

University of Iowa Football Media Conference

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Athletic Director Gary Barta

Press Conference

GARY BARTA: Good to see you in person and not through a TV screen. As I walked into the room I saw most of you do not have masks on. So I'll talk a little bit more about COVID.

I do carry a mask. I spoke to a class earlier today. They all had masks on. So I put my mask on. If I'm in a group that's uncomfortable, I'll wear my mask. If I'm in a group that either is all vaccinated or comfortable, we have distance here -- but I'll talk a little bit more about that.

Just can't say enough about how excited I am to have game week back -- and game week with fans. And I know as I've talked to fans just so much excitement, just feel the goosebumps of having the music and seeing the team come down the tunnel. And I really can't wait to feel that again.

Last year, we got through it. But it certainly wasn't the same. In addition, this weekend just a reminder, at least my excitement, reminds me -- having Hall of Fame weekend. We're inducting 10 new members into the Hall of Fame after not having a class last year. So congratulations to all of those inductees and their families.

Friday, what used to be the Marriott, has now changed hands; it's now the Hyatt in Coralville. We'll have a Friday afternoon luncheon honoring that group. We'll have a Saturday evening reception honoring that group. And as is tradition, probably the most excitement is honoring them on the field. So looking forward to that.

Generally momentum from last year, picking up with the great year we had last year, soccer is off to a 3-1 start. Field hockey, undefeated, 2-0, and most importantly beat the number one team and the number 11 team -- went in ranked No. 3 in the country. So just a really great start for our other teams before we talk about football.

I thought I'd talk a little bit about just a few more remarks and then happy to answer questions. Talk about game day,



Saturday. Certainly Steve mentioned a lot of changes. So we haven't done this for a whole year. And just several changes that -- all of this can be found on the GameDay page on Hawkeyesports.com. I thought I'd address it.

Just, first, playing a conference team right out of the chute, a very good conference team. So that's unique. That's different. Mobile ticketing, mobile app ticketing. We've been working on, as most of you have experienced, whether it's airlines or other sporting events, certainly somewhere that everyone's going to. The transition is challenging, because we're all used to that piece of paper in our hand.

We've been working with our season ticket holders and fans, converting them, asking everybody -- the best way to manage this is to get it downloaded on to your phone before Saturday. There still is the opportunity on Saturday but by doing it before Saturday you maybe work out some of the bugs. Our staff has been working on that nonstop.

There will be -- so, first of all there will be 94 points of entry as opposed to 2019, there were 84 points of entry. Even though we've shifted some of those in terms of the gates, but there's more than there was in the past. And there's also some help stations that will be there for someone who is having a problem, having a difficulty managing their mobile ticket app. So at the end of the day everyone will get in. Everyone will get in that has a ticket. Certainly not if you don't have a ticket.

But we certainly encourage people to start coming into the stadium earlier, game one, for a couple of reasons. One, because of the changes. Also, not unlike service industry across the country, shortage of staff. If you think about everywhere you go and you see that experience, we have between 500 and 1,000 workers on any given Saturday.

And we know for sure we're going to struggle to hit that 500 mark. So we will be understaffed. And so just everything we do, whether it's getting into the gate, whether it's finding a place to park, whether it's buying concessions, we know we're going to be facing -- plus it's the first game. Plus we haven't done this for a year. So just encouraging fans to get there earlier.

It's cashless inside the stadium. Concession stands are all cashless, that's partly a COVID move. Not interacting or having that transaction. Obviously credit cards are taken.



We are selling beer and wine.

We've done that in the clubs and suites, but this is the first time we're doing it in all of the areas. And you have all heard me say this, when it started to become a thing, four, five, six, seven years ago, I said the University of Iowa won't be the first. It's likely we won't be the last.

Well, we're eighth, is my understanding in the Big Ten. But it is new. It is different. So, safe, legal and responsible, Aramark is trained all around the country and world in managing this. And certainly expectations for fans are making sure that you are of age.

There are tips trained to Aramark staff. We'll begin as is common practice, we will stop selling alcohol after the third quarter. So that's, again, just standard best practices across the country.

