams are and going back through the four-team playoff, it hasn't been easy. I'm not going to comment on the last couple of seasons, but you think there are a lot of places who think it's also teams not getting consideration. I think there's a lot of that.

The idea that I'm -- I'm not going to point to any one school, whether it's in our league or outside our league. You can look at the reaction when the rankings come out and who is invited and see that yourself. At the end of the day, I think there's been a lot of concern about how those decisions are made.

I focus on that piece. How are we differentiating from teams that don't have head-to-head play, teams that don't play common schedules across leagues that do different things? I think that's a really hard, tall order.

The point I'll make is that every time you think about expansion, I think there's some sort of counter-idea that it gets easier to make these decisions. It actually gets harder. More teams look alike. More teams are going to have 9-3 records and struggle in a conference road game.



More teams might stumble in a conference home game. Some teams play tougher non-conference schedules.

It's also just the evolution of how you go through the season and how you move across. I just think that those decisions are really difficult to make. I know this has been the system that we've used for a really long time, but I have a hard time believing expanding it will make these decisions easier.

Q. There's a report out that you wrote a letter to the NCAA about the Michigan sign-stealing scandal. I'm curious whether the letter happened or not. Do you believe that should be put to bed, that the punishment that you issued is strong enough and that the investigation should be closed?

TONY PETITTI: Well, the first part, I'm going to confirm that we did submit a letter. It's not uncommon in proceedings for conference office to weigh in. I'm not going to address what the contents of the letter we sent are. Because it's an ongoing process, I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment about whether it's enough or not while there are individuals deliberating. I don't think that's the right thing to do in the process.

Look, I will say, having gone through this, one thing to point out is I think when you think about the CSC and the discipline and what we're trying to build with the new entity, having an enforcement mechanism that's faster is a priority, one that reacts more quickly.

This is a system we have now. It's been in place for a long time. It functions the way it was built, but I do think there's this consensus among our colleagues that whatever we are building for the enforcement piece that's going to live inside the CSC, that's got to be still there. It's difficult to still be talking about this almost two seasons after. I think everybody agrees that part of the process should change.

Q. I wanted to ask you about our location here for the next couple of days in Las Vegas. There's no Big Ten programs here. What went into the reasoning to have them house Big Ten Media Days? They have the College National Championship coming up. What do you see as the future of this city and the involvement potentially in the Big Ten Conference?

TONY PETITTI: To be candid, this was a logistics thing. Some things were going on in Indianapolis. We have brought our media days to Indy, and it's worked really well for us. It just wasn't possible this year. Then we had to make some decisions about where to go.

We're bringing our men's and women's basketball

tournaments here in the next couple of years, so it made sense. The city has been great in terms of providing us the resources we need to do this. I think obviously we are a conference that goes coast to coast, so having some presence closer to our West Coast members is not a bad thing.

It started with logistics, to be really candid.

Q. The question I have is about the play-in situation that you want to institute for the playoff. Last year was pretty cut and dried that you had four top-10 teams that should be in the playoff. I guess the trade-off is those teams worked so hard to establish themselves after 12 or 13 games as top-10 teams, why should they have to play Illinois or Iowa just as examples who had more league losses? I don't sense a clamor for a four-loss team in a playoff. Doesn't that create a situation for the playoff, which we saw blow-outs in the playoff last year, for more blow-outs in the playoff which drive down the ratings and make it less lucrative perhaps, to put a team that doesn't deserve to be in the playoff?

TONY PETITTI: There's a lot there. Let me try to do it in order.

So the first piece about the value of the play-in games, first, I have to commend our coaches. They obviously talk about the same thing you just raised. Hey, if I'm in position, I can get hurt by losing a game. I think where our coaches came down and our ADs was that at the end of the day there are 18 members in the Big Ten. You have 17 available opponents. You play nine of them. There's a lot of discrepancy, let alone making comparisons across the leagues.

There's a lot of issues about how you compare teams inside the Big Ten. Your schedule and the way it plays out might be easier than people thought when it was made up. We try to competitively balance our schedules. So there's an issue there, even within our own leagues, giving teams a chance. We were willing to take that risk. If you had 16 teams, there's still a catch-all where there's potentially three at-larges.

In your example if a 6 seed beat a 3, could the 3 go into a pool to get in? Maybe. At the end of the day, I think our coaches are willing to take that risk because what they're thinking about is not a snapshot of any one season. They're looking at how do we get more teams in contention?

As you expand the playoff, the rest of the bowl system and how we're trying to protect all of that, you're basically



driving everybody to this one event. I think in every league's interest, not just ours, to have more teams emerging. Like Indiana did last year. Giving more teams a chance to compete.

There's huge value in having games across. Look, last year Ohio State was 7-2 and finished fourth in the Big Ten. Was undefeated in nonconference play. The idea that we can go deep, I feel pretty strongly about that. If you are 6-3 in the Big Ten, I would argue that's a great record. If you stumbled in a nonconference game, I don't know why that disqualifies you.

