

# Pandemic: 'We are acting in the students' best interest'

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The football championship game is set for Dec. 18, putting the conference back in play for the biggest postseason games — and the multimillion-dollar payouts that come with them.

It was Aug. 11 when the Big Ten and Pac-12 announced they were postponing their football seasons, a dark day in college sports that came six months after the pandemic canceled March Madness.

Six leagues forged ahead, including the powerful Southeastern Conference, which begins play this weekend. The Big 12, Atlantic Coast Conference and three others have been up and running since Labor Day weekend.

This every-conference-for-itself college football season looks like it will have five different start dates.

Some teams could play as many as 12 games while others get in only six. And that's not even counting what seems like the inevitable disruptions still to come. There have already been 21 games postponed or canceled since Aug. 26 because of teams battling various levels of COVID-19-related issues, including four this week that were wiped off the Saturday, Sept. 26, schedule.

As for the bowl season, it could conceivably start before the conference champions are crowned. The NCAA football oversight committee on Thursday recommended that bowl games can be played as soon as Dec. 1 and minimum requirements for bowl eligibility (.500 record against FBS opposition) should be waived for 2020.

The Pac-12 will try squeeze seven games into seven weeks, borrowing an idea from the Big Ten and allowing all its teams to play an extra cross-division game on championship weekend.

"We want to be in the best position, quite frankly, to get ourselves in the CFP conversation, but also bowl game consideration at the very highest level," Arizona State athletic director Ray Anderson said. "We want to play."

The turning point for the return of sports in the Pac-

12 came Sept. 3 when it entered an agreement with diagnostic testing company Quidel that will give each school the capacity to conduct daily antigen tests on their athletes.

Still, it took three weeks for the conference to reverse course on fall football, leaving it starting later and scheduled to play fewer games than its Power Five peers.

"I don't think we're behind," Schill said. "I think that we are acting deliberately. We are acting in the students' best interest. We waited until we were able to, if not ensure, protect their health and safety."

Schill said state and local restrictions in California and Oregon to stem the spread of the virus made it impossible for six Pac-12 teams to practice football and slowed the conference's return-to-play decision.

"Those barriers came down once the daily antigen test was available," Schill said.

There is still work to be done for schools in the Pac-12 and Mountain West to get the approval of local officials in Northern California and now in Colorado. Due to a recent spike in COVID-19 cases, Boulder County, Colorado, officials on Sept. 24 halted gatherings for college-aged residents for two weeks. That includes athletic events.

"We'll continue to work with our public health officials to comply with the public health order and be a part of the community solution," Colorado Athletic Director Rick George said. "The one thing I've learned in this pandemic, is don't get too high and don't get too low."

No fans will be permitted at Pac-12 sporting events taking place on campus. The loss of ticket revenue and decreased number of games will cost Pac-12 schools tens of millions of dollars, but it could have been even worse with no football at all.

The CFP's annual payout to the Power Five conferences has been \$66 million. Conferences receive \$6 million for every team they have selected to the national semifinals and \$4 million for each team they get in the other four New Year's six bowls.

# Seahawks: 'There's nothing that he doesn't do well'

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— Patrick Mahomes in 2018 and Peyton Manning in 2013 — they each went on to win the MVP award.

And of Wilson's nine TDs, six have been of 15 yards or more and three of 35 yards or longer.

"His long ball accuracy has been off the charts the first two weeks," Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy said. "He's had a number of big-time dime throws. The biggest thing is just try to keep the big plays to a minimum."

Prescott's 450 yards passing last week was the third-highest total of his career, and the Cowboys needed all of them to rally from 12 points down in the final eight minutes. Prescott was 13 of 19 for 182 yards, one TD pass and one TD run on the Cowboys last three possessions of the comeback.

It was the 10th time in his career he's led a comeback in the fourth quarter or overtime.

"There's nothing that he doesn't do well," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said.

## Injury woes

Both Dallas and Seattle have major injury concerns, most of them on the defensive side.

Dallas will be with-



AP Photo/Ron Jenkins

**Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott (4) celebrates running the ball for a touchdown as back judge Greg Meyer (78) looks on in the second half of an NFL football game against the Atlanta Falcons in Arlington, Texas, Sunday, Sept. 20, 2020.**

out linebacker Leighton Vander Esch (broken collarbone) and cornerbacks Anthony Brown (ribs) and Chidobe Awuzie (hamstring). Rookie cornerback Trevon Diggs is also a question mark after showing up on the injury report with a shoulder issue.

"I don't think it's much of a challenge because they've done a great job of bringing guys in here that understand the defense, understand how to play the game," said Joe Thomas, who replaced Vander Esch. "A few veteran guys that can come in and step up and play, to hold it down until those guys get back."

Seattle lost outside line-

backer/pass rusher Bruce Irvin and starting nickel cornerback Marquise Blair to major knee injuries last week. Ugo Amadi will step in for Blair, while how Seattle fills Irvin's role is unclear.

## Steady Elliott

Ezekiel Elliott is still looking for his first 100-yard game, but the two-time rushing leader has been more than steady. Elliott had both Dallas touchdowns in the season-opening loss to the Rams, and the first one against the Falcons. He's third in the NFL with 185 yards rushing — the most through two games in his five seasons

— and has another 64 yards receiving.

"I think I've had a good start this year, laid a good foundation for the season both as a runner and a blocker, and out of the backfield," Elliott said.

## Catching on

One of the unique aspects of Wilson's five TD performance last week was that all the touchdown passes went to different players. Tyler Lockett, DK Metcalf, Freddie Swain, David Moore and Chris Carson all took turns finding the end zone on passes from Wilson. For Carson, Seattle's starting running back, it was his third TD catch of the season, matching his career total entering the year.

## Explosion

A big key could end up being whether Seattle can shut down the Cowboys' explosive plays. Dallas leads the NFL with 41 plays of 10 yards or more through the first two games. Seattle has allowed the most plays of 10 yards or more with 47.

"They have some explosive guys on their side. They can make a lot of plays," Seattle safety Jamal Adams said. "We have to do a good job of doing our thing, and plastering them and covering them."

# Hamilton: Stands will be at 50% of their capacity

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skill set — from the garage to the engineers in the factories and design departments. Change isn't coming quickly enough, and we need to know why," Hamilton said in a statement.

## More fans in stands

There will be more spectators in the stands than for any other race in the pandemic-hit 2020 season. Organizers say the race weekend is sold out, but haven't given final ticket

sales figures.

Race promoter Alexei Titov previously told Russian state TV that the stands would be at 50 percent of their capacity, which equates to around 30,000 spectators.

That's far more than the previous season high of 3,000 fans for the last race, the Tuscan Grand Prix at the Mugello circuit.

Unlike at the last two races in Italy, there will be a full entertainment program on offer for fans, with concerts featuring some

of Russia's most popular musicians.

Russian organizers say they're taking precautions to keep fans safe and will have medical staff posted at checkpoints around the venue, and that spectators will have their temperature measured on entry.

## Verstappen's struggles

It's hard to believe that Max Verstappen still looked like an outside title challenger only a few weeks ago. Since then, his season

has gone up in smoke.

An overheating engine forced the Dutch driver out of the race at Monza, and then a similar problem struck just before the start of the following race at Mugello. Verstappen was far slower off the line than the cars around him and was struck by Kimi Raikkonen's Alfa Romeo.

That leaves Verstappen a full 80 points off Hamilton in the standings, though he could rebound by trying to make up the 25-point gap to Bottas in second place.

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