

Wofford College Athletics Virtual Town Hall
May 14, 2020

Nayef Samhat: Thanks to everyone for tuning in and for your passion for Terrier athletics. We've had a lot of questions relating to our fabulous Division I athletics program during this COVID-19 crisis. So, this event is designed to address those questions and to get your thoughts on the coming year. These town halls have given us the opportunity to learn what people are thinking about the college and some ideas about how to respond to the issues we all face collectively. So, they are invaluable, and we appreciate your time and interest. And, let me tell you that we are all working to find safe ways to gather again. We have two committees on this campus working in that regard. A working group to formulate best practices and health and safety guidelines to bring students, faculty, staff and coaches back to campus in the fall. And as well a calendar committee to look at scheduling for our classes and other events and the academic year, so we have some flexibility, should we need it, as we start the 20/21 academic year at the end of August. So, I want to thank everyone for your participation, your time and your interest. We will conquer and prevail. So now to the questions.

QUESTION: I think it's great that the NCAA is allowing spring sports seniors to have another season, but surely this affects scholarships down the road. Could you speak to this?

Richard Johnson: I certainly can. This is one that is really not going to impact us that much, certainly not for our current seniors. When this came down, our seniors were already planning to graduate so without graduate programs they graduated, and some may choose to use the fifth year in graduate school somewhere else. Our current players may decide to stay and play another year. That would have to be managed within the baseball budget for scholarships. But for the most part what I think makes Wofford special is that our student-athletes come, and they graduate in four years. Again, there are exceptions for those who double-major. So, this one will pretty much have minimal impact on us.

QUESTION: How have Wofford student-athletes been doing academically during COVID-19? How have they stayed in shape and are they meeting with coaches?

Elizabeth Rabb: That's a great question. Quickly after COVID-19 hit and everything shut down, it was legislated that student-athletes would be able to do eight hours of countable related athletic related activity that was non-physical per week. So, chalk-talks, film reviews, team meetings but no type of workout or physical activity. As we transitioned to distance learning, we felt pretty good about it and how everything was going to go, but we quickly learned that just because you had an 8 a.m. class you could not necessarily have an 8 a.m. Zoom. There were issues as far as, maybe you had a sibling who had a class at the same time and you only had one computer or maybe your internet could not support multiple siblings or your parents working at the same time. So institutionally we went back to the playbook, we came up with a plan, and Boyce Lawton, James Stukes, Ron Robinson and many others were very helpful as far as getting

technology and other needs out to our student-athletes. Whereas coaches thought they understood their student-athletes schedules when they were on campus, that wasn't the same when we got into virtual learning. You didn't necessarily meet at the same time; you didn't necessarily study at the same time. So, when you would have your classes in the morning and you would go to the athletic facilities in the afternoon, that no longer worked. So, I think a lot of the eight hours became individual check-ins or team bonding, how are you doing academically, do you need anything from us? And we had to find a new normal. I'll throw it to AC to give some of those examples.

AC: Some of the ways specifically that women's basketball has been practicing to stay in shape, this time would typically be our post-season, so I know we've all really taken it upon ourselves to try and stay in shape. Our strength and conditioning, Coach A.J. Kerr, has created an at-home workout plan for us to follow. It's all optional but we do have Tuesday and Thursday social media challenges, so this has been a great way to stay competitive with each other and have a good time seeing each other and holding each other accountable during this time to try to stay in shape the best that we can at home. Academically, our coaches check in with us once a week, so I have a weekly meeting with Coach Garrity where he asks how I'm doing academically, checks in on my grades. So that's been great to have that accountability while at home as well. And, in regard to SAC, we have created a few different things through our social media page where student-athletes have volunteered to show some at-home workouts on our Instagram page as well as some yoga sessions. So, I think that's really been beneficial to show people how to work out without necessarily having the equipment that they need.

QUESTION: Some colleges are cutting sports because of coronavirus. Is Wofford considering this?

Nayef Samhat: You'd be surprised if I said yes, but the answer is no. I would surprise our AD and our Associate AD no doubt. We're in good positive shape, strong financially. We've had an outstanding entering fall class of 503 deposits, which is a record, and outstanding retention. We don't anticipate any changes in our sports programs or really across the college. What is important, and what we need to do to maintain that position is to bring our students back to campus, educate them, on our campus, and have them play their sports on our campus in the fall. That is absolutely essential.

QUESTION: Will there be college football in the fall?

