



# USA TODAY SPORTS WEEKLY

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## NFL

Offseason reports:  
Steelers, Rams, Bills, Eagles

## MLB

10 must-see series  
in abbreviated season

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## Send us feedback

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## Corrections & Clarifications

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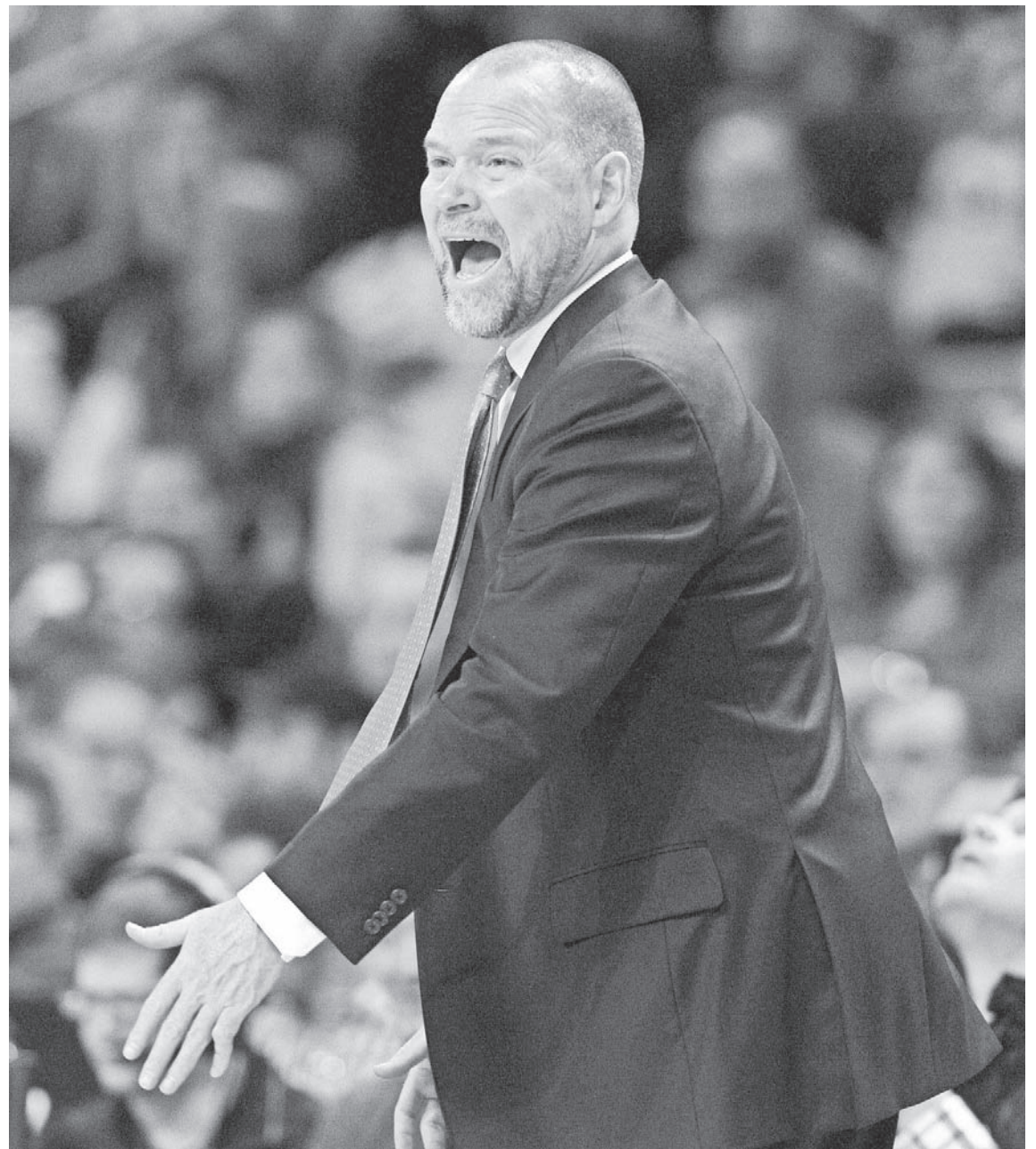
Redskins owner Dan Snyder.  
SUSAN WALSH/AP

## Cover credits

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## College football preview

Our blockbuster 64-page special edition sizes up every Football Bowl Subdivision team, projects its record and includes schedules for FBS and FCS teams. Plus, an insider's take on Notre Dame's golden chance at an elusive title, Penn State's dynamic linebacker Micah Parsons and Oregon's push back to the national stage. Also, Ohio State's faith in Justin Fields and Alabama's faith in its system and Clemson's Trevor Lawrence seeks a storybook ending to his college career. Also, coaches on the hot seat and Heisman watch. Available on newsstands or online at [sportsspecials.usatoday.com](http://sportsspecials.usatoday.com).



