

HUSCH BLACKWELL

**INDEPENDENT
INVESTIGATION
REPORT**

Colorado State University

October 4, 2020

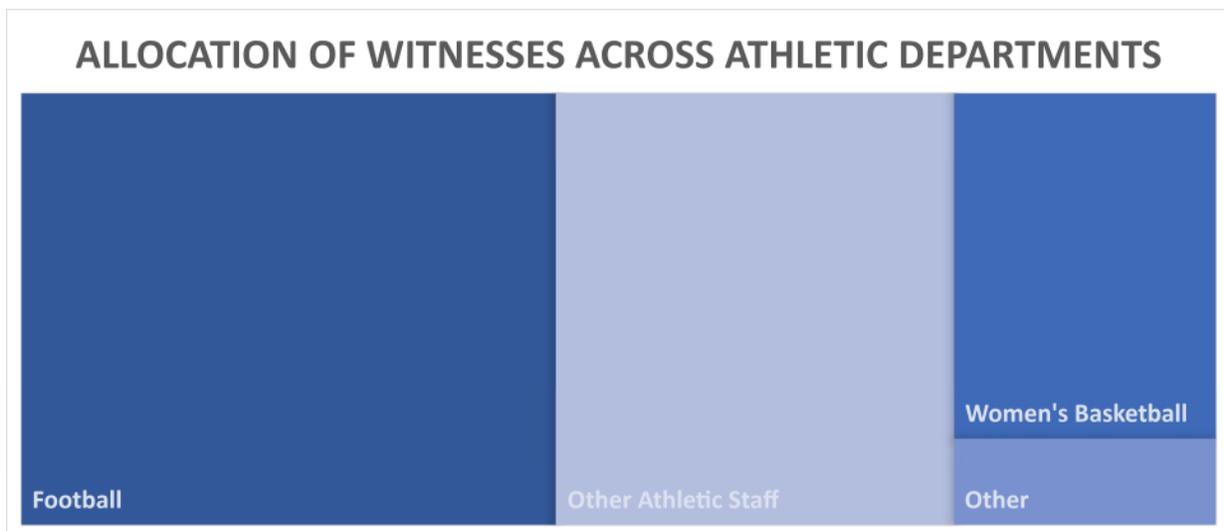
Compliance
with COVID-
19 Protocols

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

Colorado State University (the “University”) retained Husch Blackwell LLP to conduct an independent investigation into allegations that the football program and other intercollegiate athletic teams failed to comply with return-to-sport protocols implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We interviewed 115 individuals, including 49 student-athletes, 63 employees, and three other community members. Our investigation gathered a diversity of perspectives from a large cross-section of the Athletic Department and campus, including student-athletes, coaches, strength and conditioning staff, athletic trainers, administrators, counseling staff, and personnel from student life, academic support, and public health.

The following chart sets forth the distribution of witnesses across athletic departments.¹



In addition to conducting interviews, we reviewed the Policies and Procedures for Return to Activity and the return-to-sport plans for eight University intercollegiate athletic teams approved by the University’s Pandemic Preparedness Team in conjunction with The Larimer County Department of Health and Environment (“LCDHE”). Copies of those documents are attached as Appendix A.

The investigation examined perceptions and allegations about the Athletic Department’s implementation and enforcement of the COVID-19 protocols, particularly within the football program. The investigation was not intended to evaluate the appropriateness of the specific protocols implemented. Rather, the critical inquiry was the extent to which Athletic Department employees and intercollegiate athletic teams complied with the designated protocols.

¹ The “other” category includes players from smaller sports programs as well as extended community members.

Background

On August 4, 2020, the Fort Collins *Coloradoan* published an article containing numerous allegations regarding the Athletic Department's lack of compliance with the University's COVID-19 protocols, particularly within the football program.² On August 6, 2020, President McConnell announced that the University commissioned an independent investigation of the allegations. The Office of General Counsel subsequently retained Husch Blackwell LLP to conduct the investigation.

Report Structure

This report discusses the information gathered during the investigation, with detail around common themes. The report does not make findings as to whether specific incidents occurred or did not occur. Rather, specific incidents and allegations relayed in the report are included as examples of the different perspectives offered during the investigation.

In terms of organization, the report first describes the varied perceptions gathered about compliance with the COVID-19 protocols, including both positive feedback and common concerns expressed by individuals who participated in the investigation. The report then addresses both general perceptions and specific allegations about the football program's compliance with COVID-19 protocols. The report also addresses allegations that student-athletes and staff were intimidated and/or pressured to withhold information or lie during the investigation.

Athletic Department Compliance

County and University Oversight of Student-Athletes

The LCDHE has the authority to issue orders for quarantine and isolation. The University's Environmental Health Services ("EHS") and LCDHE work jointly to make decisions related to the isolation or quarantine of students. EHS is also responsible for all contact tracing. The Athletic Department is not involved in any decisions related to the isolation or quarantine of any student-athletes. A representative from EHS informs the University's Health and Performance staff (i.e., training staff) when any student-athlete is placed under an isolation or quarantine order by LCDHE.

The University's Public Health Administrator described that the length of quarantine or isolation varies based on the specific circumstances of each individual situation. For example, it is typical for LCDHE to order an individual to isolate for ten days after testing positive for COVID-19. However, LCDHE may order a symptomatic individual to isolate for ten days after onset of symptoms.

² *CSU Athletes, Staff Say Athletic Administration Covering Up COVID-19 Health Threat, Fort Collins Coloradoan*, August 4, 2020.

The Public Health Administrator also described that quarantine orders are typically for a longer duration than isolation orders. An individual may be ordered to quarantine after determining that the individual was in close contact with a person experiencing symptoms of illness or that tested positive for COVID-19. Under these situations, the quarantine order would last for 14 days from the person’s last exposure to the symptomatic or positive individual. EHS conducts contact tracing and makes an individual assessment of whether an individual’s contact with the symptomatic or positive individual warrants quarantine. EHS reviews many factors, including the length and location of the contact.

Positive Feedback

A substantial majority of student-athletes and staff reported no concerns with the established COVID-19 protocols.³ Student-athletes from multiple sports reported feeling safe, that their coaches and teammates were taking the protocols seriously, and that staff were doing a good job implementing the protocols. Several student-athletes also observed that the protocols have been adjusted and improved since their implementation.

Safety
Consistent implementation
Ongoing adjustment

Numerous student-athletes from different teams reported that masks were consistently worn, and coaches strictly enforced the protocols. Coaching staff agreed and stated that they did not witness anyone not following the protocols. Student-athletes from different teams reported that trainers and coaches provided clear information about the protocols for sick players, instructing them to report their symptoms and stay home if they felt sick. One student-athlete stated that training staff assured her team multiple times “if you feel ill or uncomfortable, you don’t have to come in for workouts.”

Numerous staff members, including members of the training and coaching staff, stated that they implemented the protocols as required and did not have concerns about student-athlete safety. Two senior administrators stated that they had not received any communication from staff members expressing concern that COVID-19 procedures were not being followed, nor had they received information from student-athletes alleging that they felt unsafe or concerned.

One administrator explained that he received questions from student-athletes about the protocols, but none of the student-athletes expressed concerns that protocols were not being followed. Of those student-athletes he heard from, most expressed appreciation of the steps being taken and were generally surprised that there were no “shortcuts” around the protocols. In his view, criticisms about the protocols could have been alleviated if the University had shared more information about the process used to develop them and decisions made about their implementation.

³ This portion of the report encompasses feedback from all individuals interviewed, including members of the football team. More detailed information about the football program and its compliance with the COVID-19 protocols are set forth later in the report.

Concerns about the Protocols

Witnesses who expressed concerns about the COVID-19 protocols generally identified issues within the areas of communication, testing protocols, contact tracing and quarantine procedures, and consistency between teams.



Communication

Numerous witnesses raised concerns about what they perceived to be a lack of communication and transparency around the protocols and return to campus. One staff member explained that the communications were team- and unit-led rather than issued from the Athletic Department, which created some discontent. Other staff members expressed frustration that there was not consistent communication with all teams, resulting in situations where some teams felt they were operating with an information deficit as compared to other teams.

