

Interview With Josh Krulewitz, ESPN Vice President, Communications

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ESPN Vice President of Communications Josh Krulewitz started his ESPN career immediately after graduating from the University of Connecticut in 1992. Krulewitz was a 2008 Katha Quinn Award recipient for the service he provided to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association media members. He is also a member of the V Foundation Committee. The V Foundation is a foundation dedicated to the fight against cancer, and it honors the life of former National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Championship men's basketball coach and ESPN commentator Jim Valvano, who lost his life to cancer. Krulewitz has held his current position since 2006. He is ESPN's point person when it comes to communication issues related to studio programming and personnel. Krulewitz's work with studio programming communications includes media inquiries tied to everything from news programs, like SportsCenter, to special events, like the National Football League (NFL) draft. His work touches a tremendous number of the ESPN and ABC sport properties, including hundreds of annual college sport events, ESPN's broadcasts, sport news programs, and issues related to ESPN News. Krulewitz's communications work with personnel keeps him busy handling media inquiries tied to ESPN administrators, like President Jimmy Pitaro, as well as on-air talents, like Scott Van Pelt and John Anderson.

Hanna: When did you start planning for COVID-19 and its impact on ESPN programming?

Krulewitz: If you look at what we do for (NCAA Basketball) Championship Week in mid-March every year, the jigsaw puzzle that is Championship Week is one of the most elaborate programming things we do because there are so many different rights holders piecing together games all day long. So contingency planning had already been discussed, as news of the virus and the impact of the virus was starting to spread. We saw some things with events considering cancellation, postponement, different rules—so we had already begun some contingency planning conversations prior to the NBA postponement.

Hanna: How did the NBA postponement change things?

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Krulewitz: We were on the air, obviously, doing NBA games. Clearly, that was an enormous tipping point. We had already begun planning, but when that moment happened, it takes things into a much higher gear, and you are immediately sitting down, saying we have so many different live events that are on our air over the course of all of our platforms over the course of a given week—particularly in this busy time of the sports season. That immediately shifted the contingency planning to a much faster overdrive, and we had to plan for the most extreme scenarios, including what if there are no live sports at all from an events standpoint. Quickly, we realized that is what is going to be the most likely scenario. We had a programming war room that next day, including people for each sport category interacting with the rights holder and league to figure out what their plans were, what their thoughts were, and what potential contingency plans we can come up with in the event there were not any live games for an indefinite period of time—and that’s what obviously has come to pass.

Hanna: Was there ever a mood of panic caused by the substantial nature of the changes?

Krulewitz: I would describe it more as a focused effort of heightened importance to figure out what we were going to do. I don’t think there was ever a moment of panic. I think, obviously, concern might be a better word, given what sport fans look to us for each day and given the importance of live events and sports to our culture and to ESPN. Of course, it should go without saying, but everyone’s health and well-being is our first area of concern—including that of our own employees. So that was the immediate focus of everybody: How can we best protect the health and safety of our workforce? As people are trying to navigate through the changing sports decisions from a professional standpoint, they are also dealing with school closures and relatives and mitigating their personal risk.

Hanna: Does ESPN play a role in the national morale during times like these?

Krulewitz: I think it is a fair consideration. It is not something necessarily that we sit around and strategize about in those terms, but I think it is a residue of what we do, and we are proud of that. We have a mission to serve sports fans wherever they are and whatever sports they are consuming—that is sort of our basic mission of the