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9-15-2020

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Recommended Citation

Manning, Thomas, "GWU Track and Field Works to Salvage Season" (2020). *GWU-Today*. 602.
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GWU Track and Field works to salvage season



GWU TRACK AND FIELD WORKS TO SALVAGE SEASON

By Thomas Manning

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As the proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact daily life, college athletic teams such as Gardner-Webb University's track and field program seek to adapt to the evolving landscape. With fall sports seasons shutting down across the country, Gardner-Webb Track and Field works to stay consistent and connected with daily, socially distanced workouts.

The deadly airborne virus has reached more than 6 million cases in the United States, with the death toll currently at 190,000 people, according to the Center for Disease Control. As the Gardner-Webb's fall semester began on Aug. 19, the university enacted various methods to slow the spread of COVID-19. This includes the requirements of masks and face coverings, smaller class sizes, and the limitations of large indoor gatherings on campus. As of Sept. 11, there have been 13 confirmed positive cases of the virus at Gardner-Webb, with 71 more students in varying stages of quarantine or isolation.

GWU track and field athlete Austin Buzzard described the protocols in reacclimating to campus life after being away from school for five months of the pandemic. "When we first got here, we had to quarantine for seven days, which meant we could only go to class and get food for our first week back on campus," Buzzard said.

After that first week, the tight restrictions were loosened, but athletes have still been encouraged to be as cautious as possible around campus. This includes adhering to mask requirements and social distancing standards. Symptom screenings are held for each athlete every weekday morning. Additionally, their temperatures are monitored and pulses observed. The team is also executing modified versions of practices and workouts. “Usually, only one or two practice sessions are held each day, but now our coaches have divided us into three or four smaller groups for daily workouts on the track. In the weight room, there is a limited capacity of people at a time. We are not allowed to lift heavy weights either, because it would be impossible to have a spotter for our lifting and maintain social distancing,” Buzzard explained.



Austin Buzzard, Junior

Buzzard went on to talk about the unlikelihood of an indoor track season, which is technically a winter sport that overlaps with the fall season. Fall athletic competitions in the Big South Conference have been delayed until the spring of 2021. “I would not be surprised at all if the indoor track season is cancelled, because it just does not sound like a safe environment to partake in athletic activities,” Buzzard said.

Currently, the team has no scheduled competitive events for the rest of the calendar year.

The Big South Conference Outdoor Track and Field Championships are set to be held in mid-April 2021, pending any more potential effects of COVID-19. The Gardner-Webb Men’s Track and Field team looks to improve on its seventh-place finish at the 2020 Big South Championships, while the Gardner-Webb Women’s Track and Field squad are coming off an eighth-place finish.

The NCAA Division 1 Outdoor Track and Field Championships are slated for June 9-12, 2021, in Eugene, Oregon.