These concerns extended to communications occurring between the University and public health authorities regarding the COVID-19 protocols and their implementation. Several staff members provided anecdotes of student-athletes who tested positive but were either not contacted by the public health department or received inconsistent advice from the public health department. One staff member relayed complaints from a student-athlete whose roommate was not promptly quarantined after receiving a positive test result. Both the student-athlete and staff member commented on long communication delays with public health officials. Other staff members complained that information from the public health department did not adequately flow down to them and was “filtered” by the Senior Associate Athletic Director for Health and Performance. This led to a perception by some staff members that the Athletic Department was “randomly deciding” which protocols to implement and enforce. Several individuals observed that communication practices changed after the investigation was announced and the Athletic Department began operating with increased transparency.

Several staff members also raised concerns about the adequacy and consistency of information they received regarding the protocols, especially with respect to the Olympic sports.⁴ For example, one staff member expressed concern that he had inadequate information to respond to questions he received from parents and student-athletes about the protocols. That same staff member reported that he was unable to assure that food was delivered to quarantined student-athletes because he was not told about the proper procedures.

One student-athlete expressed concern that the University had been “wishy-washy” with respect to the protocols and did not communicate effectively when the protocols changed. Although staff members met with student-athletes to answer questions about the protocols, this student-athlete stated they never described the exact protocols put in place. A second student-athlete complained

⁴ The term “Olympic Sports” is used to refer to the intercollegiate athletic teams other than football and men’s and women’s basketball.

that the Athletic Department did not appropriately involve student-athletes in discussions around the protocols or opt-out procedures, nor did it share important information with student-athletes. For example, the student-athlete asserted that information about a NCAA hotline to report issues regarding return-to-sport protocols was not distributed to students, parents, or the campus community. A similar concern about the inability to report anonymous concerns was also raised by a staff member.

One staff member encouraged the Athletic Department to communicate more regularly regarding updates, explaining “at this point, they need to over-communicate. During these times, you can never be too careful or communicate too much.”

Fall 2020 Student-Athlete Opt-out/Opt-in

Several witnesses also expressed concern about the process for student-athletes to opt-out of athletic participation. One current player said that despite a town-hall meeting with student-athletes, information was not provided with enough lead time before the decision deadline and unanswered questions remained. Other players stated that they were still trying to figure out what the opt-out option entailed. Several staff members expressed concern that student-athletes were afraid to opt-out because of fear of punitive actions. However, no staff reported hearing or witnessing any retaliatory conduct by coaches and no student-athletes expressed fear of retaliation.

Athletic Director Parker stated that the Athletic Department held several townhall meetings with the student-athletes throughout the summer to discuss the opt-in process. Administrators received feedback indicating that some students expressed apprehension about the possible impacts of opting out. This feedback prompted the Athletic Department to clear all athletic rosters and allow the student-athletes to opt-in for the Fall 2020 semester. The Athletic Department informed the student-athletes that a decision not to opt-in for Fall 2020 semester would not impact their student aid.

The Athletic Department provided student-athletes and their parents the University’s Opt-out/Opt-in form and other information, including prohibitions on retaliation, on Friday, August 28, 2020. The Athletic Department required student-athletes wanting to opt-in for Fall 2020 to opt-in by Monday, August 31, 2020. By the deadline, 363 student-athletes opted-in and 11 student-athletes opted out. The Athletic Department also informed students that they could opt out later if their circumstances changed.

Testing Protocols

Most of the witnesses who identified issues with the testing protocols expressed concerns about the frequency of student-athlete testing and the lack of testing for athletic staff. Multiple student-athletes stated that there should have been more frequent testing after student-athletes returned to campus. Numerous student-athletes and staff also expressed surprise and concern that staff was not being tested.⁵ One student-athlete asserted this deficiency was contrary to NCAA requirements

⁵ Athletic Director Parker explained this was a decision made by the University’s Pandemic Preparedness Team based on CDC guidelines.

that all athletic personnel be tested, including coaches, staff, and administrators. This same student-athlete raised concerns that the University was not conducting weekly surveillance PCR (genetic virus) (as distinguished from antigen or antibody) testing.

