

Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith Thinks Michigan's Three-Game Winning Streak Against Buckeyes Should Have Asterisk



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith is set to retire from his role on June 30, 2024, after 19 years with the university, but his imminent departure did not stop him from speaking his mind on Ohio State's arch rival football program on his way out.

Appearing on WOSU Public Media's "All Sides with Anna Staver," on Thursday, Smith said that Michigan's three-game winning streak against Ohio State from 2021-23 should carry an asterisk — as least for the first two wins — due to the program's alleged participation in an elaborate sign-stealing scandal, one which he thinks created an unfair advantage for the Wolverines that went against the integrity of the sport.

"Yeah, of course I do," Smith said when asked by Staver if the Buckeyes' three-game losing streak to Michigan should have an asterisk. "The rules are in place to protect the integrity of the game and try your best to create a level playing field, and when those rules are violated, then it affects those principles. And so, we have to keep that in perspective."

Michigan has been under investigation under the NCAA since last fall over allegations that the program, led by now former staffer Connor Stalions, manufactured a multi-level sign-stealing scandal that included Stalions and others using unauthorized in-person scouting to steal the signals of numerous opponents, mostly Big Ten and potential College Football Playoff teams, dating back to the 2021 season.

The NCAA announced in November that it "knew and could prove" that Michigan, led by Stalions, violated in-person scouting rules, which later resulted in the resignation of Stalions on Nov. 3 and suspension of Wolverines head coach Jim Harbaugh for the final three games of the 2023 season.

Smith declined to say if he felt these punishments were enough for his liking, but he did admit that he thinks the potential sanctions put on the Wolverines after the NCAA investigation ends may not be as severe as people think.

“I think people’s expectations of what the NCAA might do relative to penalties were probably too high,” he said. “because everyone was upset and there were just visceral comments around it. I won’t comment too much about what I feel, because I don’t want to disparage. But at the end of the day, violations occurred and penalties have been levied and will be levied, and we just have to live with them.”

From 2021-23, Michigan defeated Ohio State three times, two of them coming by more than 15 points, and boasted a 40-3 overall record and 27-1 mark in the Big Ten. It won three straight Big Ten titles and made the College Football Playoff in all three of those seasons, culminating in a National Championship Game win over Washington this past January.

Despite this historic success from Ohio State’s arch rival which occurred under the umbrella of an ongoing NCAA investigation, Smith said that he is not looking at the past and instead opting to look forward and focus on how the Buckeyes can win The Game next fall for the first time in four seasons.

“I’m not one that looks back,” Smith said. “I think what’s important for us is to look forward. And we host That Team Up North this fall....We need to make sure we pack that place and we’re ready to roll early. Be in your seats early. Don’t wait until the kickoff. Be in your seats early.”

Ohio State’s matchup with the Wolverines is set for Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium.