

Indiana University Football

Media Conference

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Scott Dolson

Director of Athletics

Press Conference



SCOTT DOLSON: Hope everybody had a great summer. Want to thank you, first of all, just for all your support. I know sometimes it used to be around here summers used to be a slow time, but it seems like summers are busier than ever. I want to mention -- want to compliment Zach. He had the highlight of the summer in terms of a tweet he sent out about his son's experience at school and what he did at school that day. If you remember that tweet, it was pretty funny. It gave me a good laugh for sure. It was really a good one. That was entertaining.

I thought I'd make some opening comments and then open it up for questions.

I want to really start by saying it's one of my most favorite times of year. How can you not be in college athletics and be excited about the fall? There's an energy around campus and you can feel it. There's an energy around here.

Really want to take this opportunity to thank President Whitten. She's been fantastic to work with. You can feel her energy. We hosted a check-in for Residence Hall, Simon Scott Assembly Hall that first kind of weekend when you feel the wave of students coming in, and she's out there buzzing around and greeting families, and she just brings an energy that you can just feel it.

From our perspective, also, I've worked very closely with her, particularly this summer as we went through all the changes with the Big Ten, the expansion, with the media rights deal, and as busy as she is, which is extremely busy with a lot more important things than athletics, she always finds a way to zero in on the topic and is always there for us, and I thought just as I started out today, it was important to say that and to recognize her. I couldn't have had a better partner than her in terms of working through all the great things happening in the Big Ten.

I also wanted to mention, she started a new program called Gear-Up Fridays, which sort of shows her enthusiasm and the energy she's bringing to campus, so across all of our

campus, she's encouraging everyone to wear their IU gear on Fridays starting with this Friday, so that'll be a big deal, and we just appreciate that.

Speaking of the Big Ten, which I had mentioned this summer, it was an extremely busy time. The Big Ten media rights deal was exciting to be a part of.

It's funny because I've said this before, in my first little over two years as athletic director, I've had more athletic director meetings maybe than any other IU athletic director in history, coming out of COVID and then all the changes going on in college athletics and certainly the media rights deal has been a long process. It's one I really enjoyed being a part of.

I'm on the Big Ten athletic director TV subcommittee, and it was for me -- the strength of the Big Ten in my view is certainly the people and the leadership, and I certainly compliment the colleagues that I worked with, my fellow athletic directors in the Big Ten, but obviously Commissioner Warren for his vision and what he's put forward and making certain that our conference and the brand of the Big Ten is in the best position it possibly can be in his vision for our media rights package.

There's also a lot of unsung heroes. There's a person named Kerry Kenny, who's an associate commissioner behind the scenes that just does a phenomenal job, and again, couldn't be more happy for that process.

Also, for us, it's going to be incredible with media rights in terms of our brand and the exposure for our students athletes in our programs. The financial impact will be significant, and it is critical, but quite frankly it's one of those things that don't believe everything you read. It's going to be good, but it's going to take some time to ramp up. I'm not saying anything to minimize the deal, but what I've had to do is make certain that particularly internally people understand that there's going to take some time. Those deals are generally backloaded. We've got a lot to sort out before we really start to alter budgets or anything like that, but again, it's a tremendous deal. We've done a lot of managing expectations on that end.



From our media partner standpoint, really excited with, again, the vision that Commissioner Warren had with that deal, making certain that we really still have the linear networks that we're partnering with in terms of FOX and CBS and now adding NBC and then certainly our partnership with BTN.

One of the things I thought I'd point out to you to me that was very interesting in working with FOX and their CEO of FOX Sports is Eric Shanks, who's one of our former student assistants in our media relations office, and I just thought that was -- for me I was really proud sitting in meetings and hearing his name or him coming to a meeting as we were part of that process. It's great to see the IU family be so successful out there, and he certainly is a big part of this new deal.

I also wanted to mention, we're really, really excited about bringing all of our students back. We've started obviously with soccer, field hockey, volleyball, but just can't wait for this Friday night. We're pumped about the game this Friday.

A couple things about that. Ticket sales have been really, really good. We really feel great about renewals, where we are. We had a terrific year last year attendance-wise, and renewals have been very strong, particularly students, and I want to take a second just to commend our students. Our students have been phenomenal. Again, high energy. Going back to what I said about President Whitten, our student ticket sales are up 10 percent, so we expect a big student turnout for this Friday night.

