

# University of Iowa Media Conference

Friday, July 8, 2022

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Gary Barta

### Press Conference



GARY BARTA: I hope everybody is doing okay this summer. Again, you won't be picking up any breaking news today, but certainly a lot going on in college athletics, probably more than in a typical summer, I know some of you had asked after the expansion announcement of the Big Ten to visit a little bit, and I thought, I'll talk about that a little, talk about a couple of other things going on in the athletic department, and then happy to try to answer any questions you might have.

I'll start with expansion since that's been the most recent topic. I'll probably go over a few things that you already know, but the bottom line is USC and UCLA contacted the Big Ten -- I would estimate, I didn't take the call, the Big Ten did, but I would estimate sometime six or seven days prior to when we announced that we'd be adding them to the conference. Whatever that was, four, five, six, seven days, from that moment on, that's when the presidents and the ADs and the faculty, senior women's administrators all came together and worked through that process. The attorneys worked through the process with those schools and vetted a lot of different things.

I'm very excited about the addition. If you look at those schools and what they bring, they are an AAU institution. They're academically proven and strong, research, so all the things that have historically been important to the Big Ten, they bring those.

Athletically I'm excited. I used to work in the Pac-10, so I'm very familiar with those two institutions athletically, and you all are, as well, those brands, those histories -- the history and tradition at those schools is very strong.

Then the other thing that we look at, when we looked at -- when Oklahoma and Texas joined the SEC -- the presidents and the ADs, the faculty and the senior women's administrator and the commissioner came together and said, we're not going to go out and start seeking to expand, but if we were to expand, why would we expand, what characteristics would we look like if we were to expand, and we kind of went through that process and then set it on the shelf because we were busy working

on the TV contract, which is something that the conference has been working on.

So we weren't out soliciting. When USC and UCLA called, they had the things on that list. The other thing that's important on our list is how they treat student-athletes' well-being, whether it's the medical staff and attention, how they handle that, how they handle food, their travel. Those were checked off on the list.

Then finally, and certainly importantly, what did they bring to the table financially, and financially related to LA being the second largest TV market in the country, so now by making this decision, the Big Ten now has a presence in New York, Chicago, LA and in between.

Those were some of the big issues that were discussed when we looked at adding those two.

Question or rumors or discussion, will there be more? I don't have a crystal ball, but at this point I can tell you the Big Ten is still not seeking members. I know the Big Ten has taken calls, and they inform us when they take calls just so we have a general idea, but if I were predicting, I'm not predicting that we would be adding any more in the near future. We'll see.

Football season, so I'll make the segue there. Obviously coming off a lot of momentum from last year, recruiting is going very well, and we have a strong schedule. I'm very excited about the ticket sales as we head into this fall. We've already sold almost 5,000 new season tickets for general public. Our student season tickets sold out quickly. Our mini pack sold out, our Fight for Iowa packages sold out. Single game tickets will go on sale July 18, and we anticipate very quickly that Michigan and Iowa State will sell out, and then certainly the AD is cheering and so is the football coach and so are we all that work here that the rest of those games will not be too far behind.

In that first game, a reminder, as we have for several years, we'll have the Fry Fest Celebration. We'll honor our Hall of Fame class and do that in person again, and then we'll also be celebrating 50 years of athletics, women's athletics in that opening weekend.

Facilities-wise, if you haven't driven by Carver-Hawkeye Arena for a while you need to drive by because the front



door look of Carver-Hawkeye Arena has completely changed. The wrestling training facility is under construction. We're very excited about the progress, and that's been in the works now for quite a while.

As you heard earlier this summer, due to inflation, due to supply chain challenges, the price, the anticipated price did go up about 20 percent. On the flipside, I'm very excited. I knew this would be the case, but I'm grateful that it has been happening, and that is our donors continue to step up, so I'm confident that we'll meet the number that it's actually going to cost, and I'm really excited -- it's about an 18 to 20-month process, and I know Tom and Clarissa are very excited about that continuing to develop.

