OAC Announces Restructuring of 2020-21 Athletic Season

By: Ryan Gasser, sports information director

AUSTINTOWN, Ohio – On Friday, July 24, 2020 the Ohio Athletic Conference announced that following a vote by the conference Presidents Council that all NCAA intercollegiate athletics competition will be postponed through December 31, 2020. The announcement comes as a result of continued concerns surrounding COVID-19.

The OAC is committed to moving intercollegiate fall competitions to the spring with various models currently being discussed. While competition will not occur during Fall 2020, the OAC is planning a robust engagement of student-athletes through the fall semester to allow for conditioning and preparation for competition that will adhere to CDC and local health guidelines, and NCAA criteria.

“The OAC believes we can continue to provide an excellent experience for our student athletes while continuing to make the health and safety of our student-athletes, coaches, staff, families, fans and campus communities our highest priority,” said OAC Commissioner Tim Gleason.

“This was an extremely difficult decision,” said Interim President Dave Kaufman, “but with coronavirus cases still on the rise, it is just not possible for our student-athletes and coaches to compete safely at this time. Athletics are an important part of the Capital University experience, not only for the athletes, but for all students, parents and alumni. With guidance from the NCAA and local health organizations, our athletes can look forward to physically conditioning and training this fall in preparation for a return to safe competition in the spring.”

“As the lead administrator of the athletics department, I am disappointed that I will not be able to see our fall student-athletes compete,” said Interim Director of Athletics and Recreation Dixie Jeffers. “However, this is the right thing to do and as a coach I am excited that our staff will have 114 days to interact and prepare mentally and physically for high-level OAC competition under more safe conditions. We will pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin preparing for our seasons to come. We are not done, yet.”

The fall sports that will be impacted by the postponement include cross country, golf, football, soccer, tennis, and volleyball. Winter sports including basketball, indoor track and field, swimming and diving, and wrestling will have their competition start dates postponed through the 2020 calendar year with plans to resume in January 2021.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How was this decision made?
Rest assured, this decision was not made without incredible amounts of research and time discussing all of the issues surrounding the impact on our students, staff and institutions. Conference leaders, presidents, administrators, health experts and professionals, and legal counsels made up a variety of committees that helped navigate each institutions approach to a solution and the eventual decision. This research and the discussions that followed have fueled the plans being provided to our conference leaders and the decision-making processes that have been ongoing since sports ceased last March.

Our top priority is to provide all students at all OAC-member institutions the safest environment to thrive in, and to eventually return our student-athletes to their respective fields of competition. These very committed groups will continue to meet, discuss and plan for a safe return to play set for January 2021.

What sports does this impact?
Fall sports impacted include golf, tennis, football, soccer, cross country, and volleyball. Winter sports will also be impacted since competition is suspended until January 1, 2021. Those sports include basketball and indoor track & field, and for those schools that sponsor swimming & diving and wrestling.

Will fall student-athletes be able to compete in the spring?
The NCAA recently made a decision to permit 2020 fall sports to play in the spring of 2021. The OAC is considering various models that would provide competition in the spring for fall-sport student-athletes.

What does it mean to postpone intercollegiate competition?
This means that all scrimmages, exhibitions, regular season, and postseason competition for all impacted sports have been postponed. Teams, once completing the NCAA Resocialization Process, may return to limited practices under new governance, which allows for 114 days of contact with student-athletes.

How does this decision affect the 18- or 19-week seasons as well as traditional and non-traditional seasons?
For the 2020-21 year only, the traditional and non-traditional weeks have been replaced with 114 days to be used the way each institution wishes to use them. The 114 days represents 19 weeks of six days (factoring one day off each week).

Will any activities other than competition be allowable in the OAC during the fall?
Yes, the OAC plans to use much of its 114-day allotment for a robust fall season that will keep student-athletes engaged and prepared for spring competition. Current guidelines and strategies are being explored.

Will student-athletes exhaust a season of competition during the fall?
No. Until there is competition, a season of eligibility is not exhausted. Since there will be no OAC competition in the fall, there will be no season of competition exhausted.

Do NCAA Resocialization principles need to be followed?
Yes, and if “athletically-related activities” as defined by the NCAA are a part of the resocialization process it must count as one of the 114 days.
Will winter and spring teams be able to participate in practices in the fall?
There will be opportunities for winter sports teams to gather and practice, according to their usual practice schedules as defined by current NCAA legislation. However, winter and spring teams will not compete in the fall semester.

When will decisions be made regarding winter and spring sport competitions?
The decisions regarding winter and spring sport competitions will greatly rely on the success that we have at Capital and across all OAC institutions on creating downward trending numbers relating to the spread of COVID-19. We will be closely monitoring our progress in the coming weeks and months so that we may make those decisions as timely as possible.

When will decisions be made about schedules for fall sports?
The OAC will begin working on updated schedules for our fall sports as early as the week of July 27. There are many factors to consider when developing these schedules but our conference staff will be working diligently to provide details as quickly as possible so that we may all begin planning and preparing.

In order to participate in training activities with my team, what do I (student-athlete) need to do?
In order to participate in training activities with your team(s), you must be enrolled as a full-time student at Capital University. After successfully re-acclimating on campus, we can begin Phase 1 of the NCAA Resocialization Protocol, which includes specific activities you are permitted to engage in.

If a team begins to compete in 2021 and then needs to stop due to the virus, will the student-athlete lose a season of participation?
If the team does not exceed half of its allowable contest dates, no. The NCAA made this exception for the 2020-21 academic year only. This number includes OAC and NCAA postseason contests.

Will the NCAA conduct fall championships?
The NCAA Board of Governors will meet very soon to decide this matter. They will take into account the many conferences like the OAC who have decided to suspend fall competition.

Can any competition take place this fall between or among OAC schools?
Not formal in-person competition that we are accustomed to but OAC coaching groups are urged to communicate and think of creative ways to conduct competitions that would be fun for the student-athlete and keep us all engaged and connected. You can use your 114-day allotment to video student-athletes running, throwing, jumping, hitting, shooting, kicking, serving, etc. and issue challenges and competition, online.

What is the NCAA’s Core Principles for Resocialization of Collegiate Sports?
The idea of sport resocialization is predicated on a scenario of reduced or flattened infection rates. You will find full details here. The NCAA is continuing to monitor all information around COVID-19. Please continue to check the website for updates.

Updated FAQs can be accessed at athletics.capital.edu/covid19faq as updates are available.
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