



NCAA CHALLENGE

How do we convince fans that it is safe to attend live events, leading them to purchase tickets now during a pandemic for championship events that occur next spring, summer and fall?

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The world is eight months into a global pandemic and the same question is on everyone's mind – when will it be safe to return to a concert, game or championship? Unfortunately, a global pandemic doesn't stop time – college seniors ready to compete in the sports they have spent their lives perfecting are still set to graduate, incoming freshmen still hope to compete and put their name on the map of who to watch for in upcoming years, and high school juniors and seniors are just as excited to get scouted for college teams as they were in years without a pandemic. For the NCAA this means it is essential to let fans know it is safe to return to watching the games and championships that will define these players careers in years after a pandemic.

But in these times, safety is in more than just the eye of the beholder. When facing a virus that has asymptomatic carriers and complicated transmission vectors, ensuring the safety of attendees at events is critical for both the event managers as well as those choosing to attend. Constantly changing state regulations as infection rates vary create additional hurdles for event managers to consider. What may have been allowable attendance could change in less than week to require refunds and re-assignment of tickets.

The first step to ensuring fans feel safe in returning to attend championship games and events is to stabilize the uncertainty surrounding the virus. This will involve setting internal guidelines that are stricter than the current restrictions at championship game sites, and advertising that the NCAA is committed to safety with these measures. Capping attendance at 25% of venue capacity, requiring masks to be worn at all times by attendees, providing ready access to hand sanitizer stations, and offering limited or no concessions to reduce lines will all

fall within these stricter guidelines. Where possible venues should be selected that are out of doors to reduce recirculated air, which has been shown to be a vector of transmission (Hartford). When it is necessary to host events indoors, efforts should be made to ensure that the air-exchange systems at venues are able to maintain a good mix of air drawn from outside the venue, and utilize HEPA filters or UVC lighting within ducts to reduce the chance of spread (Hartford). These basic methods of safety enhancements should be widely advertised to attendees as the initial step in reassuring potential purchasers that they will be safe when at an NCAA event.

The second step to encouraging fans to return to championship events is to provide an incentive to attend in the upcoming year. A simple and effective method would be to help offset the higher cost of a reduced capacity ticket by negotiating with attending schools to ensure that anyone who has purchased a ticket to the championship games is eligible to receive a discount on tickets to attend their school of choice's games in an upcoming full season after the pandemic has passed. Much like retailers are able to encourage purchasing behaviors by offering a "Buy One Get One" discount offer, these tickets would enable fans to see their favorite teams compete in a championship game while also enjoying future games at partnering schools.

Finally, giveaways at larger budget events could be advertised and utilized to encourage ticket sales. These giveaways could consist of reversible masks that have the team colors of one school on one side and the other school on the reverse – allowing fans to "Choose their colors" when sitting in the stands and encouraging compliance with masking regulations. Hand

sanitizer bottles could also be given out. These safety kits could be distributed by placing them on reserved seats in advance of the game, so fans are not put into unnecessary contact with personnel at the entry gates.

By following simple guidelines to encourage health and safety, it is possible to host successful events during a pandemic. The key is ensuring that all guidelines are followed and all interested parties (fans, teams and schools) are aware of the importance of maintaining compliance. In any team the success on the field starts when every team member is doing their job in unison to the highest level of their abilities – the NCAA and their fans are just part of a much larger team that needs everyone to do their part to keep the whole organization reaching their goals.

Works Cited

- “Can an HVAC Duct Spread COVID-19 in Offices, Stores and Schools?” *Hartford HealthCare*, hartfordhealthcare.org/about-us/news-press/news-detail?articleid=27158&publicId=395.
- “Championship Central.” *Championship Central | NCAA.com*, www.ncaa.com/championships.