Contact Tracing & Quarantine Procedures

Numerous witnesses expressed concern about the lack of effective contact tracing performed by the EHS.⁶ Many witnesses also described what they perceived to be an inconsistent and inadequate response when student-athletes test positive for COVID-19, some providing the following anecdotes:

- One student-athlete reported that her roommates (non-players) were not required to quarantine after she tested positive.
- A second student-athlete relayed concerns to her trainer that there was a lengthy delay between her roommate testing positive and being placed in quarantine housing, resulting in the student-athlete feeling unsafe in her shared residence hall room.⁷
- A staff member reported that student-athletes from one team who were exposed to an individual who tested positive were quarantined, yet student-athletes from a different team who lived with someone who tested positive were not.
- One staff member stated that a small group of student-athletes who ate a meal together with a teammate who subsequently tested positive was told that they did not need to quarantine.⁸
- Two student-athletes expressed concern that some of their teammates continued to practice during the interval between exposure and being placed in quarantine.

One staff member responded to the alleged inconsistencies, explaining that quarantine decisions were based on an individual's level of exposure and risk of infection and were made by EHS rather than the Athletic Department.

Witnesses also relayed a variety of experiences around quarantine procedures for student-athletes who tested positive; many focused on challenges around alternative housing.

⁶ According to informational materials on the University's website, an individual who tests positive, has been potentially exposed, or who reports COVID-like symptoms must meet with a case investigator to discuss the possibility of infection and everyone with whom the individual has had close contact. Contact tracers will reach out to those who may have been in close contact with the ill person or positive individual and gather information about the nature of the contact and potential exposure. See <https://covidrecovery.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2020/09/CONTACT-TRACING-EXPLAINED-final.pdf>.

⁷ The student-athlete also complained about the quantity and quality of food provided in quarantine housing, which she alleged was inadequate for her physical needs as an athlete.

⁸ This staff member also asserted that contract-tracing and quarantine protocols were impacted by the degree of influence exercised by the individual team's coach. No other witness echoed this assertion.

- One student-athlete who tested positive reported feeling supported by her teammates, training staff, and coaches.
- In contrast, a different student-athlete who tested positive stated that no steps were taken to assess the appropriateness of her off-campus housing arrangements for quarantine, nor was she offered any options for alternative housing.
- A staff member relayed a similar anecdote involving a student-athlete who tested positive and needed to “scramble” to find a place to live away from her roommates.
- Several other witnesses echoed these concerns about quarantine housing, especially for student-athletes residing off-campus.
- One staff member stated that the individuals conducting the contact tracing had “no idea” about the living situations of the student-athletes until a plan was put in place to gather and provide such information.
- A second staff member confirmed that the University was not tracking who student-athletes lived with, especially off-campus.
- A staff member with public health experience explained that students who were required to isolate or quarantine were moved into quarantine housing; however, student-athletes residing in housing with a private bedroom or bathroom were permitted to quarantine in their own residence.
- One coach expressed his view that student-athletes, including those normally residing off-campus, should be quarantined in a designated residence hall where both their health and compliance with the quarantine could be monitored.

Consistency

Several staff members expressed concerns regarding changing or inconsistent protocols. For example, one staff member described changing mask protocols: student-athletes were initially told they must wear masks during light to moderate activity indoors, but they could remove masks during intense activity; student-athletes were subsequently required to wear masks indoors at all times. Three staff members also reported inconsistent protocols between sports. They asserted that members of the men’s basketball team were required to wear masks in the weight room, but not on the court; members of the women’s basketball and volleyball teams were always required to wear masks, including on the court.

The Senior Associate A.D. for Health and Performance denied that the mask protocols differed from sport-to-sport. However, he described that, throughout the summer, the guidance and orders received from the EHS and LCDHE evolved. Initially, student-athletes participating in physical activity indoors were not required to wear masks indoors. However, as state and local regulations

changed, the EHS and LCDHE required all student athletes to wear masks indoors, even during physical activity. However, the EHS and LCDHE did not require student-athletes to wear masks while participating in physical activity outdoors.

