

Nobody really knows if we'll play football in 2020, but history might give us a hint

By Rick Cleveland, Mississippi Today

In answer to a question I have been asked countless times these past few weeks:



No, I have no idea whether or not there will be a 2020 college football season. Don't have a clue. John Cohen and Keith Carter don't know either, and neither does Jeremy McClain. Nobody knows right now, and if they tell you they do, they're lying.

The coaches don't know. The athletic directors don't know. The conference commissioners don't know. They are making plans and back-up plans and contingency plans for the back-up plans. One athletic director says he was on seven conference calls in one day recently.

One plan is that a miracle happens and the coronavirus pandemic slows to a point they can start on time at the end of August and early September. Another is that they would delay the season a month and play the regular season through December. Another is that they would drop non-conference games all together and play a shortened season.

That last plan would not be a first, you know. In the fall of 1918, when the U.S. was enduring not only the



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When will we see a football scene like this one at Ole Miss again? September? October? December? Next year?

Spanish flu pandemic, but also World War I, Mississippi State and Ole Miss played abbreviated seasons and Southern Miss didn't play at all. State played five games and Ole Miss four – and for the only time in history, Ole Miss and State played each other twice.

The Spanish flu, which wasn't Spanish at all, was a factor. It killed more than 6,000 Mississippians and sickened tens of thousands more. So was the war, which ended that November. State defeated Ole Miss in both "Egg Bowl" games, 34-0 at Starkville and then 13-0 at Oxford.

You will recognize the name of the Ole Miss head football coach. He

was none other than Clark Randolph "Dudy" Noble, who would return to his alma mater, State, in 1920 and later tell a sports writer, "I already know what hell is like. I once coached at Ole Miss." Yes, and Noble once owned a bird dog, a lazy mutt that wouldn't hunt, so Noble named him "Mr. Ole Miss."

But let's get back to 2020 and the business at hand, which is that everything is up in the air, in sports as in just about every aspect of life. March Madness was a victim of the virus and so was the college baseball season and all other spring sports. Revenue is down across the board. Athletic directors are trying to figure out how to get by with

less money – and that's before we even get to football, which produces the most revenue and is very much in question.

If they do play football, do they play to limited crowds or no crowds at all? If they delay the season and start late, how does that affect the bowl schedule and the playoffs?

Still another scenario being discussed is playing college football into the spring. How would that work? Would we have baseball/football doubleheaders?

Or will we even have reached the point where we can play the games next spring? Nobody knows.

One possibly good result of all this, in

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