

Gene Smith Would Prefer Indoor Venue For Any Home Playoff Games



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith told gathered reporters on Feb. 16 that he's in favor of College Football Playoff expansion to 12 teams, but if that expansion includes home games in the early rounds, he would prefer to see his Buckeyes host away from their traditional home in Ohio Stadium.

Smith's concerns lie largely with the Columbus weather, which is famously unfriendly into late December when playoff games have been traditionally played. Instead, he'd like for the Buckeyes to play at an indoor field - namely Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis - saying that OSU would benefit from a clean environment away from the elements.

"I don't want a hard surface for the players," Smith said. "And I know the fans would love to have it in the Shoe and maybe it's snowing or we're playing whoever, but that surface is a whole new ballgame. And I would prefer to have the indoor elements and have a clean field. If it was this year, I would want (Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud) to have good weather. It's just that simple.

"Pinpointing a date where this thing ends up, we may look at the historical calendar and say it's okay to play in Columbus. But for us, it plays into the weather issue. The deeper you go in December, as you know, the more challenging it is here. I'm kind of anxious to see how this playoff schedule actually will end up. When will it actually start? That's critical."

When pressed about the comments, which sparked a firestorm among Ohio State fans online, Smith clarified that his concerns are about extreme weather conditions of all kinds, not just the cold of Columbus.

"We would only do that because of the weather. I don't just want it for the north. I certainly wouldn't want to go to Scottsdale and play in Glendale when you can play outdoors at Arizona State."

As for the home-field advantage that the Buckeyes would hope to lean on in the case of a matchup with

teams specifically from the south, Smith says he has no concerns about Ohio State's ability to travel, and that the Buckeyes have proven a willingness to pack Lucas Oil Stadium time and time again.

"I know our fans rally around that, and they'd like to host Alabama up here. But now we have the flexibility to move into domes," Smith said. "Now we can move into (Lucas Oil Stadium) or Ford Field (in Detroit) or Minneapolis or whatever if we ended up hosting. And I think that that's important, because who knows what the inclement weather could be like at that time of year in any of our places in the north. We need that flexibility.

"We've been blessed to have experiences in (Lucas Oil Stadium) playing in the Big Ten championship and I think our fans understand that environment, they love the hotels, they love the restaurants and all that. While it's difficult to take it away from the Shoe, I still think that's the right thing to do for the players in the game."