Gymnastic Training Center. That's something that we have some fundraising momentum on and would likely be our next project, so we're working on designing that. Another project that has a lot of momentum, we've had some great gifts recently -- Rick Heller has done a terrific job with our baseball program, and we're receiving a lot of support to renovate our current stadium. We would do it in the same location, and we're going through some design there.

And then beyond that, we're always looking ahead, but field hockey, softball, track, some enhancements in Carver-Hawkeye Arena, those are all on the plate. I can't predict how quickly each of those will go, but those are all things that we're working on.

Then there's always big items that aren't very exciting like air handlers in the swimming pool. We had to replace those this summer, we replaced the turf in the field hockey facility outdoor and we're working on replacing the turf on the indoor field hockey space. Then our indoor track has a roof that in the next year or so we'll probably have to replace, so those are expensive but they don't make the front page. They're not real exciting, other than they're very important.

I just have two more things. Name, image and likeness, you can go all sorts of different directions with name, image and likeness. I am reading lots about how it's working or not working around the country.

Year one at Iowa for name, image and likeness, and I emphasize that because when it's not a recruiting inducement and it's truly a name, image and likeness, our student-athletes I think did a wonderful job. You've been familiar with different corporate sponsorships that some of our students had. There was an apparel line or two that were started, some podcasts.

To me, that's exciting in name, image and likeness. That's what name, image and likeness was meant to be. That will

continue at Iowa.

There also is this thing called collective. I feel really good about where we're at. I know some have suggested that we're behind. I don't feel that way because I want to do it the right way and do something that would be sustainable, and some of the things that are going on, one, are either borderline or flat-out against the rules, and then others I just don't know if they're sustainable.

What we're doing with some groups outside is trying to create something we think can continue on into the future. There's a group I'm most familiar with that has been in contact with us. They want to do it the right way. They're having great success in generating some initial money and probably in the next week or two they plan to make a public announcement, and then I learned about one maybe at the same time you did, maybe you learned before I did, about a name, image and likeness collective this week.

I'm not real familiar with that group. I think it's a group that's trying this nationally. I think they have a concept and they're trying to plug it in in schools around the country. I'm not certain of that. I don't even know exactly who it is. My understanding is that fans can pay \$199 a year and then the student-athletes that want to participate will provide access.

Again, that one to me sounds like name, image and likeness.

That's kind of where I am on that. Stay tuned. We have a couple of other things in the works. There's an outside group that's thinking of maybe a big banquet this summer with all the proceeds going there. We're certainly on board in supporting those things.

The final thing I'll mention and then I'll open it up for questions, we're calling our program the Hawkeye Academic Advantage Plan. If you recall earlier the Supreme Court ruled or confirmed that athletic departments can provide up to \$5,980 more per year in support for academic achievement, so we've come up with this name, Hawkeye Academic Advantage Plan, HAAP, and our program is going to benefit every student-athlete, so whether the student-athlete is a walk on or they're a full scholarship student-athlete, they're going to receive benefit. Now, that benefit will not be exactly the same for everybody and our program has been laid out for our student-athletes.

The one thing that will be the same for every student-athlete, if you're a student-athlete and you come to Iowa as a freshman and you stay for four years and you earn your degree, you will receive an amount of money

that's going to be the same, whether you're a walk on or a full scholarship student-athlete. You'll hear more about that, but we've laid that out. Our coaches know about it and are supportive of it. That will begin this fall. It does add a significant amount to our financial aid package in terms of raising those dollars, but we're excited that we were able to roll that out as we head into the fall.

I know I threw a lot of stuff out and we can go back to any of those things or if there's other things you want to ask about.