We've got several new things in the stadium. As you drove up you probably could see the light poles. The final light poles are going up. We've got new lights in the stadium, which has been something that we've needed for a while. We've had to rent lights for night games because the coverage -- those were the original lights put in I believe in the early '80s, so we're really excited to have modern, state-of-the-art LED lighting going in the stadium which should be ready for Friday night. That's a big deal.

I'm excited also about our new team store. We've partnered with Legends, which is an up-and-coming outsourcer of all apparel sales. We're still obviously an Adidas school, but the Legends family will be handling all of the team sales as well as our e-commerce, and hopefully -- I like to under-promise and over-deliver. I don't like to make big statements, but I think you'll see an improvement there, and couldn't be more happy with them.

Also really excited about having cashless payments for the first time. No more cash in the stadium, which hopefully, again, we can continually think about ways to improve our

customer service, and we think that's a big deal for us, and we're excited about that, as well.

I also wanted to mention just our partnership with IU Sports Properties, which is a division of Learfield Sports. IU Sports Properties has done a phenomenal job for years, but really particularly coming out of the pandemic, we've really upped our sponsorship opportunities.

You saw that we made an announcement a few weeks back that we've partnered with Molson Coors as official beer sponsor. We're opening up that category. Just to clarify that, we still have the same beer offerings. That doesn't mean that's the only beer that will be sold here, for those of you who might be interested in that category, but we certainly are partnering with them as an official sponsor of IU athletics, and we'll be announcing later today that Upland will also be a sponsor, as well. Upland handles all of our alcohol sales at the games but they'll also be a sponsor. We separate the sales from the sponsorships. So we're really excited about that and appreciative of IU Sports Properties and the great job that they do.

Speaking specifically about football, I'm really excited about Tom and the staff and excited for the players. To be honest with you, since the Purdue game ended last year, it's been fun for me to watch Tom roll up his sleeves and then the players follow, just really get after it, and couldn't be more happy with just the process.

I'm a big process person. I think you don't just show up at the game and expect different results. You've got to put in the work, and I know Tom feels the same way. That's really what's been going on.

I think I'm probably preaching to the choir, but the new staff has just fit right in seamlessly. It feels like the staff, to be honest with you, has been here a long time, and the integration has been really great from that perspective. I'm really impressed with them.

From the players themselves, they've got an edge. You feel it. You guys cover us. I'm impressed so much with the leadership of the team.

Again, to me, winning is a product of a lot of things, and I think that process has gone well, and it starts with leadership, and I couldn't be more proud of the leadership of this team.

Not to single anybody out, but I did want to mention Tiawan Mullen. We've got really special student-athletes across the board, but Tiawan has been incredible, just for me in my position to watch him grow here and see the young man that he's become. He's probably stopped by my



office, I won't exaggerate, probably 25 times since the season ended and pops by. We've established a great friendship, but he'll pop in and a lot of times he'll just ask me how I'm doing and what's going on. He attended the women's basketball late games this past season with me and went to the NCAA tournament games here. He attended the NCAA track regionals. Tiawan is just someone to me that represents all that we want in our student-athletes, and I wanted to mention him today because I think that's reflective of the culture that we're building within our football program but also just across the departments. Special shout-out to Tiawan.

With that, can't wait to kick things off on Friday night, and I'd be happy to answer any questions anyone has.

Q. Just sort of forgive me for being a little blunt, but last year I know there was a lot of energy, season ticket sales, fan engagement, things like that. After the way last season went, what is the work that's gone into reigniting some of that when I imagine your fan base isn't as sort of keyed up as it would have been out of the 2020 season?

SCOTT DOLSON: Are you talking more departmentally or within the program?

Q. Specifically football.

SCOTT DOLSON: Specifically football, yeah. For us, our style or my style is not to be a big talker, to not make big projections but really just to go to work, and really last season didn't live up to our standards after coming off the seasons in 2019 and 2020 which were really record years for us back-to-back and Tom national Coach of the Year. Obviously we struggled last year.

Just like Tom and obviously what he's done with his staff and obviously with the roster, and just really evaluating our program to really get back to those standards that we set, and same thing for me and the department, whether it's our ticket office, whether it's our marketing department. Everything that we do behind the scenes to make certain that we have the program at the level we want it to be.

I couldn't be more excited come into the game this Friday night. Our fans have responded. Again, the renewal rate, quite frankly, coming off a huge year like last year from an attendance standpoint, didn't know where we'd be, but was really pleasantly surprised at the season ticket base, how they came back, and with the students up over 10 percent was a big deal. So I'm excited looking at Friday night.

