

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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## Big Ten

Commissioner Press Conference

## Commissioner Tony Petitti



TONY PETITTI: Thank you for being here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. There are reports about a Big Ten-SEC alliance potentially and automatic bids potentially on the football side. Can you comment on that? With this Big Ten and SEC alliance, how might that impact the NCAA Tournament and what happens with that in the future?**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, on the football I'm just going to wait. We have our meeting next week. I think I would rather wait and talk about football when we get through meetings next week.

On basketball it doesn't have much to do at all with the NCAA basketball tournament. I think we're focused on some of the things that have been reported around scheduling. I think there's a real appetite in both leagues to play each other more. Not just in football, but in other sports.

I think hopefully we'll have good, positive discussions in that direction next week.

**Q. I wondered with the power those two leagues have, is there a world where the NCAA Tournament changes in any way? Do you foresee that?**

TONY PETITTI: We're committed to the NCAA Tournament the way it is. I know there's been talk about -- you guys have reported about expansion in terms of adding teams.

But other than that, the discussions are in the Big Ten about getting more teams in the Big Ten tournament. I'm sorry, the NCAA Tournament. You know what I meant, though. I misspoke.

**Q. Do you have strong feelings either way on NCAA Tournament expansion?**

TONY PETITTI: I do. I think, look, something like that I

really rely on what our coaches think, to be honest. In terms of the first place to go to have conversations about expansion, it should be our coaches who do it and get their take on the way they think it would work.

I think on the NCAA side we've had a lot of conversations with NCAA staff, with Dan, with President Baker. I think there are some positive feelings towards expansion in our league.

I think also the detail of how the seeding would work, I just need to hear more about how that would work depending on how many teams they had, what the seeding looks like, what the first two days look like, because it's just not as simple as saying add more teams.

I think it has an impact on actually how you structure those first couple of days and what types of changes they would be considering or not.

I think that's relevant. It impacts how you feel about the idea to expand.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about basketball tournaments' in-season challenges. Up until last year there was the ACC-Big Ten challenge. It was made for TV. It went away because of TV ramifications. Is there any possibility to bring back a Big Ten, full-scale Big Ten Challenge in basketball?**

TONY PETITTI: I'll talk about it more broadly. I think there's an appetite to do more things to drive interest in regular season college basketball. I think we can do things that create that interest early. That would be great.

I think we're open in the Big Ten talking about all different kinds of formats, whether it's working with other conferences, doing things inside of our league.

But I do think if we're doing our jobs properly that we're talking about that. I just think there will be an evolution in the creating events. You've seen in-season tournaments in the NBA.

There's just ideas, and we should be creative about this



and try to figure out how we generate more interest. There's a lot of nonconference events that are staged by others. I think we believe that we can do more and more of that ourselves and find ways to bring our teams together with others and play meaningful games throughout the season and continue to do that.

Look, it's tough to get through the Big Ten schedule, so you have to be respectful of how we do it. But I do think there's an opportunity to actually do more and create some more excitement and interest really in the basketball season.

**Q. The UNLV quarterback situation with the NIL, a lot of news, generated a lot of conversations. What do you think (off microphone) mechanisms to avoid that, and are contracts, actual contracts, to exploit NIL something that potentially could...**

TONY PETITTI: I'm not going to speak to specifically UNLV because I don't have the details of that situation. Just generally I think that's why we've spent a lot of work the last year trying to find the structure through settlement that will give some predictability and sustainable -- create a sustainable system.

I think we believe in the mechanism that the settlement is proposing, and we're optimistic that the judge will see it the same way, that we can get to a place whereby settling we can have a structure in place, work towards that.

I think we'll clear up a lot of the things you're referring to, and that will require a good rule-making on our part. Overall I think that settlement gives us the best opportunity to create a sustainable system there.

We'll still have to get a lot of things right in that system, but I believe it's the absolute crucial first step, and we spent a lot of time on it and we're optimistic that we'll be able to do it.

**Q. You talked about putting a bigger spotlight on regular season basketball. How challenging is that when our season starts with the NFL, college football, NBA, and everything else that's kind of overshadowing especially in those early months?**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, look, I think there are opportunities during the week. There's days when there's no football being played. I think a lot of it's the creativity and how you schedule, where you put these events to try to maximize interest, maximize attendance, and do all the things you need to do. I think there's opportunity there across and just trying to schedule it smartly.

