

Ohio State Men's Basketball Responds To Cancellation Of Big Ten Tournament



Following the cancellation of the Big Ten men's basketball tournament due to the concerns around the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), Ohio State will prepare for the NCAA Tournament.

"We're assuming right now that we're going to play, because I think that's probably the best way to go about it," head coach Chris Holtmann said. "We understand that with the NCAA Tournament, there are decisions yet to be made on that."

The Buckeyes will prepare to play in the NCAA tourney just as they had planned on taking on Purdue at 6:30 p.m. in the conference tournament.

"We woke up this morning prepared to play a game, without the fans, and we were ready to play," junior guard C.J. Walker said. "And obviously, when you hear this type of news, it can be very frustrating to get ready for a game and then all of the sudden it's all canceled and you're packing up and going home. It's most definitely an unreal feeling."

With concerns regarding the spread of the coronavirus growing, Holtmann said he had contemplated the possible risks of having his players go through a walk-through practice in preparation for a game.

"I had some concerns about that," Holtmann said. "You try not to be reactionary and I think we can all get a little reactionary when it comes to social media. The unknowns were a concern. All of our players were in favor of playing, but they were also leaning on us to lead them and guide them, and make the right decision."

The third-year Buckeye coach said he and athletic director Gene Smith had been in communication through the night about the coronavirus concerns.

"We feel like it was the right decision and the right call," Holtmann said. "You started to sense as of last night [March 11] that this potentially could be what takes place. There were just too many concerns about where this is headed."

Walker, an Indianapolis native, who had secured more than 20 tickets for his family and friends for the

Big Ten tourney taking place in his hometown, was obviously disappointed by the news but showed understanding of the gravity of the situation.

“You don’t want a lot of people getting sick,” Walker said. “It’s hard to treat a lot of people getting sick at one time, so you just want to get preventative and take the right steps. I feel like that’s the smart thing to do with this virus going around as fast as it is. You’ve got to make the smart decision for everybody, not just the athletes playing.”

Premier programs like Duke and Kansas were reported to have removed themselves from possibly playing in the upcoming NCAA Tournament. The Blue Devils explicitly stated they will not take place, while the Wildcats reportedly suspended all spring sports.

“I’m assuming that the school officials made those decisions,” Holtmann said “We’re all led and guided by our school officials, so it wouldn’t surprise me if that doesn’t begin a domino (effect). There have been some of those conversations that have taken place in a lot of universities, including ours. We haven’t made a decision yet. We’re kind of assuming that it will continue, but when I know more, we’ll put out a statement.”

Although Ohio State will continue to prepare as if it will play in the NCAA Tournament, with a Selection Sunday watch party at Holtmann’s house following a few days off, he seemed to indicate that the cancellation dominoes may already be in motion.

Holtmann was asked if he could imagine March Madness without Duke or Kansas, two of the staples of men’s college basketball.

“That would be unique if there was a tournament that went without them. I think we probably all see where this is headed,” Holtmann said. “We’re just trying not to be too premature, but I think we all see where this is headed.”

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