Q. What is the renewal rate, and how does that compare to previous years? What else can you tell us

about season tickets at this point, single game tickets at this point? Can you put some finer numbers on it?

SCOTT DOLSON: Sure. Our renewal rate is right at 98 percent of where we were last year in total. Our students are up 10 percent, so general public is just right about there. In fact, we could close in on it this week.

The way I do it is I talk to our staff internally. Our season ticket numbers are about half the stadium, so we get up around -- our stadium seats about 52,000, we've got about 26,000 plus in season tickets sold, so we rely heavily, which we have for years, on the single game sales, and again, those are trending in a great direction.

We expect that this Friday night we'll be in the low 40s and hope to grow from there. Again, just couldn't be more appreciative of our fans.

Sometimes I think unjustly so, I think sometimes our football fans maybe take some criticism, and I don't think that is warranted at all. I think our football fans are as well as they come. Again, this year's results are a real indication of that.

Q. Message received on the media rights deal kind of being backloaded as it relates to the financial side of that, but presumably down the road there is a financial windfall there. Do you have one or two main areas that you're focused on when it comes to facilities or budget expansion and things like that?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, like you said, it is backloaded, and a lot of those details are still to come. But the reality is that the way things are changing and the way that our budget is just -- like many of your budgets are increasing, I feel like we've already kind of spent it in a way.

We announced this summer the Alston Award, which is an academic award that we'll award to any student-athlete who qualifies for it this year, and that's about a \$3 million hit to our budget, so in a way, as we look at -- as this media rights, the details come out and as that grows over time, I feel like that will allow us to really keep pace and to be able to do things we need to do to support our student-athletes, but I really don't look at it as a real windfall.

The staff that are here, they were at our all-staff meeting this past Wednesday, that was part of my message was, because what you just asked or I think what a lot of people started thinking is that it's going to be a huge uptick at one time, and again, it's a steady stream over time, mainly backloaded, and again, a lot of that is already taken into consideration in what we're planning for the future to

support our student-athletes.

Q. Scott, when it comes to NIL, I know it's still changing, football, basketball, apples and oranges, it's a lot easier to work in basketball because of the smaller numbers, but obviously the basketball program here has had greater success over the years, and they seem to be getting solidified via NIL through Hoosiers For Good and whatnot. Is there a plan to start doing that on the other side for football? I know you can't do it the entire way, but to equal out, I guess?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, let me first just say we've been working on NIL -- it was a little over a year ago when NIL started, and we were working on it the year before. I'm really proud of our team internally that has done everything we can to put our student-athletes in a position for success and to maximize that opportunity.

As it relates to specifically to football, it's certainly important from a competitive standpoint that our student-athletes have success here in all our sports, but certainly football is a priority. We can only control what we can control.

I will say since you opened the door, I do want to thank all of the supporters out there who have supported NIL efforts, particularly as you said, Hoosiers For Good, who's really done some amazing things, and I know they want to continue to grow that, and I know football is important to them, as well.

Again, that's outside the athletic department, but it is something that they know it's important to us that we have success from our student-athletes, so again, as future student-athletes look at coming here, they see that there are NIL opportunities here, and we take it very seriously, and I think we're on a good track to do that.

Q. More broadly on alcohol sales, beer sales, beer and wine in particular at athletics events, that has kind of gone from the trial period to football, now it's expanding into other sports, kind of widespread. Is it something you see continuing to expand? Where does that go next, and what is the financial impact as you expand? I imagine it's smaller, but to places like baseball, soccer, volleyball, et cetera?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yes, we'll continue to evaluate, and I'll say that it has gone extremely well to date. Data really shows from the time we implemented it the first year at Memorial Stadium that our incidents actually went down, our alcohol-related incidents, and I think controlling the environment has proved to be successful.

So we'll continue to evaluate.

We did announce that we expanded that to soccer. We're currently looking at Simon Scott Assembly Hall to see if that's something we may or may not do, but I am a big proponent of making certain that we're keeping up with what our fans would like to see from a fan experience standpoint. The feedback we received from our fans, even going back to the spring with baseball and softball has been really, really well received and handled really well, so we'll continue to grow that and to look at ways that we can maximize that opportunity, but keeping in mind responsibility drinking, managing the process in a way that we don't put any other fan in a precarious position by having alcohol served.