**'Do I think it's worth it?'**

Nuggets coach Mike Malone and the NBA are getting ready to resume the season in Florida as the state deals with rising COVID-19 cases.  
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# Venues game-plan for safe fan visit

**Joe Mock**

Special to USA TODAY

After closing for three months due to COVID-19, the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, reopened June 26.

This action was made possible because the Mohawk Valley region of the state had entered Phase Four of the Phased Re-opening Plan. Further, the Hall announced that guests would be required to follow a strict nine-step safety procedure (including limited capacity, timed entry and mandatory masks), as developed in accordance with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and New York State and approved by a certified Industrial Hygiene Technician.

Is this what plans will look like when college and pro teams start permitting fans to attend games once again? If so, venue operators have many issues to address.

"We all have more questions than answers," observes Matt Wells, Senior Associate Athletics Director for West Virginia University.

While Major League Baseball and the NBA intend to play in empty facilities initially, team owners, players and fans hope that situation will be temporary. Much research is underway on procedures that will need to be in place once fans return.

## Looking backward

For the past 17 years, Nick Sunderhaus has been a national security consultant for federal agencies. When sports teams are formulating their protocols for the return of fans, he advises them to "look backwards" as they think in security terms.

"Flash back to 9/11," he explains. "After that, you had to go through TSA (checkpoints) at the airport. So now if you want to fly, you know what you need to do. You know the framework. So post-COVID, when fans want to go to a game, they will need to learn what they need to do.



Fans should expect strict procedures in place to avoid crowds at stadium entrances, concession stands and restrooms.

GARY A. VASQUEZ/USA TODAY SPORTS

"With this pandemic, across all industries there's a security framework," he adds. "In sports, we're developing a framework the teams can rely on as they adapt the approach needed in their location.

"In security, you're always trying to control the environment – the access points, the seating, the safety. That's the sports industry, too."

## Lessons from NASCAR

When NASCAR restarted its season on May 17, the sport's governing body decided to admit a limited number of fans to the races at Homestead and Tal-

ladelphia, since those jurisdictions permitted it.

Guests were given a health questionnaire and a non-contact temperature check before entry. They were required to wear masks and remain socially distanced while visiting concession and merchandise stands. At Homestead, military and first responders were given priority for admittance, while at Talladega, only those who lived within 150 miles were permitted to purchase tickets.

## A road map of the issues

Gensler is a global architecture and design firm with an ac-

tive sports-facilities practice. They've devised a set of guidelines for their collegiate and pro-team clients to consider as they prepare to usher fans back into their venues.

According to Ron Turner, Sports Practice Area Leader for the firm, the key is to create "healthy and safe environments for athletes as well as fun and secure experiences for fans." To accomplish this, Gensler recommends focusing on eight areas:

**1. Parking and tailgating:** Distancing in parking lots will likely be required, which will be easier if seating capacities are limited. At the two NASCAR

events with fans, parking spaces were more than 6 feet apart and tailgating was prohibited, even after the races.

**2. Entrance sequence:** "The biggest pressure point is at the gates themselves," says Jonathan Emmett, Design Director of Sports Facilities for Gensler. He adds that if fans feel safe here, "that's going to give them a great sense of confidence once they get inside."

Important factors are making sure there's appropriate spacing between fans in line, that security procedures like metal detectors are efficient and that the presentation of the ticket is "contactless."



Fans used hand sanitizer as they entered Staples Center for an NBA game March 1 between the Clippers and the 76ers. JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/USA TODAY SPORTS

West Virginia has already informed fans that there will be no paper tickets for the upcoming football season. It will be “a fully mobile-ticketing environment,” explains Wells. “When the decision was made to go to a contactless entry, it necessitated the elimination of all other ticket-delivery options.”