Other Concerns

A small number of student-athletes and staff expressed general concern over the University's decision to resume athletic activities, expressing their view that playing sports was not worth the associated risks.

One staff member expressed concern that coaches were involved in the development and implementation of the COVID-19 protocols, asserting that they influenced the Athletic Department, Pandemic Preparedness Team, and public health officials. According to the staff member, the protocols appeared to change depending on a team's individual coach and that coach's influence on the process. Athletic Director Parker disputed this allegation, emphasizing that public health experts made decisions regarding when and how students would return to practice and what protocols would be implemented. In his view, those decisions were not influenced by the Athletic Department or individual coaches.

Football Program Compliance

The media has reported numerous allegations regarding the football program's compliance with the University's COVID-19 protocols. Student-athlete and staff responses to those specific allegations are addressed below. General observations about the football program's implementation and enforcement of the protocols are summarized first in this section of the report.

Implementation of the Protocols

Most witnesses with direct knowledge about the football program's implementation of the protocols were positive about the level of compliance. Indeed, one staff member with public health experience stated that the specific protocols implemented within the football team were safe and, in some respects, went "above and beyond" what was required. Most members of the team stated that they felt safe and believed the staff had implemented the protocols to the best of their ability. Numerous players stated that the coaching staff told them "over and over" to follow the rules.

Notwithstanding the above, multiple student-athletes and staff members acknowledged the difficulty of wearing masks during intense drills and practices. Five different players stated that although masks were encouraged and required, players often removed them due to the heat and difficulty breathing during drills while masked. One administrator reported hearing from student-athletes that some players removed their masks during full-contact practices, yet the coaching staff did not intervene. According to this administrator, that led to the perception that the protocols were not being taken seriously. This same administrator grew concerned after receiving a phone call from the parent of a student-athlete who reported that her son and another teammate did not feel safe and would not attend practice.

Four members of the team expressed concern that the coaching staff did not immediately halt practices and initiate a broader quarantine after the first players tested positive. In their view, both the players and coaches underestimated the potential spread of the virus. One other player questioned whether football itself was capable of being played within established protocols, explaining that the extent of close contact between the players makes it virtually impossible to comply with CDC recommendations.

Head Coach Appreciation & Enforcement of the Protocols

Witnesses provided differing views regarding the coaching staff's perspective on, and enforcement of, the protocols. One administrator reported hearing concerns from players that coaches were not wearing masks and were "downplaying" or minimizing the potential dangers of COVID-19.

Head Coach Comments

Staff members stated that Head Coach Addazio made internal statements that made some staff members believe that Head Coach Addazio questioned the severity of COVID-19. A member of the football staff alleged that Head Coach Addazio did not appreciate the dangers of the virus and remarked at a meeting that "all the experts are wrong, and it is all political." A second staff member speculated that Head Coach Addazio seemed more concerned with "getting on the field" than worrying about the virus. A third staff member expressed his belief that Head Coach Addazio did not understand the meaning of "stopping the spread" and had not "totally bought in" to the protocols.⁹ Numerous staff members reported observing or hearing rumors that Head Coach Addazio described COVID-19 as "just the flu."

There were varied reports about whether Head Coach Addazio shared these opinions with coaching staff. One coach alleged that Head Coach Addazio told his staff that if he tested positive in July, he would not have to "worry about it" in six months or be tested again for at least three months. Two coaches denied that any such comment was made to the coaching staff.

Similar mixed reports were provided about whether Head Coach Addazio made such comments to players. Of note, many of the staff members who alleged that Head Coach Addazio expressed personal views minimizing the dangers of the virus also made a point to clarify that he did not express those views in front of the team. Several players expressed concern that Head Coach Addazio "downplayed" the dangers of the virus. One player alleged that Head Coach Addazio told the players "if you get a cough or have the sniffles, not everything is COVID-19; grow up and get over it." A second player stated that Head Coach Addazio "acted like COVID-19 didn't exist on the football field; once you were in the white lines, COVID-19 didn't exist." A third player asserted Head Coach Addazio told players "if you are only doing a single play, it is not a big deal." A fourth player asserted that Head Coach Addazio told players "if you wear your mask and you get the virus, you don't get the whole virus you only get a part of it." A fifth relayed hearing Head Coach Addazio suggest that the virus was not as dangerous as reported.

