

EDITOR'S PICK

New stadium policy in place for Wisconsin Badgers homecoming football game Saturday

ABIGAIL BECKER | The Capital Times | abecker@madison.com | @abecker_4 Nov 10, 2016



STEVE APPS, STATE JOURNAL

UW Athletics announced changes to its stadium policies in effect for the next Badger home football game Saturday.

Effective in time for the homecoming football game at Camp Randall Stadium this Saturday, the UW Athletics Department has specifically banned nooses and ropes at sporting events, equating them as "weapons" that "constitute a threat to safety."

Fans could also be kicked out of games for behavior that could "provoke a disturbance or incite violence" under the policy change.

"What happened at Camp Randall two weeks ago goes against everything we stand for," Wisconsin director of athletics Barry Alvarez said in a statement Wednesday. "It is great to be able to talk, and even more satisfying that we took action."

However, some are questioning whether this action is enough. The Black Liberation Action Coalition, a group of community members and students formed in 2015, is organizing a protest on Bascom Hill Friday from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

"We know that the lynching at Camp Randall, along with many other incidents that have occurred at UW, are acts of violence and warrant more than a superficial statement and/or initiative from administration," the online event description reads.

Marquise Mays, president of UW-Madison's Black Student Union, was frustrated by the university's initial "reactionary" measures to the incident and said he felt the administration is not actively promoting a diverse climate.

"I feel like UW-Madison is very worried about their brand and image instead of worrying about their students," Mays said.

The new standards follow controversy over a fan who wore a mask of President Barack Obama with a noose around his neck at an Oct. 29 football game at Camp Randall. Outrage over the costume and how the university handled the incident followed, motivating community leaders to speak out and call for change.

Alvarez said in the statement "productive" meetings in a "collaborative spirit" between athletics officials and community leaders led to the changes.

Michael Johnson, Dane County Boys and Girls Club CEO, said he applauds Alvarez for addressing the issue quickly and for working with a wide group of students and community leaders on crafting the policy change.

"I've worked with the university, and I've never seen anything move this quickly," Johnson said.

Johnson said he, Alvarez and other community leaders would announce the new policy at Saturday's game. Additionally, he said the new policy would be printed on tickets and signs outside of entrances to Camp Randall.

"We don't want any form of discrimination or hateful statements to deter people from coming to our games," Johnson said.

Any spectators carrying a prohibited item may be refused entry or ejected from the game. Under the new rules, the controversial costumed fans would have been ejected instead of simply asked to remove the noose.

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More broadly, the rules specify that "racist and other offensive behavior is not appropriate for our venues" and anyone who engages in "violent, threatening, abusive or otherwise disorderly conduct" will be ejected.

"Threats include statements, actions and behaviors that could reasonably be foreseen as having a purpose to inflict physical harm, even if the person making the threat doesn't have the ability to carry out the threat," the statement reads.

Chancellor Rebecca Blank and other UW-Madison administrators faced a backlash for initially pointing out that the fans at the Oct. 27 game were exercising their free speech rights. Since then, Blank said the university has revoked the season tickets of the two people involved, the Wisconsin State Journal reported.

"This policy change is an important step in ensuring that our sporting events are free from offensive conduct that has the potential to create a disturbance," Chancellor Rebecca Blank said.

Justin Doherty, senior associate athletic director, said the new policy will be enforced by athletic department staff and those the department hires and collaborates with, including stadium security, police and guest services.

"Security personnel have always been tasked with keeping a close eye on fan behavior, and they will be so tasked going forward as well," Doherty said.

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Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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