

features

The impact of no sports on campus

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Many changes have impacted the daily lives of college students everywhere.

At Ashland University, students cannot leave their dorms without a mask.

In classrooms, they are separated from peers by chairs marked as unseatable.

Even in the convocation center, the way food is distributed has been altered.

While all students are doing their best to become accustomed to a different way of life on campus, it is even more difficult for student athletes.

As a result of COVID-19, fall and winter sports have been cancelled.

These athletes, who are used to heavy practice time, team bonding and competition with other universities no longer have the same opportunities.

For senior volleyball player, Zoie Franklin, she has already found it hard to adjust to a new routine.

“The hardest part is not knowing what to do with your time,” she said. “Just to basically do your homework, sit in your room and go do normal stuff, but we’re used to doing two-a-days in the pre-season.”

As a senior, Franklin has had to cope with the possibility that she might not have a final season.

Although there is a chance she can play competitively in the spring semester, it is not guaranteed.

In order to boost their morale, the football team has incorporated 15 accountability teams within the full team, senior fullback Austin Williams explained.

“You have a leader for each accountability team and the teams get to kind of meet and hangout or just do something together and talk together,” he said.

This has been a helpful tool, making Williams feel more connected with the team despite not being able to be with everyone.

Although Williams was prepared for the fall season to be cancelled, him and his team were still disappointed by the decision.

“All of us were kind of hurt by it because we’ve all played football since we were little so we’ve played football every fall and this is the first fall without football,” he said. “It’s just gonna be very different for us.”

Since Williams redshirted his freshman year, he is eligible to play for another year but this is not the case for everyone.

“I have a couple friends that this is going to be their last year,” he said. “I really feel for them.”

Williams cannot help but feel a sense of weirdness with lacking a competitive season.

“Usually we report to camp for our season early August and obviously that didn’t happen,” he said. “It was just weird not having stuff to do for the summer.”

Without the ability to play against other universities, it can feel like you are practicing for nothing, Williams said.

“You’re practicing to get ready



No concession stands for the fall semester means a loss of revenue for the university.

it’s something that we can keep the programs going,” he said. “There’s a feeling of hope there.”

As for scholarship money that is awarded to student athletes, it still remains intact.

“The one thing that the NCAA has talked about is you’re not going to penalize kids because of COVID,” King said. “As a university, we understand we brought kids here on scholarship

games from last school year is completely gone.

The university gets money from parking, concessions, ticket sales and game sponsorships, primarily.

“Our goal through sponsorships is usually to raise between \$60,000 and \$70,000,” he said. “Right now we just can’t do it.”

King has begun to feel a divide between AU and the sports fan base as the beginning of the fall semester is much different this year.

“We’re always so close to the community and right now it’s just a sense of sadness because we’re separated more than normal,” he said.

It is also important to King that people are discussing mental health through these changes.

“We try to tell the athletes that there’s no shame in saying that they’re struggling,” he said. “We’re undoubtedly throwing a lot at students because there’s just so much uncertainty.”

Elizabeth Hoge, director of academic support services for athletes, has made it her primary concern to be there for student athletes among a semester without seasons.

In these first three weeks of being back on campus, Hoge has had 123 students come in for appointments with her.

She typically handles the preparation of first-year student athletes with matters like organizing their class schedule and shedding light on the resources available on campus.

“This is their first shot at college life and it looks so different,” Hoge said. “It’s complicated and it’s a lot.”

So far, Hoge has heard student concerns about making friends amidst a pandemic and dealing with feelings of homesickness.

“There’s definitely some mental health concerns and they’re just trying to find their place in all of this,” she said.

Hoge suggests that student athletes find the positives in having a cancelled season, such as being able to focus on technique without the pressures of competition and taking this time to cushion their GPAs.

“This is really the semester where you have the least amount of athletic commitment that you’ve probably ever had,” she said. “I think by being able to not have all these distractions they can really put together that holistic plan of working on their academics.”

Williams and Franklin, themselves, have made it their number one priority to be on schoolwork.

Even though there is a shift in excitement without sports on campus, King believes that students should celebrate the fact that they are even here.

“We are going to beat this, it’s going to happen at some point, we’re going to get past it,” he said. “I don’t know when it will be, but we’ll play again and our fans will come back again.”



Student athletes can find a supportive space in the Mary C. Miller Student-Athlete Enrichment Center.

“Even if we do have a season in the spring, which I really hope we do, it’s kind of reversed because now we have four months of practice and then the spring is going to be taken up,” she said.

Emotionally and mentally, the absence of a volleyball season has been draining and caused a shift to Franklin’s mindset.

“I’m always excited to come in for fall because the season starts, school starts and you see all your friends,” she said. “Not having it definitely puts [the team] in a depressive state.”

Student athletes at AU are currently allowed to practice in groups of 10 or less.