Look, I think we've seen when you bring teams together, you create events that matter, people find it. So I think we can just keep doing that. We do a lot of it now. I'm not suggesting that we don't, but I think we can do a lot more of it.

**Q. Going back to the settlement and your conversations with student-athletes when it comes to employment, what kind of feedback have you heard about that potential with the idea of maybe contracts?**

TONY PETITTI: Look, I think the goal has been through the settlement is to provide the benefits directly from the institution where they're predictable, where you know where near going to happen. I think that's one of the primary benefits of the settlement.

I think when you speak with student-athletes, at least when I do, I think they feel like they're getting a lot of the benefits they would get under employment status. I think student-athletes want to be students and have the experience that they have now.

Having said that, I think what we're talking about is a meaningful change and being able to provide more benefits directly. But in terms of the other things that come, the health and wellness, the training, nutrition, employment status is really complicated.

I think it's sort of a misconception that when people think about employment that that automatically means it's better for the employee. That's not necessarily the case.

So I think there's a lot of unintended things that could happen in that model, so I think the best model is to preserve the student-athlete paradigm first and then move to the next world here that we're trying to get to by providing more benefits directly.

I think that's the goal, and I think student-athletes will embrace that.

**Q. Guys announced in July the 2028 Big Ten tournament to Las Vegas. I'm curious how big of a move was that to leave the Midwest, and what's your vision for the future of nationwide Big Ten events?**

TONY PETITTI: I think the expansion makes it clear that we have to bring some events to try to connect all the fans across the entire fan base across the Big Ten. Moving out to Vegas helps do that. We've moved a little bit, and I think I like the rotation that we have. The Midwest is still in proximity, the anchor for the largest footprint of the conference.

But having said that, it's really important to bring events closer to the new members and bring championships. That's part of the way you integrate the four new members is to try to bring championships closer.

So I think this move to Las Vegas is a really important step in that direction.

**Q. Last year when you were here we were talking about Big Ten scheduling and what it would look like with 18 teams. A lot of teams were still influx. How do you feel about a 20-week -- or 20-game schedule for the league, and what were the challenges like in trying to figure out the travel logistics and how all this works?**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, the team -- Brad, Alize (phonetic), our college basketball with Kerry Kenny, did a really excellent job of taking the input from coaches and administrators, kind of putting that all into one bucket, and then try to come out with the right -- with the right result.

I think the fact that we're playing everybody is really important, so that's the first tenet, play everybody.

Then we have the three games where you play somebody the second time. I think geography and historic rivalries are a big part of those second matchups. So just like we did in football, we try -- there are certain things you want to preserve that are important to our fans. You don't want those to go away when you get bigger. I think we've done a good job of doing that.

The other thing you have to do is connect everybody, play everybody. That was the overall goal. When you get into the second things of who you are going to play twice, rivalries, geography, travel, all those got into your consideration.

I feel good about it. I think we've gotten good feedback on how we set it up. We'll go play it and see what the feedback is after.

**Q. Obviously a lot of dominos and a lot of changes in this league in the last couple of years. What are the chances, if any, of more expansion do you think in the future with this league?**

TONY PETITTI: Right now I can tell you there's just no discussions about it at all. I think we feel really good about where we are. We've had a lot of work to do to get it right because, as you know, it's not just getting it right for football and men's basketball, women's basketball. It's everything else that we do across the 28 championships that we're staging.

We need to make sure that we're getting that right, so I think that's where the focus has been.

**Q. Was there ever a consideration to go more than 20 games?**

TONY PETITTI: I don't think we really had meaningful conversations about more than 20. Maybe Brad took more inquiries about that than I did, but not that it reached me. I think we felt good about where 20 was. That fair?

**Q. Big Ten is historically a test station for league and NBA prospects (indiscernible). What do you feel about the level of star power?**

TONY PETITTI: The league has always had the history of having great players that go on to do great things on the professional side. I think we continue to have that. I feel really good about the quality and the depth of the league across.

The two you mentioned, I think there's a lot of excitement in New Jersey about those two specifically, so we're excited to let everybody go play and see how it goes.

Our coaches and the ability to attract great players and the institutions, the Big Ten has always been able to do that, and I don't see any changes in that at all.