**Q. About a week ago, the only AD in the Big Ten who has more seniority than you in this conference has publicly vouched for another member, Notre Dame. What's the status of Notre Dame, discussions with the Big Ten, and would you support Notre Dame joining the Big Ten if Kevin Warren asked you your opinion?**

GARY BARTA: Fair question, and remember, Gene has a history at Notre Dame so certainly he's very familiar. I would tell you that Notre Dame, when we went through that discussion, when Oklahoma and Texas were added to the SEC, we talked about should we; if we do, why; and if we do, with whom, Notre Dame was certainly on that list. I would reiterate we are not seeking applications, but as people come to the Big Ten, they're certainly being received, and then trying to make a decision.

I know your direct question is would I support it. I would probably eventually support it. I don't anticipate that being a decision that I'll be making this summer. But again, I don't have a crystal ball. But it's not before us right now.

**Q. When you heard of USC and UCLA, what was your first reaction when you heard that news?**

GARY BARTA: A little bit surprised of the timing. Again, we as a conference have been focused on our current TV negotiations and those are going very well. We had vetted this possibility with different schools and then kind of put it on the shelf. Again, I'm very familiar with those two institutions and all the institutions in the Pac-12 because I was there for seven years at Washington.

After my initial kind of surprise, then I didn't have a lot of time to emotionally think about it because we dug in immediately and for four or five days on Zoom calls and just conversations, we were breaking down does it make sense, does it meet the criteria, should we say yes, and clearly after those four or five days of discussions, decided that the time was right, the school was right, and so I'm excited about it because I do know what they bring to the table.

I do know they're academic research focused institutions. I know about their athletic history. I know they're going to bring the TV market. So I'm very excited.

A little bit surprised at first, just maybe the timing and when it came about.

**Q. Would you support more West Coast schools like say Oregon or Washington if that were to come up?**

GARY BARTA: Again, my answer is very similar in that we've studied the types of schools. I'm not going to talk direct about any one school. I doubt that I'll be forced or asked to make that decision or our president will be this summer, so right now my sense is we are where we are, and we're going to move forward with who we have, with the addition of USC and UCLA, and right now I'm not really going to -- I'm not going to speculate whether or not -- because I don't think we're going to be adding any more this summer. That's just one person's opinion.

**Q. As the former chairman of the College Football Playoff committee, and thankfully probably -- how do you think the realignment will impact that group and the playoff at large in two to three, four years when the whole new playoff structured is probably implemented and we see two conference probably breaking away in power and prestige?**

GARY BARTA: Probably a lot of that's going to be on where the decision lands. Right now there's four teams. We all know where it sits right now. We all know there was a proposal to go to 12. I anticipate in the next year or two it will expand. I'm supportive generally of an expansion, and that'll all get worked out.

How it fits in with the SEC having Oklahoma and Texas join, now we have USC and UCLA join, it's really hard, other than we've added two great brands, they've added two more brands. If it goes to 12, I like the chances of the Big Ten having more access and getting greater access to the playoff.

It's so hard to predict now what's going to happen with the other conferences. At the end of the day when that shakes out, the committee doesn't evaluate conferences. We evaluate the best teams available.

The committee will still go to work the same way it always has; put the schools 1 through 25 and then 1 to 4 if that's how many get in or 1 to 12 if that's how many get in, and the job of the city is to not evaluate which conference they're in.

Will it have an impact? I believe it will. Just the fact that

the SEC has changed in how it looks, the Big Ten has changed how it looks, and I anticipate maybe a few more other changes between now and then, but at the end of the day it's going to be the best four, six, eight, 10, 12 schools that will be invited to the playoff. And hopefully the Big Ten -- I believe the Big Ten has positioned itself so that we'll be able to get a maximum number of participants in. That's the goal.

**Q. Along those lines, it appears it's pretty universal anyway among your peers that the divisional alignment is probably gone and probably replaced with cycling through a mix. Now with 16 teams, do you anticipate some sort of a 3-6-6 mechanism as far as scheduling goes, or is it still in the preliminary stages with all of that?**

GARY BARTA: Since USC and UCLA joined it's still in the preliminary stages, but I would tell you that most everybody is aware that prior to that, even before that, it was looking more and more like we were going to move away from divisions. The decision hasn't been finalized yet.

