

## Age no barrier to Alonso as he expects a strong return to F1

Although Fernando Alonso will be 39 when he returns to Formula One next season with Renault he feels his reflexes and racing craft will not weaken with age.

His widely anticipated F1 return was became official on Wednesday, when the French manufacturer announced that he will replace Daniel Ricciardo next year.

Alonso won both of his world titles with Renault way back in 2005 and '06, but still looked sharp driving an uncompetitive car during his last season with

McLaren in 2018 before walking away.

"The stopwatch is the only thing that matters, not the age," he said Wednesday during a media session. "I never had a classification on the race based on the passport, my date of birth. It's always on stopwatch. Hopefully we're still fast."

That remains to be seen considering Renault struggled last season, finishing fifth in the constructors' championship and one place behind McLaren, the team it supplies engines to.

But he certainly feels in good enough

shape to take up the challenge.

"I had to start very specific fitness preparations, I started in February, so now I'm 100%," he said. "We did a couple of fitness tests 15 days ago and I had the best results ever in my career, so I'm extremely motivated, happy and stronger than ever."

However, because of rule changes teams will use the same cars for 2021 and Alonso may not have a genuinely competitive car until 2022, when he will turn 41 in late July. (AP)



In this April 24, 2019 file photo, IndyCar driver Fernando Alonso, of Spain, drives out of the pit area during testing at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Indianapolis. (AP)

# Sports Plus



## 'Heartbreaking day' - Stanford drops 11 sports to cut costs

# Ivy League suspends fall sports due to coronavirus pandemic



In this Nov 17, 2018 file photo, Harvard wide receiver Jack Cook (83) raises the ball after crossing the goal line for a touchdown against Yale during the second half of an NCAA college football game at Fenway Park in Boston. (Inset): In this Jan 2, 2019 file photo, Penn State's Bo Nickal (rear left), wrestles with Stanford's Nathan Traxler in the 197-pound championship bout of the Southern Scuffle wrestling tournament in Chattanooga, Tennessee. (AP)

By Doug Feinberg, Jimmy Golon and John Marshall

The Ivy League became the first Division I conference to suspend all fall sports, including football, leaving open the possibility of moving some seasons to the spring if the coronavirus outbreak is better controlled by then.

"We simply do not believe we can create and maintain an environment for intercollegiate athletic competition that meets our requirements for safety and acceptable levels of risk," the Ivy League Council of Presidents said in a statement.

"We are entrusted to create and maintain an educational environment that is guided by health and safety considerations. There can be no greater responsibility - and that is the basis for this difficult decision."

Though the coalition of eight academically elite schools does not grant athletic scholarships or compete for an NCAA football championship, the move could have ripple effects throughout the big

business of college sports.

It was the Ivy League's March 10 decision to scuttle its postseason basketball tournament that preceded a cascade of cancellations. All major college and professional sports were halted within days.

"What's happening in other conferences is clearly a reflection of what's happening nationally and any decisions are made within that context," said Dr. Chris Kratochvil, the chair of the Big Ten's infectious disease task force, adding that there is no "hard deadline" for a decision.

Football players in the Power Five conferences have already begun workouts for a season that starts on Aug. 29, even as their schools weigh whether to open their campuses to students or continue classes remotely.

"There are important decisions to be made in the coming weeks and by late July there should be more clarity about the fall season," Southeastern Conference commissioner Greg Sankey said.

The Ivy League announcement

affects not just football but soccer, field hockey, volleyball and cross country, as well as the fall portion of winter sports like basketball. Wednesday's decision means Harvard and Yale will not play football in 2020, interrupting a rivalry known as The Game for the first time since the two World Wars.

"This news is disappointing for all of us," Harvard athletic director Erin McDermott said. "While the Fall 2020 experience will be unlike any other, I am confident that we will find positive opportunities in this challenging time. We will keep moving forward through this painful but temporary experience, together."

The league said it has not yet determined whether some seasons can be moved to the spring. But the conference noted that its schools already are limiting gatherings, visitors and travel for students and staff.

"As athletics is expected to operate consistent with campus policies, it will not be possible for Ivy League teams to participate in

intercollegiate athletics competition prior to the end of the fall semester," the league said.

Ivy League schools are spread across seven Northeastern states that, as of mid-July, have seen some success at mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. But most of those states still ban large gatherings; under the Massachusetts reopening plan, Harvard would not be allowed to have fans in the stands until a vaccine is developed.

Harvard has already announced that all classes for both semesters will be held virtually; dorms will be open only to freshmen and seniors. Yale said it would limit its dorms to 60% capacity and said most classes would be conducted remotely. Princeton will also do most of its teaching online, with dorms at half capacity.

Meanwhile, Stanford was already facing some difficult financial choices as it tried to support one of the nation's largest athletics departments.

The coronavirus pandemic forced a dramatic and painful decision:

Faced with a nearly \$25 million deficit next year, Stanford became the first known Power Five school to eliminate athletic programs because of the pandemic, announcing that 11 of its 36 varsity sports will be shuttered next year.

