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Seattle U Athletics Return COVID Style

Ben Wiley, Author

After the COVID-19 pandemic forced the postponement of all Seattle University fall quarter sports, the Athletic Department is allowing athletes to gradually return to practice under strict health and safety protocols. This announcement coincides with the made by the NCAA on Sept. 22, stating that they have a plan to have both soccer teams, cross country teams, and women's volleyball make up for the cancellation of the fall season. This alternative will instead allow the sports to play their respective seasons in the spring.

The Seattle U COVID-19 protocols, outlined by University Leadership and the Student Health Center, required all members of the student body who plan to live on-campus to get a COVID test beforehand. . Those living on or visiting campus are also expected to keep their masks on and practice social distancing at all times..

Initially, Seattle U asked that students get tested ten days prior to their return to campus, however, did not ask for a new one upon arrival. In the past week, Seattle U began surveillance testing students who live on-campus or come onto campus for any reason, including athletics. Seattle U Athletic Director Shaney Fink anticipates that Seattle U will spend up to \$150,000 on COVID-19 testing in the 2020-2021 school year for all students, including athletes.

Regarding student athletes, Fink said that the university's athletic department is following the COVID-19 testing and safety guidelines put in place by Seattle U and the NCAA. The department has cut back or adjusted travel and recruiting in order to keep their players health and safety a top priority.

She explained that students who play higher contact sports, such as soccer, are being tested more often. Gina Leete, a third-year defender on Seattle U's's women's soccer team, said, "We get tested weekly by having one person from each of our households randomly selected to get tested."

Currently, most athletic training is being held outdoors with the requirements to wear a face mask, unless participating in strenuous training, and to practice in small groupings.

"I do feel safe continuing soccer with COVID-19 still around because our team and all of athletics does have lots of procedures in place to help prevent exposure and spread. We just started practicing this past week on Tuesday in pods of no more than five people and it's really nice to be able to play on the field again" Leete said.

Fink said that not all athletes decided to return to Seattle U for fall quarter, particularly international students and those preferring to train off campus. Athletes were not pressured to return, and their decisions do not affect their spot on the team or athletic scholarships.

Those, like Leete, who did return, are being well taken care of by the athletic department.



“Every part of what we’re doing, from wearing face coverings to walking into facilities to our coaches keeping their distance, is to make sure that we are being in tune with the needs of the student athletes.” Fink said. “We are having meetings with a representative from each team where we meet and get feedback on what things are working, what we could improve, and what is challenging for student athletes”

This approach seems to be working as there has not been a positive COVID-19 test among members of Seattle U athletic teams at the time of publication.

As for now, Seattle U intends to begin fall sports in accordance with the NCAA's schedule. Men's and women's swimming will start Nov. 1, basketball season will begin Nov. 25.

The NCAA has yet to make a decision regarding the status of the indoor Track & Field season. The NCAA championship brackets for soccer and volleyball will be reduced to 75 percent of their normal capacities.

Athletics stated that they will not be impacted by university academic plans, meaning, they will still hold sporting events even if classes remain virtual.