Tailgating starts at 8:30 for a 2:30 game. That's new, six hours before. We looked around the conference and we looked at other tailgating procedures. We looked at the fact that we are trying to continue to make a good environment, a safe environment.

And it does relate to the staffing that we have. Historically if we open at 6.00 a.m., we're bringing staff in to man those lots somewhere in the middle of the night. If we have a night game and they have to work all the way through to a night game, well, you just add up the hours. I know you all work a lot of hours, but just add up, if you're there from 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning until the game starts at 7:00 at night.

So lots and lots of changes. Change is always difficult. But at the end of the day we're committed to our fans having a great experience. Student section is sold out pretty much right away in the summer. And we made more student tickets available.

We have about 2,500 tickets, as Steve said. We're still selling them every week. I think we were on a pace to sell out, and then my only thought is that as the variant became more and more discussed and prevalent, that probably slowed down our ticket sales, would be my guess, but still a great crowd. It will feel and look sold out when we get there on Saturday, depending on, I think, the weather forecast is favorable. So looking forward to that.

COVID, is still critical. Still top of mind of everything that we do every day as we're working through this. The uncertainty that we have this year is mostly surrounding the variant. But it's still so much better than it was a year ago because we do have a vaccine and our medical staff does have much better understanding of how to treat

somebody if they contract the disease.

So at the end of the day, my approach to this, and this is Gary's approach -- it's generally supported by the university's approach -- mandated or not, get vaccinated, because medically vaccination is how we're going to beat this thing.

It's how we're going to -- it's years ago how we beat polio, mumps, measles. I'm not saying I'm medically trained to say this is different or the same. But I've spoken to medical professionals and vaccination is the best way. Not because it's mandated, but because medically it's the best way to overcome this.

After that, what else can you do? Wash your hands, wear a mask in situations where it makes sense or people are uncomfortable.

Just maybe put yourself at distance like we are today, a little bit more than we are used to. And if you so choose, make decisions to not be out as much or in situations as often.

It's not going to be zero. We're not going to have zero infections on our campus, in our state or across the country. But we can mitigate it to some degree.

So I could go on and on. I could talk about CFP expansion. I could talk about transfers, NIL. I could talk about all the things that have been happening since we used to get together more regularly but I'm not going to. At this point I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Is it too late or is the help-wanted sign still out? If people want to work at Kinnick Saturday and the rest of the season, how do they do that?

GARY BARTA: Absolutely, the answer is yes. I would steer everybody to hawkeyesports.com game day. And I'll have somebody on the staff make sure that we can provide that information directly. As soon as I'm done here I'll make sure that. Thanks for asking.

Q. Gary, it's been a week since the alliance was mentioned. It seems nebulous, it did then, than it does today. What does that mean for football scheduling going forward specifically to the Cy-Hawk Series which has a contract through 2025?

GARY BARTA: Texas and Oklahoma announced they were changing conferences, the Big Ten, rightly so, got together and said, first of all, where do we stand? The Big Ten is in a very good position.

We have a group of schools that share philosophy academically, research, competitively. It's in a contiguous nine states. And our TV contract is strong, so we feel very good about where we are.

Now, that said, we talked about, do we look at expanding? And if so what would that look like? We've talked about that.

We didn't identify somebody that we were ready to go forward with, with those criteria. So then we started talking to others. And the Pac-12 and the ACC had similar thoughts, similar approaches to research and academics and athletics. So we came up with the alliance concept.

One of the pieces of that is scheduling. We haven't dug in and gotten after scheduling. But we will honor current contracts.

You mentioned, Iowa State, we have a contract with them through 2025. That's just factual. The principle that we've talked about is, this would not preclude us from playing other conferences. So that's a principle that we've discussed.

And Jamie Pollard and I have spoken about this and other things as the world of college sports has been shifting and changing. I've said before, and I'll say it again today, I think the Iowa-Iowa State Cy-Hawk matchup is good for our state, good for college football, college athletics.