⁹ This same staff member acknowledged that Head Coach Addazio stressed wearing masks and carrying hand sanitizer.

Head Coach Addazio reiterated that he took precautions to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 amongst the players. He also denied making comments that downplayed the seriousness or dangerousness of the disease to students or staff members.

Head Coach Enforcement

Numerous other players and staff members applauded Head Coach Addazio's commitment to enforcing the protocols and disputed the allegations that he "downplayed" the risk or said he wished to personally get the virus. One staff member recalled Head Coach Addazio explaining that although he found the protocols "ridiculous," he "did not make the decisions" and "we have to follow the protocols." That staff member emphasized that Head Coach Addazio never encouraged anyone to deviate from the protocols. In fact, he viewed Head Coach Addazio as a leader because of his compliance and commitment to the student-athletes' safety.

Multiple witnesses described Head Coach Addazio as a "germaphobe" who took the virus seriously and went "above and beyond" to ensure his players were staying safe and taking precautions. Head Coach Addazio agreed that he is a "germaphobe" and stated he was very conscious about the risks and concerned about COVID-19 due to his personal and family members' risk factors. Athletic Director Parker reported that Head Coach Addazio appeared to take the risk seriously and commented on several occasions that he is "at-risk" because of his age.

Multiple members of the coaching staff said Head Coach Addazio consistently cautioned players to be safe and reminded them that their actions outside of football could place themselves and others at risk. One coach stated he could not imagine someone being more responsible in their attention to detail with COVID-19. Another coach characterized his level of compliance with the protocols as "maniacal." A third recalled Head Coach Addazio "making this a much bigger deal than it was" and adopting a very conservative approach to COVID-19. Several other witnesses offered specific examples:

- Numerous players and staff confirmed that he repeatedly discouraged players from patronizing bars or attending parties.
- A fourth coach described Head Coach Addazio's response as "over the top" and explained that he personally bought hand sanitizer for the team.
- A different coach said that he and Head Coach Addazio purchased and tried multiple different kinds of masks in order to find safe, comfortable masks for the team.
- Numerous players shared similar thoughts, reporting that Head Coach Addazio consistently encouraged players to wear their masks and practice social distancing. He was described as the "chief enforcer" of masks and social distancing during practice, with several players recalling an occasion when he stopped practice to distance players who were too close to one another.

Multiple players said that Head Coach Addazio never encouraged players to circumvent the protocols. They also reported that he and the other coaches led by example and complied with the mask requirements themselves.

Reporting Symptoms & Practicing When Sick

The media reported allegations that football coaching staff coerced health administrators not to quarantine players so that they could continue to practice and that players who were exposed to other symptomatic players were permitted to practice.

Several staff members reported hearing rumors or receiving information from players that members of the football coaching staff had instructed players not to report symptoms and forego testing after being exposed to the virus. One staff member said two different players told him that players were afraid to report their symptoms. This same staff member alleged that coaches were unhappy with a player for providing too many names to contact tracers after a positive test result. A different staff member asserted that a coach told two student-athletes who had tested positive not to tell anyone else about the results. A third staff member alleged that players were encouraged to continue practicing even when exhibiting symptoms.

All but one player disputed the allegations and said that the coaching staff encouraged players to report their symptoms and avoid coming to practice when sick. One player recalled coaches instructing them “when you are in doubt, call the trainer and don’t come to practice.” A second player stated that coaches told everyone to be honest on the daily health screening questionnaire and to leave workouts if feeling unwell.

The sole player who raised concerns in his interview stated that he spoke with his position coach after being exposed to someone who tested positive. According to the player, who was not experiencing any symptoms, the coach told him to “keep this quiet” until symptoms arose. The coach denied telling the player not to report; rather, he recalled referring the player to the training staff or pandemic team.

Multiple coaches and staff members also disputed the allegations that coaching staff discouraged reporting. One coach said he was told to follow every symptom. Two other coaches denied that sick or quarantined players were permitted to practice, explaining that players were not allowed to practice unless they were cleared through the medical staff. A staff member stated that when he followed up with a player about the rumors that staff discouraged reporting, the player denied being discouraged from reporting.