My guess is this will continue that direction that we would likely not have divisions. Again, just one person's thought based on where things have been and how we would lay it all out.

But we haven't yet sat down and said, here's how it's going to go with the addition of these two new ones.

**Q. I won't ask you to forecast, but if we all are moving towards two or three super conferences in the next five to ten years, is that something you'd be supportive of? Is that good for college athletics, bad for college athletics?**

GARY BARTA: Let me do the best I can to answer that fairly and honestly. I've been doing this for 34 years, and I love the history and tradition of college football, college athletics. I'm used to a West Coast conference and two Midwest conferences and a southeast and an east. I'm used to that, and -- I'll speak for myself -- change can be challenging sometimes.

Now, that's kind of my nostalgic feel. That being said, over the last 10 years you've seen change in college athletics. I'm not against change, so I'm embracing it, and then now I'll get to as the athletic director at Iowa, my responsibility is to put Iowa in the best position we can possibly be in, and as a member of the Big Ten conference therefore my job is to make sure the Big Ten conference is the best position it can be in.

I felt great about when we added Nebraska and we went

into the East Coast with Rutgers and Maryland and now adding USC and UCLA. I feel great about it from the standpoint it's put the Big Ten in the very best position. We've always felt we were one of the best conferences, if not the best. I feel like we've secured that with this move.

I'm going to miss some of the nostalgic things that will probably change as a part of that because I've grown up a certain way and so we'll just have to wait and see. But in the end as the athletic director at Iowa and as a Big Ten member, I'm very excited.

**Q. On that note, last August there was an alliance between the ACC and Big Ten and then the Pac-12. What's changed since then to get to where we are now?**

GARY BARTA: That's a fair question because a lot has changed in the decision we just made. I would tell you that a lot of the things that we're talked about when we formed the alliance are still in existence, a lot of similar approaches to academics, to the way that we want to commit to health and safety of student-athletes, to our medical schools and all the things involved.

What isn't the same now is that discussion we were having about scheduling across the three conferences. As you probably had noticed, that really hadn't gone -- taken a step further since that announcement, and so that had sort of calmed down. In a perfect world I would tell you I would hope the alliance toward academics and medical school and research would continue, but clearly the addition of USC and UCLA has changed the way that alliance would do anything related to scheduling.

That's the best response I can give you on that.

**Q. In regards to revenue and money in the second year post COVID, where would you say the athletic department is as far as operating on a deficit still, maybe back to normal? Where is the athletic department right now moving away from that COVID era?**

GARY BARTA: We're back on a good track. We're back -- our budget that we just presented to the Board of Regents this past month is back to the type of number that we presented prior to COVID, so I'm excited about that.

The deficit that we incurred is still there, and I think you've heard we're planning to pay that out over 15 years, and we'll do that -- that's built in going forward.

But we're back. We're back on solid ground. But the fact that we have to pay back that deficit, that's just going to



take a while, and it's something we'll have to build in as we move forward.

But I'm pleased -- the fact we were able to have a full football season last year with fans, basketball season with fans, full tournament, full CFP, bowls, that helped us get back, and now this year I would say is the first time as we move forward, knock on wood, that nothing changes. I feel good about being back, notwithstanding the decisions we had to make related to the deficit and the hole that was dug.

**Q. Along the lines of scheduling again, I know some of your colleagues were reluctant to implement one thing if it needed to change two years down the road, whether that's a playoff expansion or what have you. Would you anticipate status quo until USC, UCLA and dot-dot-dot happens two, three, four years down the road, or do you think in 2023 that something could be implemented?**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, the goal is you don't want to keep changing. So I understand and I share the feeling of let's not keep -- set a schedule out for 10 years and then change it two years later, that type of thing.