That being said, I can't predict the future. So I can't go beyond where we are today other than what I just stated.

Q. Are you waiting to see what happens to the Big 12 before deciding about scheduling?

GARY BARTA: I think it's fair to say we have to wait and see what happens to the Big 12, and all of college sports in terms of conference alignment. Does anybody else expand or retract? What decisions will the Big 12 make? What other decisions will other conferences make?

I think it is fair to say that we're going to wait and see. And there's no reason to make a decision on August 31st.

Q. This alliance thing happened fast. Did it go all the way down to you -- athletic directors, administrators and coaches?

GARY BARTA: Yes. At least in the Big Ten I can tell you, yes. And I'm comfortable to say that it sounds like it occurred in the other conferences as well, that it had presidential discussion and it did have athletic director inclusion and involvement.

Q. Schools like LSU, Syracuse, Tulane, Oregon, Oregon State are all requiring either proof of vaccination or negative tests three days prior for fans entering the stadium. Have you had talks about implementing rules like that moving forward for football games and what were the discussions had?

GARY BARTA: We've certainly had numerous discussions about mitigation. What is the best path forward? How do we do this the best we can? But in the State of Iowa, we're a state institution, and it would be against the law for us to have mandated vaccinations and mandated showing a card and those types of things.

So we are where we are. As I mentioned before, I would love everybody who walks into the door today, everybody who walks into the stadium, to get vaccinated.

By the way, I'm glad you brought it up because it slipped my mind. Hy-Vee will be offering at our game the opportunity for fans to get vaccinated, right on the north side of the stadium. My understanding is Hy-Vee is going to offer that at Iowa State as well. I think I heard that they offered it at the state fair. And I would just encourage every fan that comes here -- that means you'd have to come probably even a little bit earlier -- but get vaccinated.

So while on the one hand it's not mandated, it's the path forward.

Q. I'm sure you've heard there are season ticket holders that are wishing there were a mask mandate because they want to go back to the game as much as anyone. Have you heard from those folks and what's your response to that?

GARY BARTA: I've heard from those that absolutely want a mask and those who absolutely don't want a mask. So I think this is one of those topics that's certainly very challenging. I respect both opinions, but we're moving forward with the plan we think is going to best fit where we are at this time.

Q. Where are season tickets at this juncture? You said 2500 for this game, but are they below or at or exceed what they were pre-2020?

GARY BARTA: I didn't bring the number, but the last I had heard we were kind of right where we were prior to 2019. And the vast majority decided to move forward this year as opposed to put it off.

I think we're in a good place with the opportunity. If somebody wants to buy some season tickets, we'll still sell



them.

Q. From your perspective, I think you're part of, some Big Ten ADs are a part of this, do you like the appeal of scheduling an ACC/Pac-12 combo in a plus-2 type of model for the Big Ten?

GARY BARTA: In general terms, I think it's intriguing. Now, we currently play nine Big Ten games. And the ACC plays eight. And I think I'm right, the Pac-12 plays nine. That might have to be part of the discussion. We need to have seven home games.

There's certain things at Iowa, we're going to say, have to happen. And then after that, having the opportunity to play some other games, I think it's intriguing. Especially depending on where college football and college athletics goes in the future. But we are just not ready to say that as of today here's what we should be doing.

Q. You're on the College Football Playoff committee, expansion talk going to 12. What were your thoughts on that, and where does that stand right now?

GARY BARTA: First of all, I think everybody knows the subcommittee that was put together. They brought forward a proposal. That proposal hasn't been voted upon yet. My understanding is that will happen in September. That's number one, just a quick update.

The committee that I serve on is the selection committee. So we focus on -- I've already watched all the games from last week like you all did. I'll be, first and foremost, focused on Iowa-Indiana, and the rest of the weekend I'll watch the other games. At the end of the day, my point being, my role is pretty limited. It's get a group of 13 people to pick the best teams as the year unfolds.

After that, I'm excited to see where, if it does expand, as the athletic director at Iowa, what does that mean for the Big Ten what does it mean for Iowa, but we'll see where it goes.