

What Legalized Sports Gambling Could Mean for The Big Ten Conference and Beyond

By Jake Riepma

College football coaches in today's landscape are proving to be about as honest as the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Whether it be a small fib about a player's injury status or a blatant lie to the face of hundreds of media members and the entire college football nation (cough, cough, Urban Meyer, cough), the line of honesty between coaches and the press is at best, blurry.

Now that the [Supreme Court has opened the door for states](#) to legalize sports gambling, this longstanding questionable relationship of honesty and transparency between coaches and media will take on a whole new meaning. Things like injury reports and player availability will have an impact on bet makers that determine the odds and other factors associated with the game's money lines.

When it comes to releasing the status of participants in any given game, Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald was quick to admit he hasn't always been the most honest.

"We have an injury report at Northwestern that we've done for a number of years," Fitzgerald told the media at Big Ten Media Days last month in Chicago. "I've been accused of sometimes being honest and sometimes being less than honest. I would agree with that."

Despite acknowledging his occasional less-than-truthful approach with the media, Fitzgerald says he's not opposed to adhering to a weekly injury report policy of full disclosure and transparency, if everyone else is on board.

"If we move forward to where we have to have a fully transparent conference-wide or national one (injury report), I'd have no problem with that, as long as we adhere to it," Fitzgerald said. "There needs to be accountability. If there's not accountability to it, then I'll do whatever I have to do to protect our players, first and foremost."

Pat Fitzgerald wasn't alone in his sentiments regarding the notion of a mandatory injury report as a way to effectively cope with this new world of legalized sports gambling in collegiate sports. Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck is also in agreement that opposing teams should have access to accurate information informing them of who will be in uniform for any given game.

"I'm all for it," Fleck said at Big Ten Media Days.

The Golden Gophers second-year head coach made it clear that all he really needs to know is who's playing and who's not.

"I don't need to know why, whether it's a suspension, whether it's an injury, whether it's a knee, whether it's grades, whether it's disciplines -- I don't need to know all that. But I'm a huge advocate (for a mandatory injury report). I'd love to be able to see who is going to be able to play and not play," Fleck said.

Injury reports and player availability wasn't the only topic of discussion at Big Ten Media Days centered around sports gambling. The potential game plan of how to appropriately handle this new wrinkle as a whole was also widely talked about amongst the conference leaders.

"We've had a lot of discussion about the changes in gambling that will obviously occur in the coming years," Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany said. "We need to continue to educate them about the challenges associated with gambling and the importance of the integrity of the game."

One major point of emphasis that was consistently echoed by Delany and several coaches was the importance of continuing to educate student athletes on the dangers associated with gambling.

"I think we've got to double down on the educational element," Delany said. "I think we've done that over the years and we continue to do that."

"I think it's, first and foremost, important that we educate our guys and the understanding of the issues that surround gambling," Fitzgerald said.

Perhaps the future of college athletics relationship with sports gambling could be relatively simple. Although the specifics of sports gambling in college athletics at the state level have not been clearly defined, Commissioner Delany made his preferences clear.

"I think that we would prefer a federal framework that omits college sports from gambling at the state level," Delany said. "And if that's not possible, that there be some standardization of a framework so that college sports, high school sports, Olympic sports, those categories of sports receive some additional protection."

Regardless of the future decisions that are made to effectively and appropriately absorb legalized gambling with collegiate athletics, college football coaches have a new reality to deal with because of sports betting. Although the Joker's true colors never changed in *The Dark Knight*, it'll be interesting to see if coaches that have fibbed in the past will morph into honest, candid, and transparent sources of information as it relates to player availability and injury reports.