8-4 is a winning percentage. If you project that winning percentage in every other sport, I'm pretty sure you make the postseason, whether it's hockey, basketball, anywhere else. That type of winning record -- we've conditioned ourselves to think that if you're not a one- or two-loss team, you're not worthy of competing. There are plenty of teams in professional sports who qualify for the playoffs who can't get past the first round game. That's okay. They still get to play. We'll figure it out on the field rather than sitting in a room.

Q. Obviously it's pretty hard to out-do a national championship. Just in regards to all the success from last season, what global brand deals might be on the horizon for the conference that you can or maybe can't speak to at the moment?

TONY PETITTI: I think you saw it in terms of what we're doing with PayPal. When you think about the reach of the conference and what we're able to do, obviously each of our institutions has their own local sponsorship and deep relationships in their own market, their own states.

I do believe that you're going to see this start to change, and the reach that we have allows us to do those types of deals. I think you should expect to see more of that and making it more of a priority for the league across. We have tremendous reach. We drive large audiences with incredible passion.

College athletics across is driving more interest than ever, so we feel like we're in a good position to expand those relationships.

Q. As you mentioned that the Big Ten and SEC have control over the decision with playoff expansion, at their media days last week a lot of talk about at-large models. What is your level of confidence that you guys can figure out one of these models to move forward with, and if so, level of confidence you can do that by that December 1st deadline?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, I'm not going to put any deadline on it. We've pretty publicly brought our ADs together in both leagues twice, once in New Orleans, once in Nashville over the last six to nine months. Maybe a little longer than that. But twice during that period.

It's been productive. Not just talking about CFP, but lots of other issues that are around college athletics. I do think we're obviously not in the same place on these discussions. I think there's lots of ideas. I think the goal would be to bring people back together, have a conversation of what we think works and kind of go from there.

I will say every time we've come together with the two leagues, we still have our presidents and advisory group meeting, good things have happened. Not just for the two conferences. I think for college athletics in some places, especially around the settlement.

Q. Nonconference schedules vary pretty widely across the country. You've got Clemson, for instance, that plays LSU and South Carolina. Indiana plays a weak nonconference slate. Ohio State plays Texas. It varies across the country. When you have a committee involved for picking the playoff, would you ever supported a model where schools are not in control of their own nonconference slates?

TONY PETITTI: That's a really hard thing to change. It just hasn't come up in terms of that control. I think over the years leagues have tried to put parameters about playing 1A4 or what you can do with FCS. I think those have been in place across. I don't think that's the solve.

I kind of focus more on what's the incentive to get schools to schedule stronger games? Those are some of the things we've talked about with the SEC and in the season. I think fans want more of those games. I think there's been some writing, well, those games won't mean anything if you are qualifying off your conference.

I disagree with that. At the end of the day, you are still playing for seeding and straight seeding. If you had a system where you are qualifying off your conference record, winning or losing a tough nonconference game could affect seeding. Plus, the models we're talking about, there's still some at-large picks left.

I think we got to focus on the right incentive. You're starting to see games being dropped. I think there's a running concern among coaches, and you'll hear from our guys, whether they cover this or not, is does winning a big nonconference game help you more than losing a nonconference game hurts you? That's the sentiment.



What's the right way to measure that?

Also, a lot of these games tend to be played early in the season. You don't quite know who your team is at that point. Teams move up and down across the season. Some teams are unhealthy or unlucky. It really depends. I focus more on let's create an incentive to schedule more of them naturally. I don't think we need rules to do it.

Q. Your colleague with the Southeastern Conference has touted his conference as the best in the country and produced materials to suggest their strength of schedule is better than even in some cases a nine-game schedule with the Big Ten. Do you agree with him on that? Do you disagree on that? Also, Indiana was much maligned last year for its schedule. However, the results were the results. What do you say to that, and how do you assess the SEC?

TONY PETITTI: I'll start back and talk about Indiana's schedule. When Indiana's schedule was made, on their schedule were the two teams that played in the championship game the season before. They played Michigan and Washington, both at home. Won both of those games, but those are the idea. That's part of what this is, right?

That gets back to the value of play-in games. Put that aside, I'm not going to comment on where any one conference is. We just stand by what we do in the Big Ten. I think the national results have shown that the last couple of seasons. I think when you look at what expansion has meant across the A4 the last couple of years, I'll stand by how much tougher our league has gotten. When you throw in the travel, how well our schools protect their home fields, all of that, I think that speaks for itself.

I don't ever think there's any value in talking about one versus another. We feel really strongly about what we do in the Big Ten.

Q. I wanted to ask about the Venmo and PayPal deal. What went into the decision for the Big Ten to handle the revenue sharing with athletes itself versus maybe the member institutions handling it?

TONY PETITTI: We had a group AD meeting where we were talking about just going around asking each other, how are you planning on making these payments? Is there a way to do it? At the time the ADs made it pretty clear. Hey, is there a way we can do this collectively? It really came from that.

Becky Pany in our office ran an RFP process, and it became clear in terms of what PayPal could offer and the

technology and the Hyperwallet and how used to young people are with that platform that it made sense. But we ran a pretty exhaustive process. There was back-and-forth among all 18 that they believed central was the best. We ended up with everybody in.

So far it's gone really smoothly so far. I think every institution is different. Their ability to send money to student-athletes is really tricky. Having a central system made a lot of sense for us.

Thank you, everybody.

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