The school will discontinue men's and women's fencing, field hockey, lightweight rowing, men's rowing, co-ed and women's sailing, squash, synchronized swimming, men's volleyball and wrestling after the 2020-21 academic year. Stanford also is eliminating 20 support staff positions.

"As you can imagine this has been a heartbreaking day for all of us, especially with those student-athletes and coaches involved," athletic director Bernard Muir said. "We came to this decision only after exhausting all other viable alternatives. It recently became painfully clear we would not remain financially stable and support 36 varsity sports at a nationally competitive level, which is what we desire."

The pandemic shut down sports in March, including the massive revenue-generating NCAA basketball tournaments. With no March Madness, the NCAA was short \$375 million scheduled to be distributed to its member schools, which are already facing questions about enrollment levels and tuition shortfalls.

Fall sports like football are still in question for some schools; the Ivy League, hours after Stanford's announcement, called off all fall sports. But some tough choices have already been made.

At least 171 sports programs from four-year schools have been cut since the pandemic began in the United States, according to research by The Associated Press. Of those disbanded teams, 51 are from 18 Division I schools. One conference in Division II and one in Division III suspended fall sports competitions and at least 18 small colleges across Division III and the NAIA won't compete this fall.

Stanford's decision to drop sports is likely the first of many by Power Five schools across the country.

"If it can happen at Stanford, it can happen any place," Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said. "They're the broadest, most successful program in the history of college athletics and so to see them drop a third of their program is a shocking thing."

Stanford originally projected a deficit of \$12 million for the 2021 fiscal year, a number that more than doubled as it faced fewer donations, sponsorships and ticket sales. Muir said the \$25 million deficit for 2021 would likely double if the football season is canceled.

The school projected a shortfall of nearly \$70 million over the next three years due to the pandemic and estimated it would cost more than \$200 million to sustain the 11 sports that will be cut. (AP)

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'I consider this the most challenging year ever in terms of sports writer coverage'

## Many journalists worry that less access can mean less oversight

# Games are restarting, but few reporters will be there

NEW YORK, July 9, (AP) - Many familiar pregame sights won't be back when baseball and the NBA return later this month. Managers won't exchange lineup cards at home plate and basketball lineup introductions won't feature special high fives.

There also won't be the ritual of a gaggle of reporters crowding around a manager before the game or waiting for LeBron James or Brad Stevens to emerge for interviews after an NBA game.

As US team sports prepare to resume, journalists are facing the same reckoning that their colleagues who cover politics and entertainment have encountered - coming up with new approaches despite reduced access.

"I consider this the most challenging year ever in terms of sports writer coverage," said Bob Glauber, the NFL writer for Newsday and president of the Pro Football Writers Association.

Professional leagues closed media access to locker rooms and clubhouses in early March. Even when the games restart, that access is not going to return immediately.

The NBA is the only league that will allow reporters to ask players



In this Oct 10, 2015 file photo, NBA basketball player Jeremy Lin of the Charlotte Hornets talks to media after a training session for the 2015 NBA Global Games in Shenzhen, China. (AP)

questions in the same room, and that that will be a very limited group.

The league will allow no more than 12 media members to live full-time in the Walt Disney World bubble where all the NBA players will also live and play. The reporters must quarantine for seven days after arriving. Besides covering games, the reporters will be allowed access to the postgame media room and practices. They won't be

able to see leave the resort or have visitors for as long as they stay, and the rest of the season should last about 72 days.

Reporters covering games near Orlando but not residing in the bubble can watch from the stands and will only be allowed to interview players on Zoom. The NBA's credential advisory states no more than 12 media members will be allowed

in this group, which will not attend any news conferences or practices.

Manager, coach and player interviews in baseball and the NHL will happen via Zoom, not in casual conversations in the clubhouse or the rink.

The NFL is not allowing any face-to-face interviews with players during training camp. Coaches will be available, socially distanced, depending on the team.

Journalists have seen access declining in recent years, especially as leagues and college athletic programs have taken more control of team's messaging through their team sites and channels.

Many journalists worry that less access can mean less oversight, especially with players sometimes feuding with teams and leagues about safety issues and making political statements.

"The best, most compelling stories require personal interaction and opportunities to see how the people we cover handle themselves on the job, how they act in the clubhouse or locker room and what they say when the recorder turns off," said Kerry Crowley, who covers the San Francisco Giants for the Bay Area

News Group. "I'm not confident leagues are going to restore writers' access to the level it was at before the coronavirus pandemic and I think publications, individual writers and the athletes we will all suffer because of that." Many organizations are assessing whether it is worth it to send reporters to games if locker rooms remain closed.

"Sure, we've all got phone numbers and we can text players and coaches all we want, but it's tough to replicate the one-on-one interactions in open locker rooms or on the road," said Abbey Mastracco, who covered the New Jersey Devils for Gannett's New Jersey papers.

Mastracco was hoping to chronicle the NHL's return next month, but she was a part of a wave of layoffs that hit the news industry over the past three months.

The declining access also comes at a time when the most compelling stories aren't confined to just the field.

"It would be disingenuous for coverage to ignore issues of health and race moving forward," Crowley said "I think we'll find stories will become more authentic if we as writers acknowledge that sports doesn't exist inside a bubble."