

Duey Naatz COVID-19 Oral History Interview

Interviewer: Kailey Dresel

June 1, 2020

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Kailey Dresel: Let me know and I can try it again. Okay, so the first question is - I'll just rephrase it - When do you first remember hearing about COVID and what did you think about how it might like affect you?

Duey Naatz: Well, I think the first time that I heard about much of it was I was in Indianapolis in February for NCAA [National Collegiate Athletics Association] football championship meetings and they were talking about it a little bit that was going on in China at the time. And at that time, I didn't think anything of it. So, it was sometime in February and thought nothing of it at the time.

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KD: What might you say to your past self about like with what you know now?

DN: I think that at that point in time I should have taken it more seriously. It was happening in China at the time and really didn't think it would pertain to the US [?] [United States], Wisconsin, Stout [University of Wisconsin-Stout], or even down to our Athletic Department. But I think maybe take it more serious, read more about it, and try to find more information about it at the time, which I didn't think twice about it. So, probably take it a little more serious and do more research so I would've been aware, I think, of what potential changes coming up in the world would have been.

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KD: What has been the biggest change that you've had to deal with or some of the biggest changes through the whole COVID-19?

DN: Well, I think in our Athletic Department the biggest change for us was first of all the cancellation of our spring seasons. We had our track team was in North Carolina at the National Championships, practiced for a couple days, and had to come home without competing. Our baseball - you know, all of our spring sport seasons were cancelled. It started with their spring trips being cancelled and then it kind of moved really quickly to the entire seasons being cancelled through the NCAA. It was right around the Final Four time. Just the student-athletes losing the opportunity to compete, many of them in their senior year. That was the biggest impact. And then I think the second biggest impact was the fact that all of our students being sent home [?] lost the contact with the coach's ability to train [unclear] students have a passion for.

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KD: Yeah. Are you surprised by anything about like how people are responding or how life has changed?

DN: You know, yeah. Can you repeat that again?

KD: Everyone's responding differently to this. Does anyone's like - like some people are very extreme. Some people are very relaxed about it. Does anyone's reactions or how they are responding, is that a shock to you at all?

DN: You know what, most surprised is the ability for our coaches and our student-athletes to stay connected during that time and during this time. Even now is the fact that they are used to having daily contact or multiple times a week with their coaches and their, you know, their teammates, and other athletes, other students. And not just student athletes, but their connection to students seems to be uprooted [?] and sent home and off campus and not allowed in any buildings. You know, transitioning to the way that education took place the last part of last semester is our kids are really resilient, they adjusted, they found ways to stay connected - our teams did. Our coaches did a fantastic job of keeping their teams connected the best that they could. Meetings that they were very creative with what they accomplished. So, I think there's a wide range of, you know, paranoia with the COVID to [unclear]. You know, just the whole range. It's like there's an entire United States but I think for the most part that our student-athletes are resilient and handled it pretty well.

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KD: What are you doing to remain connected to your friends, family, loved ones or like what kinds of technology have you been using or had to adjust to using more?

DN: Right here, right now. We're using - you know, I never had so many meetings on a computer, but I think we're finding that this is something that is going to be a part of the future instead of the cost and expenses for a in-person meeting to be able to do it online and do it this way. But I think there's been a lot more Zoom calls, Facebook time - you know, FaceTime, all those different things to stay connected. I think the entire world has kind of done a reset and has slowed down a little bit, which I think is a good thing. Not necessarily a good thing the way that this happened but I think there's been more time for family, friends to stay connected and maybe people you don't reach out to in your fast paced life that some of it's been a good thing.

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KD: For sure. What has been the most challenging thing about you maybe staying in contact with like your staff or you learning to keep in touch with people online? And what has kind of worked for you?