While a total switch to virtual tickets on cellphones had been a long-term goal at WVU, “the pandemic absolutely hastened its adoption,” he adds.

**3. Concessions:** Relying on technology like ordering and paying on a phone from your seat will be critical to avoiding crowds at concession stands. Emmett points out that this will actually improve the fan experience, as “people aren’t going to miss waiting in line.”

**4. Restrooms:** It might seem

like a simple matter, but Emmett feels restrooms present one of the biggest challenges to social distancing. Keys will include one-way directional flow, touchless fixtures and limiting the number of guests allowed in the restroom at one time.

**5. Seating bowl:** Assuming teams won’t be permitted to play in front of full venues initially, the question becomes how to allocate and then enforce the limited seating arrangement.

Pendulum Studio, an architecture firm specializing in civic structures, particularly for baseball, started generating creative solutions to this thorny issue soon after the pandemic started. “Savvy operators will take a ‘glass half full’ approach to reduced capacity by looking at potential sponsorship oppor-

tunities at removed or covered seats,” says Principal Jonathan Cole.

“Also, the operations staff at the venue must be both robust and alert, enforcing that guests must sit only in their assigned seats.” Fans will quickly learn to follow the rules or face ejection.

**6. Team spaces:** As college football players are returning to campus, schools are carefully implementing procedures to keep the young men safe. “Our head of sports medicine and our chief physician have been involved in every step,” notes Drew Martin, the Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director at the University of Texas at Austin. Plans call for “initial testing, monitoring and sanitizing equipment, weight rooms and anything the student athletes come in contact with.

## Cardinals step in as ‘Field of Dreams’ subs

**Tommy Birch**

The Des Moines (Iowa) Register

A Major League Baseball game is still scheduled at the “Field of Dreams” movie site in 2020.

But the New York Yankees won’t be coming to Iowa to play in it.

Instead, the St. Louis Cardinals will play the Chicago White Sox in the Aug. 13 game near the iconic Dyersville diamond, a source within MLB confirmed to The Register last week. Chicago-area baseball reporter Bruce Levine was first to report the news.

MLB is continuing with the originally scheduled date and is still hoping to get the game in.

It’s a big change for the big game, which is being played in a specially constructed 8,000-seat stadium where the 1989 movie was filmed.

The Yankees and White Sox were originally set to play, but with the coronavirus pandemic shortening the regular-season schedule to 60 games and limiting play to divisional opponents in each league, a matchup between the White Sox and Yankees was no longer possible.

“You can put a plan in place, but then you see how the people are abiding by the plan and you make the necessary adjustments,” he adds.

**7. Building operations:** Historically, venue operators have kept cleaning crews out of the sight of the fans. Emmett suggests that fans “need to see the presence of the cleaning staffs, even during games. Cleanliness and sanitization are what we need to focus on as an industry.”

**8. Signage and way finding:** Watch for venues to rely heavily on signage – particularly digital signs that can be changed on the fly – to direct traffic flow on concourses and through restrooms.

The White Sox’s involvement in the matchup is a key part of the game and the movie about an Iowa farmer, played by Kevin Costner, who plowed over his corn to build a baseball field.

Costner’s character builds the field to help bring back the spirit of White Sox outfielder Joe Jackson, who, along with seven other members of the 1919 team, was banned from baseball for throwing the World Series.

The new Dyersville park, which has been under construction since shortly after last year’s announcement of the game, will include a pathway through a cornfield to take fans to the ballpark, which will overlook the famous movie location.

The right-field wall will include windows to show the cornfields beyond the ballpark.

Aspects of the park’s design are also planned to pay homage to Chicago’s original Comiskey Park, including the shape of the outfield and bullpens beyond the center-field fence.

Fox is to broadcast the game, which is slated for 6 p.m. on a Thursday.

Teams communicating directly with their fan bases is central to the success of transitioning fans back to arenas and stadiums. “This is what protects the integrity of the (sports) industry,” says Sunderhaus. “It’s what instills the sense of security and safety in the fans when they return.”

Sharing best practices is also critical. “This whole process has been so collaborative,” notes Martin. “As competitive as sports are, we’re all talking with each other and relying on each other as we seek out the best ideas. If we aren’t all pulling together, sports won’t happen.”

*Mock covers sports facilities for USA TODAY publications.*