Playing Time Threats

Several staff members reported that players expressed concern to them that playing time would be negatively impacted if they tested positive for COVID-19. In their view, coaches explicitly or implicitly fostered this perception, which amounted to subtle encouragement not to report symptoms or get tested. One other staff member expressed a similar concern, stating that players continued to participate in workouts despite feeling sick because they were afraid of losing playing time.

Players provided conflicting information regarding explicit or implicit threats to their playing time. One player stated that Head Coach Addazio told the team “if you get sick during camp, you will not be playing.” A different player reported that Head Coach Addazio told players if they had to quarantine and lose two weeks of practice, they would “forfeit their spot.” A different player said he had not heard that himself, but he did hear rumors that some players were told they could not afford to miss two weeks.

Numerous other players denied that playing time was threatened but explained that players were reluctant to miss practice because they did not want to fall behind. According to one player, playing time was never threatened, but missing too much time would make it hard to catch up with the playbook. A second player explained if a player missed practice, the next person would move up to fill the spot. One player stated that the only mention of getting sick and playing time was when Head Coach Addazio told the team “camp is four-weeks; if you are out sick for two-weeks, you are going to miss all of the installation of the playbook.” A different player recalled Head Coach Addazio cautioning players that if they were sick and quarantined during camp, it would be hard to play because they would fall behind. This player noted that several “first group” players tested positive and returned to the “first group” after being cleared to play. In his view, playing time was not negatively impacted.

Head Coach Addazio denied threatening to reduce playing time and said the allegation was “absurd.” Numerous coaches and staff agreed and denied that any such threats had been made. Rather, they reported that Head Coach Addazio cautioned the team about getting COVID-19 because the team could not afford to miss 14 days of competition. One staff member stated Head Coach Addazio constantly reminded players about the need for personal responsibility, telling them they needed “to do better and handle their business” or there was a possibility that the team could be shut down. This is consistent with the recollection of one player who said that Head Coach Addazio stressed to the team that “if you want to play football, you have to follow these protocols. If you do not, it will not turn out good for everybody.”

Player Compliance

Numerous players reported that their concerns primarily related to non-compliance from their teammates rather than the coaching staff’s enforcement of the protocols. Several players stated that the players did not take the virus seriously, and their social activities outside of team activities made them nervous. One current player explained “it is a two-way street—the coaches can only protect you so much. The guys were making bad choices to go to parties or to go to bars.”

Regarding following quarantine protocols, another player reported that he observed the roommates of a player who tested positive attending practice.

With respect to practicing when testing positive, another player stated that he was aware of teammates who did not adhere to quarantine requirements or social distancing protocols after testing positive; importantly, he clarified that those players did not attend practice. One coach recalled that there was a player who generated numerous player complaints because he was sniffing and coughing during practice; that player was not identified to investigators as having tested positive for COVID-19.

Requirements for Face Coverings at Outdoor Workouts

As described above, the EHS and the LCDHE did not require student-athletes to wear face coverings during outdoor workout activity. As such, the football team was not required to wear face coverings during their on-field walk-throughs. The EHS and LCDHE expected football players to wear face coverings to and from the athletic facilities. The EHS and LCDHE also required the football coaches and staff members to wear face coverings for all team activities.

We reviewed film from the football team's walk-throughs on July 27, July 28, and July 29, 2020. The film supports information received from the players indicating that some players did not wear face coverings during the duration of the team's outdoor activities. The film supports that many players removed their face coverings from their nose and/or mouth sporadically throughout the walk-throughs. Although some football players removed their face masks during their outdoor walk-throughs, the football team was still in compliance with the expectations of the EHS and the LCDHE. The wearing of face coverings during the outdoor workouts was an extra precaution that Head Coach Addazio placed upon the football team.

Additionally, the film demonstrated that members of the coaching staff, including Head Coach Addazio, removed their face coverings at various times while in close distance to players. Head Coach Addazio stated that he encouraged all individuals to wear face coverings. However, he identified that, at times, it was necessary to remove the face coverings to provide instructions to the players, to use his practice whistle, or to breathe outside during periods of extreme heat. In order to avoid removing face coverings to use their practice whistles, Head Coach Addazio stated that he ordered electronic whistles for the coaching staff.