I anticipate -- and it isn't final, but I would anticipate through '23 that we would stay the way we are and then we would begin building a schedule that includes USC and UCLA, get that ready to go -- I don't know when we would announce that, but get it ready to go and be ready to announce maybe eight or 10 years out after that.

The more certainty you have, the easier it is because you have to build your non-conference schedule around whatever your regular-season schedule is. You're also -- fans are planning on it. So the more concrete we can make it, the better.

Right now I don't anticipate a change between now and '23, but we'll see.

**Q. Does that mean you'll have divisions until 2024?**

GARY BARTA: Now you're starting to get into -- I'd be speculating. We haven't made that decision yet. Scott raises a fair question. We all would like to know the next few years what our schedule is. The sooner we know that, the better. We probably would have been sooner, now we're going to have to factor in what we're going to do when USC and UCLA come in. I don't want to predict what's going to happen with divisions.

**Q. How important are protected rivalries, and is there a perfect number?**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, we went through this once before, you remember when Wisconsin and Iowa didn't play, and Barry and I -- it's one of those things that -- I want to play all those rivalries. I want to play Minnesota, I want to play Wisconsin, Northwestern, Nebraska, the bordering states, particularly where we have trophy games. I would like to play each of those every year.

On the flipside, I'm a member of a bigger organization, and so where it lands, I'm going to fight for as many of the rivalries as we can get, but I also understand it may be in the best interest of the conference to not play every one of those every year.

If one of those gets in a rotation that's not every year, we'll be okay, but I love playing those rivalry games, it's just not possible to do them all, especially when you have 14, soon to be 16 different schools that are involved in the equation.

**Q. Have you been able to speak to any athletes or coaches from different sports here at Iowa about the additions and how have those conversations gone?**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, primarily most of the students are off campus right now. They're starting to come back or they're here, but I spoke with all the head coaches, some in a group and then several individually, and I can't speak for all of them other than to tell you generally they're excited. Generally they know what USC and UCLA bring in terms of history and tradition.

But I also know -- they don't know yet and we don't know yet, if you're the baseball coach or the soccer coach or the gymnastics coach you don't yet know what your schedule is going to look like. So generally they're excited because of the competition. Just trying to get the logistics in the next year -- there's a two-year period before it occurs, so I figure we have about a year, year and a half at the most to get the schedules figured out.

What we've talked about is we'll work on that sport by sport. So the track coaches will get together in the Big Ten and bring in USC and UCLA and say, what are the most important components in your sport, what are the most important in baseball and softball and basketball. We'll go through that process.

Football frankly will be the easiest to resolve because it's one day a week, and you just fly in and you fly out.

Some of the other sports that play like softball, playing a three-game series over a weekend, how do you factor that in, where are the championships in each of those sports.

We knew when we said yes to this that the work was just beginning, but generally to answer your question, I haven't spoken to a lot of athletes. I've spoken to a couple. I've spoken to all the coaches, and I feel a general sense of excitement.

**Q. How have the conversations gone in terms of expanding Cy-Hawk past 2025?**

GARY BARTA: Jamie (Pollard) and I haven't talked about it specifically. We both know where it sits right now, where it ends, but I think you've heard me say over the years, as long as both of us are here and unless something were to change dramatically, we both know or believe that it's good for both of our programs and there's every intention to continue it going. But this summer we haven't had additional conversations about it.

**Q. Walk me through with the 5980, coming up with a program for something that's brand new, how you get to this current state.**

GARY BARTA: The first step is it benefits student-athletes, so my first response is this is a good thing. Now, how do we do it, because it's not going to be the same at every school. Every school is going to do it a little differently. What we decided is that we say and we believe at Iowa, we place a high value in earning a degree, that one of the reasons you're coming here is to earn a degree. So that's why we came to the decision that every student-athlete, whether you're a walk-on or a full scholarship student-athlete, if you meet that goal, if you fulfill that expectation, we're going to reward you all the same. We are going to give you a significant amount of money when you leave here to get a start, put a down payment on an apartment, maybe lease a car, buy a car, maybe buy a new suit for interviews or whatever it is. You're going to leave here with a nice sum of money to go off into the world.

