

OSU's Gene Smith Cautious Of CFP Expansion While B1G ADs Push For Change



At the Big Ten's spring meetings in Rosemont, Ill., conference athletic directors made their voices heard when they were asked by reporters about potential College Football Playoff expansion.

While Michigan's Warde Manuel, Michigan State's Bill Beekman and Wisconsin's Barry Alvarez are among those athletic directors in favor of an increase from the four-team field, Ohio State's Gene Smith is cautious about change.

Despite three straight years of the Big Ten champion's absence from the CFP — the Buckeyes last made the cut in 2016 as an at-large team over Penn State, before OSU's consecutive conference titles (2017-18) saw back-to-back finishes just outside the top four — Smith expressed concerns about extending the season and its effect on student-athletes.

"I see the value of studying it," Smith said. "I think it's worth looking at. But I think there's a lot of problems around it, I really do. I think you need to look at the wear and tear."

Smith pointed to the 2014 campaign when Ohio State won the inaugural CFP championship, beating Michigan in the regular-season finale and downing Wisconsin for the Big Ten title before wins over Alabama and Oregon from Nov. 29, 2014, through Jan. 12, 2015.

"When we won the championship in the inaugural year, I'm not so sure our guys could've gone another game," Smith said. "We played Michigan. We turned around and went to the (conference) championship game. We turned around and played Alabama, and then you turn around and play Oregon. Most people don't understand the toll that takes on a young person's body. ... And you're playing at the top of the pyramid against the best."

Smith served on the selection committee for two years across the 2017-18 seasons before he stepped down from his post Feb. 8, providing perspective as an athletic director in the Big Ten who has been involved with the CFP's ins and outs.

"I'd be a little bit concerned about student-athlete welfare from a health and safety view," Smith said. "So I'm not sure how it would work. I would hope there would be some gaps so that they could breathe."

Other conference leaders, such as Beekman, share Smith's concerns but believe expansion has its upside.

"My personal opinion is that expansion is probably inevitable," Beekman said. "I think at some level that is a good thing. I do think there are very real concerns about how long you make the schedule and how many games you play, and there are concerns about spreading that too much over two semesters. I think in the greater scheme of things it's probably good for the game and good for the teams involved."

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