The volleyball team, specifically, is practicing five to six days a week, with two-hour practices set in place.

“We wear masks the whole time, everytime we’re with each other and everytime we go in the gym,” Franklin said. “We sanitize and wash our hands after every water break.”

The volleyball players have been bonding with each other by getting ice cream or coffee and having study sessions together.

“Whatever we can do together we do, basically just to keep that same team aspect like we would in the fall because we’re always together in the fall,” Franklin said.

for a season that might happen,” he said. “It’s really difficult to practice with no purpose.”

However, AU Athletic Director Al King, has high hopes for sports to resume in the spring semester.

“I’m planning that we’re going to play,” he said. “I’m trying to do everything to keep it moving forward at least a little bit — I owe [the athletes] that much.”

King sympathizes with the student athletes that have not been able to play sports since March.

The NCAA has placed high priorities on the championships that were lost for winter and spring sports last school year, King said.

“Now, in the fall championships, you can have conference championships but there will be no NCAA championship there,” he said.

The purpose of letting these athletes practice now is for many reasons that will ultimately benefit them in the long run.

“Our feeling is if we can get student athletes in some type of normalcy of what they’re used to it will help with retention, mental health and just give them the opportunity to be around their coaches and teammates,” he said.

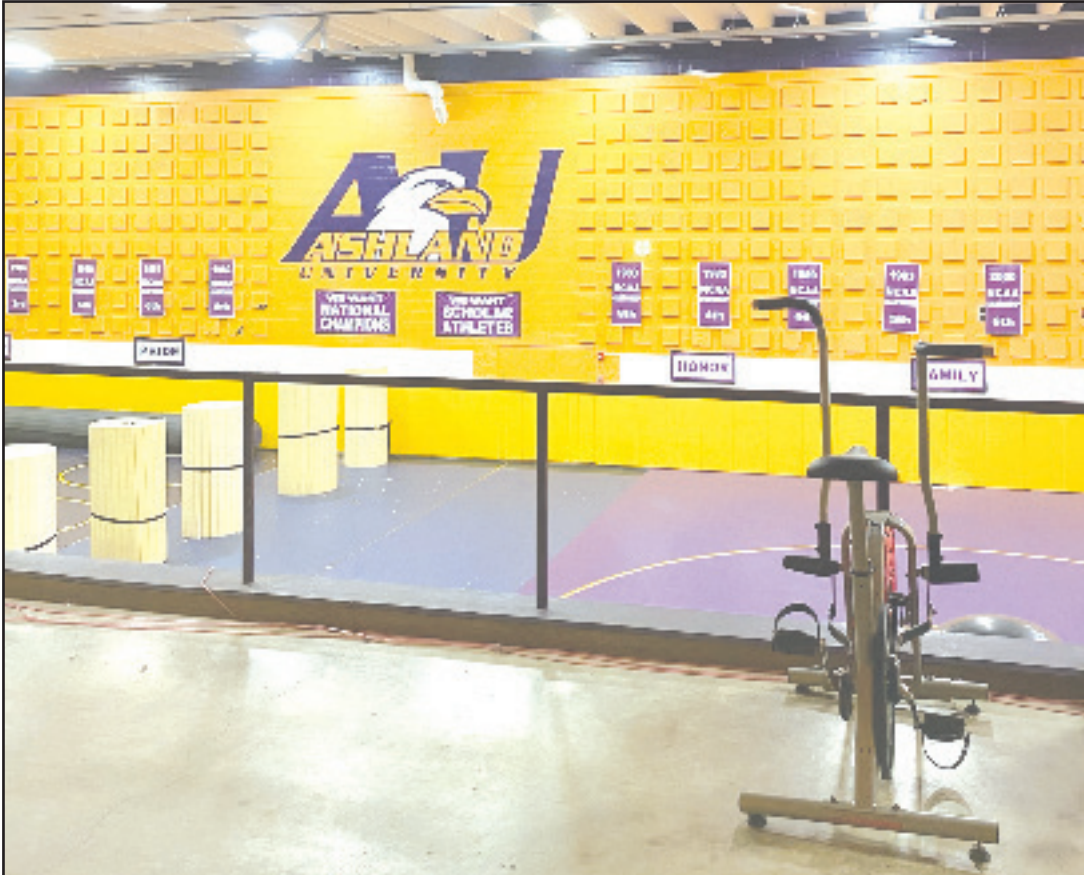
Despite knowing that internal competition might get old, King recognizes that this is all he has to give student athletes right now.

“Is it different? It is, but at least

and we have an obligation.”

It is no doubt that AU has taken a financial hit without the presence of competitive sports on campus.

While King does not know the exact total of money that the school has lost, he knows that the revenue of the six home football



Empty gyms will make for a quiet and potentially dull semester.

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