Richard Johnson: I could make a lot of money if I could predict this one! It's a great question and what everybody wants to know. Unfortunately, there is no real answer just yet. I think we'll know a lot more in the next six weeks. But there's all kinds of options. What will that look like? Is there going to be football without fans? Will there be football just normal? Will there be football with social distancing so stadiums would be maybe 25% full? All these are questions that people are talking about. Will there be a delayed start to the football season, and we play later when it's perhaps a little safer? There's no real answer to this one yet. I am planning on having football in the fall. A lot of my contemporaries are, but we're looking at all kinds of

options in terms of how we would socially distance if we would have fans and if that's necessary. This one's going to be on-going, and I would say it's going to be six weeks or maybe even eight weeks before it's answered.

QUESTION: Will fans be able to attend fall athletics events, like football or volleyball? Will there be a different standard for student spectators?

Jo Ann Brasington: This one is sort of a follow-up, and you've answered that first part. But let's consider the second part, "Will there be a different standard for student spectators?"

Richard Johnson: If you look at fall sports, our students for football, they could certainly be distanced, and we could accommodate that. If you take soccer, that shouldn't be a problem. But if you were to look at volleyball, that would be in a smaller, confined space. That may be a problem in terms of how many people you allow in. There are different models that we're looking at, we haven't landed on any one yet because like I said, we just don't know. But these are conversations that I'm having with my colleagues nationally and also within the Southern Conference. It's interesting to note that the AD's within the Southern Conference used to have a monthly call and for the past five weeks we've been having three calls a week. So, we've been talking a lot about this and the hope is that as things evolve, we'll have more clarity.

QUESTION: When will student-athletes who play fall sports get to return to campus?

Richard Johnson: I heard someone say the other day, the calendar won't determine this, the virus will determine this. I think the NCAA has extended its dead period for recruiting. It was set to expire at the end of May, it's now going to go through at least the end of June. We are not having in-person Summer I. If we don't have in-person Summer II we probably won't be bringing our student athletes back until we have to bring them back for pre-season camp. The football oversight committee has provided a little guidance in this regard. They want to have six weeks for football to prep our student-athletes to get back in shape before the start of the season. So, my guess is if we do play fall sports in the fall that it will be anywhere between a four to six-week period prior to the start of competition.

QUESTION: Are you going to allow summer athletics camps?

Elizabeth Rabb: As a mother who has been home schooling, I sure hope so. But as Richard just mentioned, the NCAA has extended the dead period through June 30th. So, no institutional camps are allowed on campus. So, we will just continue to monitor that and again, we don't feel it's responsible to have camps on campus if there are not students on campus.

QUESTION: I've heard that some large DI universities may drop some smaller colleges from this year's schedule for efficiency and safety purposes. Will Wofford have a reduced schedule this fall because of that?

Richard Johnson: Again, to be determined. There's been some conversation about Power 5's in order to go back to just playing only conference schedules. But that is far from being decided. I suspect if they go back and play football, they will play the full twelve game schedule. Which would mean at least in the sport of football, we're schedule to play South Carolina this year, that that game would still be on. But some of the other sports are dropping, not necessarily the Power 5's but some sports are trying to cut back on travel from a cost savings. Some are trying to minimize their number of competitions for safety in the fall. But for the most part, we're planning on having right now a full slate of fall competition. And again, that could obviously change quickly.

QUESTION: What's the status on the Carolina Panthers''

Nayef Samhat: The Panthers are scheduled to come to campus in July for a couple of weeks and leave in mid-August. We still expect them to come to camp. I know they are being guided by the NFL and the timelines developed in the league. In our conversations with them we are talking about ways to accommodate social distancing guidelines and the like. So, we're planning on their return to campus. What that might look is still in the process of development and conversation.

QUESTION: When will a decision be made on Southern Conference competition? Is it true that some schools are already canceling fall athletics events?

Richard Johnson: Well, again it goes back to what we talked about earlier. My colleagues in the SOCON office have not cancelled any fall competition. Some individual institutions are talking about not making any long-distance road trips or flights or things of that nature, trying to keep it more regional. But for the most part, all Southern Conference competition is on for right now. Again, it's subject to change at a moment's notice. So right now, we're not planning on cancelling any Southern Conference events. The one caveat to that is maybe the non-traditional season. So maybe the fall baseball, which is not in their traditional competition, they may not have fall scrimmages, things of that nature. If it were volleyball or soccer, they may not have spring competition. But right now, in their regular seasons, all Southern Conference schedules are planning to be played and we don't see that changing if we open in the fall unless the environment changes.

QUESTION: How much fun is your pregame basketball tradition of dinner with Slick?