**Q. As far as the expansion goes, there's some media speculation in the last year or two that 24 seems like an ideal number to get to as far as the Big Ten and the SEC. What are your thoughts on that and just guys having discussions where, hey, we are aiming towards this, or is it more or less watch and see?**

TONY PETITTI: It's more the latter. I've never had a conversation about 24, to be honest. It's never come up in terms of a target number. It just never gets discussed inside the league that way.

**Q. You talked about potential NCAA Tournament expanding and you want to know more about the structure of that. Would you also want guarantees for this league beyond the automatic berth in that expanded...**

TONY PETITTI: The field is so big, so AOs across more. I think that's a different concept than what we've talked about publicly in football given the size of the field. I think it's just different.

So we haven't had specific conversations about if you expand, what does that mean for an additional AO. I think



it's more about figuring out who else is going to get in.

I think obviously that would help on the Big Ten side to get the teams on the bubble and if the field expands, and from there I want to see how it's seeded.

**Q. How is your relationship with Greg Sankey and how has it grown, and (off microphone).**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, it's been a good year of working together on a lot of big projects. There are things that we can do that impact on the field in how we can play more together and do those things. Then there's structural changes in college athletics.

We've spent a lot of time together on that part, whether it's efforts in Congress, whether it's trying to get through the settlement and figure out how to implement the terms of the settlement, all of those things.

Look, I think when I took the job I've been really public about saying this. One of the things I was asked to do by leadership, both the athletic directors and by the presidents and chancellors of the Big Ten, is just to work more closely with the Southeastern Conference. That was a priority.

I went to go see Greg two weeks into the job. I think it's kind of evolved from there. There are a lot of challenges we face together. That doesn't mean we don't do things with others across the A4 across and the NCAA as well, but there's a lot of commonality in terms of the challenges we face and what we think the opportunities are.

This leads us to a very close working relationship to try to get some things done.

**Q. This is year two of your television -- new television package for football and men's basketball, specifically women's basketball. Specific to men's basketball, I know there were some coaches that were nervous last year about leaving ESPN because of the viewership there. What did you think of your first year, and is there anything better that the networks and leagues can do to work together to ensure viewership remains high?**

TONY PETITTI: Look, we talk about it in time. Kerry Kenny, who leads that for us, he is in touch with his network partners every day about scheduling.

I do think this is an area in the expansion that we are talking about makes us deeper in terms of the quality of the matchups across. It was great before. It's gotten a lot better in terms of how we're going to program and the opportunities to have games.

I felt good about the footprint we had last year. We have a ton of network exposure. We have good solid cable exposure as well. I feel like we have a good pattern.

There are going to be games streaming. We have to cede that platform. It's difficult to predict what's going to happen, right, in terms of linear cable bundle, all those things. You have an obligation as a league to make sure we're expanding out and we're putting our content where things might be moving. I think that's a part of what you saw last year. You'll see it again this year.

That doesn't mean -- we understand there's a disruption when you do that, but I think the overall pattern of what we had last year was really good. I feel good about it again this year. The additional matchups make us stronger, and so I think our partners are really happy about the content they have available, and we're seeing that in the windows that they offer us.

**Q. To dove-tail off that point negotiations...(off microphone).**

TONY PETITTI: Their regular season schedule is really up to them. There are things we do that might be different, but that doesn't stop other opportunities. There's lots of places where we still can come together. That's up for Greg and his league to decide what they think the right number of conference games is for them.

For us we're having this meeting, and there's no -- it's being done because we still think there's a lot we can do together, and that's up to them. That's something they'll control, but there's still a lot of room to come together to play more.

**Q. What does the L.A. market mean for this league, and how do you use it to grow the brand in the Big Ten?**

TONY PETITTI: I think you look at the footprint and being able to go to New York, Chicago, L.A., and some of the three biggest markets in the country, I think that's really important in the totality of it.

And it's also just the testament of the two institutions that are in L.A. and the reach that they have and the history.

On the basketball side what you get with UCLA and the history there and what's happening at USC. We feel really good about that. It's not just that we have L.A. It's the fact that it's UCLA and USC in L.A. which mean a lot in that market.

That's what we're trying to take advantage of. BTN and others have done a good job over the summer of starting to connect people. And then look, at the end of the day what drives the interest is the games, right? It's the matchups. It's playing great games across all of our sports.

That's ultimately what will bring it really together, but having that happen in it L.A. makes it a little bit bigger.

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