Q. I know a big question going around right now is the legislation surrounding NIL and kind of evening the playing field, making sure states are all on the same page, athletic departments are all on the same page. Have you had any conversations inside the department or outside about what you guys want to see legislation-wise about NIL moving forward?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, we talk about it internally seems like daily on what is the future and what's happening, because it changes it seems like every day. In terms of, again, I mentioned this earlier, the strength of the Big Ten I think is really in its people and the administrators, and we talk at length about what is the future going to look like and what should it look like.

I do know that there are really, really smart people working on the transformational committee at the NCAA level to really look at all aspects of the future of college athletics.

I do think there needs to be just personally some guardrails put on NIL so there is fair competition and it really is set up so it's not an inducement and it's not a pay for play. It'll be interesting to see where all that goes in terms of what the future will hold.

But in the meantime, what we're trying to do here is that we want to make certain that we're maximizing this opportunity within the rules that we're given for our student-athletes so that they can have success.

Q. I know you've been around the department for a long time, but as the guy running the show now, what do you enjoy most about the job, and what has been a little bit surprising about being the guy at the top?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, for sure I enjoy more than anything just being around the students. Whenever it's a tough day, because we spend so much time on the

business side of things, and for us here making certain that we're making the right decisions with our resources so we can certainly finish in the black but also provide the necessary resources for success, but we talk about the business so much that sometimes it's easy to forget kind of what the main thing is.

Whenever I have an opportunity, like I mentioned Tiawan stopping by my office or me to stop by a practice or run over to the Tobias Center for lunch, it definitely sounds corny, but it does make me feel like I understand the big picture here. Again, in this day and age with all the transformational change going on, sometimes it's easy to forget that.

President Whitten and I had lunch last Wednesday I believe it was with about 10 student-athletes. She was in the area, and she said, hey, do you have time for lunch, and I said, why don't we go over to the Tobias Center and have lunch with the student-athletes, and it was awesome. I talked to her afterwards, and she's kind of the same way, that she feels like on campus when she can get in the mix with the students, it really puts things in perspective.

In terms of anything surprising, really there hasn't been, although since I took over it seems like -- I should say there has been because of the pandemic and NIL and all of the transformational change, all the things that are happening, it hasn't been sort of a normal time I guess you could say, but I give Fred Glass a ton of credit that he really put me in a position as his No. 2 person or I think I learned a lot and kind of knew what to expect with the job, and so really there hasn't been a ton of surprises other than you just don't know what's going to happen next, but I guess that keeps us busy, which is good.

Q. Kind of continuing with NIL, with how new it is, have there been any conversations or is there any interest for Indiana to hire NIL-specific positions to help guide these athletes through this process?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, we actually already have NIL-specific positions that we just kind of reassigned and worked within our current staff. On our senior team, for example, Becky Pany, who's a senior associate AD over at sports management, she really has been the quarterback of our NIL efforts and really for the past two years I guess you could say has really been working as that central person really coordinating everything.

Jeremy Gray, another senior associate AD, is really working closely with her on the brand side of things, building brands for our student-athletes so they can maximize the opportunity.

Then we have various other people. We formed an NIL task force. We bring in departmental staff and also people from across campus, Dr. Galen Clavio at the media school, Ash Soni, who's the interim dean of the Kelley School of Business, to really work on what is our vision for NIL efforts.

I think at other schools they've chosen to do it a little differently maybe and hire a specific position that's not someone within their team, but for us we just had the capacity and I felt like the talent that we really could do it internally and not have to bring in someone from the outside.

I feel like we've got probably as many if not more resources working towards NIL than anyone else and feel comfortable where we are from a staff standpoint.

Q. Staying on NIL policy wise, is it something where -- do you get any sense that there is momentum for legislation in the state, and just to be direct, would you prefer that or are you in the camp that thinks it's easier to just sort of operate without a state law because it allows you to be more fluid as a department?

SCOTT DOLSON: Yeah, great question. I think it's much easier and much more conducive for success and for consistency without a state law. I think there was sort of a panic when there wasn't a state law that we're going to be left behind, but actually being able to just follow the NCAA rules and then develop our own internal policy was a much better path for us.

I think you see it that states that have passed laws are now altering them based on how NCAA rules are interpreted or different things sort of as it's unfolded.

I think we've had a ton of support, again, across campus. I think our alumni, I mentioned the collectives, you saw the fan fest that happened with Hoosier Hysterics, and they did a terrific job with that, and I think you'll see more. We'll be aggressive as we can be within the rules to make certain our student-athletes maximize this opportunity.

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