Then the other part of that is we do have a difference -- annual support and really eligibility academically and managing your life academically appropriately. If you do that semester by semester, if you're a full scholarship student-athlete, if you're a partial scholarship student-athlete, you'll receive some additional support, and then you'll also be a part of that graduation.

We got together with our faculty, with our senior staff, ran it through some different student-athlete groups and came up with the program that we decided would work best at Iowa.

**Q. Do they receive an annual stipend of 5980 plus an additional --**

GARY BARTA: You can't do additional. So the maximum is 5980 a year, and a portion of that will be paid in time -- at the time, and a portion of that will go toward a graduation amount that they'll receive when they earn their degree.

**Q. Is that like grade dependent, if you get a 4.0 you get this much --**

GARY BARTA: No, we didn't do that. At the end of the day if you're academically taking care of business, you're not on probation and you haven't done anything inappropriate, that will be the current year expectation, and then the big one to me is if you leave here with one of your big goals, you want to win a championship and you want to leave here with a degree, so when you leave here with a degree, there's going to be a nice amount of money available, and the same amount whether you're a walk-on or a scholarship student-athlete.

Do I believe that's going to keep somebody from transferring out? Probably not. But it sure is a reward if you decide to come and stay.

**Q. Do you expect that to be up to the full 5980 or is that a budget challenge?**

GARY BARTA: Well, it is a budget challenge, and yes, we expect it to be up to the full 5980.

**Q. Is there any update on the discrimination case, in your opinion when it's released I believe next Monday, is it going to reinforce the actions the program took in letting people go?**

GARY BARTA: Well, you might imagine my answer to the question is going to be that the Attorney General is representing the university, and I'm not going to comment on ongoing litigation, and I'll just leave it at that, just because that's where it's at.

I will tell you this: -- that's where it's at to your question. One of the things I'm very pleased with, if you just walk through our football building, the student-athletes, the coaches, the staff that are in there today, they're having a great experience. There's a lot of momentum. But as it relates to the lawsuit questions, that's going to be -- the Attorney General is representing us, and I won't have additional comment.

**Q. You have a deputy AD spot to fill starting next year. You have some time right now, but when are you going to start filling that or looking for your next person, and are you looking internally, externally? What's the plan for that?**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, first I'm going to start by saying Barbara Burke has been amazing. She's done an incredible job. She's had a wonderful career, and I'm going to miss her, we're going to miss her. That's my first statement to that.

I'm already searching. It's already open. One of the things that we've talked about, Barbara and I have talked about, is so she will retire no later than the end of her contract. It won't surprise me if she goes all the way -- the end of her contract is next June 30th.

But we've also agreed that I'm going to look for and go out and find her replacement, and there will likely be -- in fact, there will probably be carryover between the two of them.

I guess that's -- I budgeted for that. That's a benefit to our staff and to our organization. Then when she's ready to retire, by working -- Barbara will be working with this new person, we'll just be that much more -- we'll just have that much more expertise on the ground every day, so we're going through that process right now.

**Q. How much of a luxury is that considering Barbara has more experience as a past AD, as well, than probably your average deputy AD?**

GARY BARTA: Well, I can't speak to that, but what I can tell you as someone who's been around for a long time, when I created the position at the very beginning, I said one of the things that I was looking for was really important to me was someone who was either currently an AD or has been an AD. The first person in that goal was Gene Taylor. Gene was the athletic director at North Dakota State University, he's now moved on to Kansas State. Barbara took his spot. She had been an AD at Eastern Illinois. I had also worked with her at Wyoming, so I felt great about -- if you would ask our staff, and I certainly will tell you, those two were rock star employees, and they did a great job during their time.

