Ohio State University Requires COVID-19 Risk Waiver Execution Before Allowing Return to Voluntary Workouts

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The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is requiring athletic departments at all NCAA levels to plan for their fall 2020 athletic schedules while taking all necessary steps to keep their athletes safe. In addition to requiring its returning football players to submit to a COVID-19 test, Ohio State University has asked all the players on their football roster, and their parents, to execute an acknowledgment of risk waiver regarding the COVID-19 pandemic before being allowed to return to campus for voluntary summer workouts.

The “Buckeye Pledge” document specifically requests that players take personal responsibility for their own health and “help stop the spread of COVID-19.” It asks players to acknowledge and accept, “I may be exposed to COVID-19 and other infections.”
The two-page pledge, which every Buckeye football player has signed, requires players to agree to testing and potential self-quarantining, monitoring for coronavirus symptoms, including reporting a fever of 100.4 or higher, reporting any potential exposure in a timely manner, and practicing and following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, including the wearing of masks and practicing social distancing.

Although failure to comply with the agreed upon terms in the Buckeye Pledge will not affect any individual student-athlete’s scholarship, it may lead to “the immediate removal of athletic participation privileges” and the potential loss of access and use of athletic facilities for the athlete.

Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith explained that the Buckeye Pledge allows coaches, trainers, strength coaches, and athletic administrators to remind student-athletes of the commitment that each of them and their parents has made to the University and their teammates if they are observed not wearing a mask or utilizing proper social distancing.

Although Smith explained that the University “does not view the pledge as a legal document,” the Buckeye Pledge contains specific waiver language.

It reinforces that athletes and their parents:

“understand COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus and it is possible to develop and contract the COVID-19 disease, even if I follow all of the safety precautions above and those recommended by the CDC, local health department, and others. I understand that although the university is following the coronavirus guidelines issued by the CDC and other experts to reduce the spread of infection, I can never be completely shielded from all risk of illness caused by COVID-19 or other infections.”

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