Head Coach Addazio also affirmed that two or three trainers attend every team practice session. He indicated that he spent most of the practice sessions trying to ensure safety and compliance with face covering protocols. He also noted that he required his players to wear face coverings during outdoor physical activity before state and local ordinances made this a requirement.

Investigation Integrity

One witness alleged that Head Coach Addazio attempted to interfere with the investigation and influence their testimony. According to the witness, Head Coach Addazio told staff that they are employed in the football program "because of his good graces" and "during this investigation, I expect absolute loyalty." The witness also alleged that Senior Associate Head Coach White was complicit, posting the Ram logo and phrase "absolute loyalty" on social media to send the message "we expect you to protect us" to staff and players. According to the witness, Senior Associate Coach White also commented, "We're fighting for our lives" during a staff meeting, which he interpreted to mean the coaches know they are guilty of wrongdoing. The witness also alleged that Head Coach Addazio explicitly instructed the team videographer to delete practice videos from the server in order to destroy evidence of the team's violation of the COVID-19 protocols.

Head Coach Addazio denied attempting to interfere with the investigation in any way. In response to these allegations, Head Coach Addazio stated that he instructed all members of his coaching

staff to cooperate with the investigation and to respond truthfully. Head Coach Addazio believed that he complied with and exceeded all of the University's COVID-19 protocols.

In response to this specific allegation, we requested practice footage from July 27, July 28, and July 29, 2020. The Athletic Department provided the footage and we reviewed the footage to verify that the footage was not destroyed.

A second witness alleged that Athletic Director Parker made coordinated efforts to “drum up support” during the investigation. According to the witness, Athletic Director Parker also advised staff not to discuss the investigation, which he and his colleagues found threatening. Both witnesses also remarked upon President McConnell's praise for the Athletic Department's leadership during the Athletic Department's fall semester inaugural meeting on August 25, 2020.¹⁰ The NCAA requires college and university presidents to deliver an annual message to their athletic department employees prior to the start of athletic competitions. President McConnell attended and provided opening remarks at the departmental staff meeting in compliance with NCAA requirements. Although President McConnell does not specifically mention this specific investigation, two witnesses perceived her comments as “extremely tone-deaf,” inconsistent with the ongoing investigation, and a “slap in the face.”

During her introductory remarks, President McConnell acknowledged that it was a stressful time within the athletic department but praised the Athletic Director Parker and the rest of the leadership team. President McConnell also expressed to the staff that she expected them to follow rules and to conduct themselves ethically.

¹⁰ According to a transcript of President McConnell's remarks provided by one of the witnesses, she made the following statement: “I want to give your team a shout out. Joe has just, is just a remarkable partner for me. I'm really, really fortunate to have him as the athletic director. Steve Cottingham has been also incredibly helpful. Shalini is amazing, in terms of the compliance piece, and I feel really supported by the athletic department and the professionals that are in place, and I want to share that with you because during times of stress, there's often questions about leadership, and I want to make sure that you know that you have really good leadership. I hope you don't mind me saying all of this, Joe. I didn't prepare you for public acclaim, but you deserve it.”

Conclusion

Most student-athletes who participated in the investigation reported feeling safe during team activities and believed that coaching and training staff made their best efforts to implement and enforce the University's return-to-sport protocols. While numerous witnesses expressed some degree of dissatisfaction or concern about aspects of the protocols, those concerns were predominately related to communication, consistency, or testing policies rather than intentional non-compliance with the protocols.

There is no dispute that the football team initially incurred the highest number of positive test results among student-athletes and some members of the team did not always strictly adhere to the protocols, especially outside of team activities. However, most witnesses with direct knowledge of the team's day-to-day activities observed the coaching staff providing consistent encouragement to comply with the protocols. Most members of the football program believed Head Coach Addazio and his coaching staff took the protocols seriously and did not threaten or pressure players to hide symptoms or participate while feeling unwell.