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## College Sports in the Covid19 World (Part I)

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE COLLEGE SPORTS IN THE COVID19 WORLD  
(PART 1)

MAY 18, 2020

(This is the first of two essays on college athletics)

Even though College Sports are no longer being played, the NCAA and colleges continue to make news. Some of the news is an expected part of the norm, while other news concerns the new world of Covid19 and the future of intercollegiate athletics or, more to the point, football and basketball.

Under the category of the normal, announcements of NCAA investigations and violations continue unaffected by the new virus but remain very much a part of the older viruses that have infected intercollegiate athletics for decades. Last week, the NCAA released a 92-page report accusing the University of Kansas of five level-I violations in basketball, including "lack of institutional control" and violations by the head coach. There were three additional lesser violations in the football program.

Kansas issued a statement saying the NCAA charges are "baseless and littered with false representations," and the head basketball coach similarly denied any violations. Much of these allegations and charges stem from the Adidas scandal, which involved a number of other institutions.

Four days earlier, the University of Louisville received a notice from the NCAA accusing Louisville basketball coaches of failing to monitor the recruitment of high profile athletes. These charges stem from the FBI investigation of college basketball. The university and its former coaches have 90 days to respond.

Meanwhile, **The** Ohio State University announced that it had paid out forty-one million dollars to 162 former athletes and students in lawsuits over the scandal involving sexual abuse of athletes by the team doctor between 1978 and 1998. This settlement involves about half the lawsuits that have been filed. Forty-one million dollars would only pay the salary of the current football coach for a little over four years. This is not going to place a great burden on TOSU boosters.

Of more interest than these bits of news is the growing discussion over the coming football season in the world of Covid19. When will it start? What will it look like? Will it take place at all? The discussions around these questions spin in many directions and, at times, crisscross one another.

Are there any guidelines that have been set? Do we have any indication of who will answer these questions or set the guidelines? Will it be the NCAA, the Conferences, the individual universities, the coaches, the athletes? And, what role will television play?

One of the most interesting questions centers on the disposition of the university itself. If a campus remains closed, including student housing and food services, should there be football? Indications in early April were that Conferences were generally opposed to the idea of football taking place without students on campus. More recently, the NCAA Commissioner has said that if there are no students on campus, there will be no sports. This may not be important as the NCAA is not the ruling body over football. Indeed, second thoughts are surfacing across the football playing nation.

This is not as simple as it seems. What exactly does "students on campus" mean? Would campuses being open to graduate students be enough? Would the library being open for research projects be enough? Would laboratories for science classes be enough? Given the mentality of some college football boosters, a student seen walking across campus could be enough.

The economic pressures to bring back football are very strong, as in many cases athletic budgets depend heavily on football and, to a lesser degree, basketball revenues. Pressure will grow with time, and it is already clear that many people in the football community, especially coaches, assistant coaches, and athletic directors are wavering on the no students, no sports concept.

There have been some suggestions that college football will start later than the August and September dates that have become the norm. There has been some discussion that college football should move to the spring. It is rumored that the PAC-12 is already seriously considering moving in that direction.

Certainly, medical conditions should be in the forefront of any decision. What will be the general state of the nation in terms of Covid19? Will it be safe in some locations and not in others? How available will testing be? Do team doctors and team trainers have any role in determining who should or should not be on the field? How do you have fans in the stands and maintain social distancing? Should you play in empty stadiums?

Interesting enough, there has been very little discussion of the athletes and their views and wishes. Should they have any role in this discussion? Will they be forced to play to maintain scholarships? Will they be dismissed from the team if they choose not to play for health reasons?

Many of these questions could be rendered moot by the state of public health. As to the unresolved questions, many have the look of that staple of medieval philosophy seeking to determine how many angels can fit on the head of a pin. The difference is that those medieval philosophers did not have to consider the role of revenue streams in arriving at an answer.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport, nor a medieval philosopher, to be a bad loser.

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