DN: We have never had a staff meeting online. We've had a couple different staff meetings. When we were - school was still in session March, April, May, we had a head coaches' meeting weekly. And with how many things have changed with the NCAA and the different rule changes and the adjustments in eligibility, you know, just trying to keep our head coaches connected and our staff connected. We [unclear] and kept track of all the different meetings that our coaches had so we knew that they were maintaining contact and all those types of things. The idea is

face-to-face [?] is the ability to walk down the hall and answer questions for an athlete or a coach to stop in the office and say “hey, what do you think about this?” That’s been a little bit trickier, but I think there’s been a lot more, you know, the computer ability to hold the meetings during this time has been but I think works [?]. We have another meeting tomorrow. Most of our head coaches are not on contract in the summer so they’re not require to be on the call but we’re going to have a call for those that want to hop on to hear the latest updates and just things change daily. They change weekly so it’s important to keep them updated with all the changes because there’s been a lot of them.

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KD: Yeah, for sure. What are some things that might worry you about how other people are responding to COVID or how the effects might be? Or are you kind of hopeful that it’ll be dying down soon or like it’s going to be like life will go back to a little bit of normal soon?

DN: I’m hopeful that it gets back to what the so called normal was. I think, you know, our Chancellor [Chancellor Katherine P. Frank] has done a good job of talking about what a modified normal might look like. You know the administrators or coaches, we are not in the business of setting up what’s the protocol for resocialization [?] with COVID-19 and the concerns, you know, people from the health department and higher up than myself or our coaches will make those decisions. So, the ability for us to adjust to it and be able to get our teams ready to compete if that’s an opportunity or, you know, what is it going to look like. Our coaches are resilient, and our student-athletes are too so we’ll find a way. But I’m not really concerned [?] - you know, it’s different for us because we don’t know what we don’t know or what we know yet. For a little bit of that unknown, I think is the biggest concern. Some of the concerns, you know, from an athletics standpoint would be, you know, a lot of our non-conference contests are small schools out of state: Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa. And with the different local and state regulations, what is that going to mean for travel? What are all the resources [unclear], protocol, and guidelines that we’ll have to follow [?]? All that’s the tricky [unclear].

KD: For sure.

DN: Once we get to it, we’ll get through it.

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KD: Yeah. So, were there any items or services you’ve had a harder time purchasing or obtaining during this time?

DN: No. Once our seasons were over, and that was postponed by the NCAA, we pretty much put our budgets on lockdown. So, we’ve really held off on any purchasing since March. We’re starting to look at and gear up for purchases for twenty twenty-one and that stuff won’t take place until July one. So, we’re really trying to [unclear] a little bit and see what we’re going to be like in the fall and next school year so once we get to that point, we’ll adjust but we haven’t really been trying to make any purchases. So, for now, we’re okay.

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KD: All right. Has there been any silver linings for you during this crisis?

DN: No, I think [unclear] before, the fact that I think the world got a little bit of a reset, maybe slow down a little bit. All of us miss interaction with people and athletes - student-athletes are a very social group and getting them back together and, like I mentioned, they have a passion [unclear], as well as their major and the ability to train. Be ready for them to compete. You know, right now it's still very difficult for them to get in the gym and do the things they want to do, so.

KD: Yeah.

DN: There's a little bit of a thing, that ability to pack things down and spend more family time is okay but I think we've learned some things - other ways we can have meetings and communicate with our teams and things that I think will be the ways of the future, so.

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KD: Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences during this epidemic?

DN: Anything else?

KD: Yeah, that you'd like to share because those - we kind of covered - we mostly covered all the questions because sometimes you like answered things and it kind of went with the next questions, so yeah. But we'll just kind of give room for people if they like to add any other things during this time.

DN: Oh, let's be done with the COVID, right?

KD: Yes. Well, I just want to thank you for your time and thanks for kind of giving insight on how like you're dealing with this, especially from a Athletics point of view. And so, I'm really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to talk with me about this.

DN: You bet. Thank you.

KD: All right, have a good day.

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END