Elizabeth Rabb: I want to thank Mark Cohen for this question. I am very fortunate to have dinner with Slick before most basketball games and this year was no exception. And let me just say that as a conference we were very fortunate to get our tournament in and to have two very successful Southern Conference men's and women's basketball teams to be able to celebrate a winning season when so many of the conference tournaments were cut short. And, Slick and I did share some chicken wings. He does check in daily, if not multiple times a day and I know I'm missing, as all of you are, hearing him do the tomahawk chop during baseball.

QUESTION: I would like to hear a wrap-up about basketball recruiting: and how is the coaching staff going to address the need for one or two tall inside defenders/rebounders?

Richard Johnson: Well I'm not going to suggest that the coaches are desperate, but they have asked me if I would consider trying out. This is one of those things that is hard to predict. We did a good job, I think, in recruiting this year, bringing in two post players, one 6'8" from Texas and one 6'9" from down near Bluffton. And so, I think we're addressing that inside need for post players. We had a great year with Messiah Jones who came along as a freshman and did a really good job inside. He's a little under-sized, but the Southern Conference is a league where those "tweeners" can be very effective. Typically, they just take a while to develop. I think from what I hear about these two young men they're going to be very good players down the road. I think our coaches will adapt. I know Jay doesn't want me to get into telling him how to do his job and I won't, and I'll leave that for him to talk about the specific strategies. But they've done a really good job this year in managing it and I think they'll do a really good job again next year as well. And you know, sometimes you play smaller, you're hard to guard. Sometimes bigs don't like guarding out on the perimeter.

QUESTION: A.C., congratulations on being named to the National Student Athlete Advisory Council. What's the national student conversation like regarding COVID-19?

A.C.: First, I'd like to say thank you. Before I answer this question, I'd like to give a little background on the make-up of the National Student Division I SAC. There is a representative from each of the 32 Division I conferences, so we are very diverse and very representative in our committees. So, hearing the opinions and perspectives from student-athletes from all around the country in regard to the COVID conversation has been really interesting. We really focused on taking all of those different perspectives and trying to represent every student athlete. So, we've done a lot through social media. We've done different initiatives; we've done a lot about Mental Health Awareness. We've given fitness tips, tips on self-care. Our current initiative is the More Than An Athlete campaign, and we're really focusing on encouraging students on seeing themselves as more than an athlete and find their identity in things other than sports at this time. Our slogan for that campaign is "Sports may be what you play, but they are not who you are". In addition to all of these things we also helped the NCAA to spread a survey out to every student-athlete across the country that asked questions about student-athlete well-being during this time while being at home. And I think this has really helped some initiatives and even some legislation within the NCAA with regards to COVID and understanding that the student-athletes are at the forefront of this conversation.

Jo Ann Brasington: That was the last of our pre-submitted questions, so now we are going to take some from the community. The first is from Jeff Lipscomb. "What kind of testing do you anticipate will be required of football players when they return to campus later this summer for fall camp? Do you have a test currently to carry those out?"

Richard Johnson: We're very fortunate in that we use Spartanburg Regional for our sports medicine, so Spartanburg Regional Employees staff our training room, we use their physicians

and they've been wonderful partners. Will Chrismon, our head athletic trainer, is working on protocols to get them back and acquiring some tests so that we can do that very thing. But we will have safety protocols in place. I spoke last night at length with Dr. Steve Kana he's our head orthopedist, he's concerned about the health and safety and talked about the things we would put into place. We're happy to see Dr. Kana back doing elective procedures again because he's been terrific with our student athletes and Dr. Cole does such a great job of taking care of them. So, we're going to have protocols in place that will come from Will in Sports Medicine. I can assure you that we won't do anything that doesn't have a safe environment for our student-athletes and our football program.

Jo Ann Brasington: We have another question and it builds on some of what we've already been talking about. Will all students need to return to campus in the fall for fall sports to take place or is there a way for fall sports to be played without all students returning?

Richard Johnson: That's a very good question. I would anticipate that if our students aren't back, that we would not have, and this is just an opinion, that it would be hard to have sports without our students here. Because our student-athletes are first and foremost students. Not ruling that out, that's certainly a possibility but I would say that we would not be participating if our students are not back. And I would guess that that's the way that it's going to be across the Southern Conference. And that's without anything formal, we haven't talked about that in the AD meeting because I think that we all just assumed that we would not be playing if our students were not back on campus.

Jo Ann Brasington: Ok, that's all of our questions. Thank you again for participating and thanks to our panelists and all the people behind the scenes who have made this event possible. Remember to visit www.wofford.edu/cornoavirus for recordings and transcripts of all of our virtual events. This concludes our virtual town hall. Stay well Terriers!