My goal and my expectation is to go find that third person that's just as good, and so that's what we're undertaking right now.

**Q. What do you think can be done to improve regulation on NIL?**

GARY BARTA: Wow, that's a broad question. If everybody would just do with NIL what it was intended to do, and I say that with a smile on my face. Name, image and likeness was opened up with the intention that every student-athlete would be given free opportunity to take their brand, their name, image and likeness and benefit

from it financially. So if everybody would just do that, the world would be a better place, at least from an athletic director's standpoint.

I say that sort of half in jest. The NCAA has come out this summer and indicated that it is focusing on some of the more egregious accusations, and I'll keep them at accusations right now, that it is not within the rules -- it is against the rules to use name, image and likeness as a recruiting inducement. I wasn't born yesterday; I understand that it's going on. We're not going to do it at Iowa, and there are many, many schools that are going to do it the right way.

My hope is that some of those schools if they are doing it inappropriately, the NCAA will be able to penalize them, and that would probably slow down some of those who do decide to cheat. I don't have any names. I'm just saying, you asked the question. If we all just followed the rules, life would be a better place, right? That's probably true in all situations in life.

**Q. As you mentioned about other sports beyond football and USC and UCLA, logistics could be really challenging, probably more on their end than yours. Do you anticipate some sort of travel partnerships in some ways where you might go out in a different sport and play both UCLA and USC a couple days like a basketball game and then they might fly to Michigan and play Michigan and Michigan State over the span of a couple days to mitigate some of those issues?**

GARY BARTA: Whatever the solution is, and yes, we've talked about that possibility. Whatever the solution is, one of the first things the ADs and the presidents said to the conference is we've got to figure out how to mitigate the travel challenge, because if you're at Rutgers and you're going to USC or if you're at UCLA and you're going to Maryland there's going to have to be some sort of recognition of that when we get into travel.

With an increased and anticipated increase in money, I think all of us have talked about we have to make sure if our soccer team or volleyball team is expected to go play on a Tuesday night in LA, we've been chartering in volleyball, but that might be a situation where maybe in the past we wouldn't have chartered in soccer, maybe we're going to have to now.

It's high on our list to look at scheduling and travel as it relates to student-athlete well-being in this new day.

**Q. Are you worried about academics at all and student-athletes maybe falling behind with traveling so far?**

GARY BARTA: Yes and no. I say that because we're always concerned about and committed to making sure academically they're staying on track. But if you were to follow our student-athletes around today, even before that, first of all, there's so much more freedom and flexibility with online courses, so you're seeing a lot more of that.

The other thing is if you were to travel with our softball or baseball teams in the spring, the amount of hours they spend on the road already, they're very adept with their laptop and working with their professors and taking these online -- so yes, we're always going to be thoughtful of it, but I can tell you maybe the one good thing that's come out of COVID is just more of our ability to work academically and in our work life in a more remote setting. I know we'll rise to the challenge, but it's always on our concern list.

I don't anticipate that our GPA or graduation rates will go down as a part of this. I say that with seriousness because that's something that can't happen.

**Q. Will they have to redo the Big Ten commercial that we all love?**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, I guess we're going to have to redo that. You say that, that's one of my favorite commercials. Whoever came up with that, I love that -- just kind of that flyover showing our footprint, and now the flyover is just going to take -- they're either going to have to shorten up each stop or they're going to have to go with the longer commercial. I know you said that in jest, but that is one of my favorite commercials.

**Q. Nine games in football probably going forward? I know you're not going to cut to eight --**

GARY BARTA: Yeah, we hadn't talked about cutting or adding. We've kind of been landing on nine as the number that's worked well, and we haven't talked about with this addition would that change, but I don't anticipate it changing, but give us a few more months now to absorb this new addition.

But I'd prefer to not add, and if we did add, of course that creates other challenges. But I think we'll stay at nine and no divisions at some point, but we'll see.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports