

Regents to consider allowing alcohol sales at Husker football and volleyball games next fall

Written by Andrew Ozaki

LINCOLN, Neb. — More alcohol sales could be coming to Nebraska athletic events, including sipping a beer or wine cooler at a home football game in Memorial Stadium or a volleyball match at the Bob Devaney Sports Complex beginning next fall.

At its board meeting on Oct. 4, the University of Nebraska Regents will consider allowing alcohol sales and consumption at all University of Nebraska athletic events.

It's something board chairman Rob Schafer supports.

"I've said all along that I believe in treating adults like adults, and that's what we're doing here. And more importantly, though, Nebraska fans have proven that they can act like adults while having an adult beverage at a game," Schafer said.

Nebraska already allows booze at its basketball, baseball and softball games.

"We've had very little if any, incidents at all regarding alcohol at the different venues," Schafer said.

He said it's a natural progression fans want to see, and it comes at the right time.

"Because we're actually going to be moving forward with the stadium renovation, and with that is a plan to update and renovate the concessions and the restrooms and the concourses and so forth," Schafer said.

Nearly 80 % of Power Five football programs allow alcohol sales at games, including all Big Ten schools except Nebraska.

"Oh, I think it's a great money-maker for the university. I mean, you're not going to draw more people in, but it'll definitely make a lot more money," said downtown Lincoln barbershop owner Ryan Amen.

Customer Jason Powell believes it's a smart move.

"Like, they drink before the games, so what's the difference," Powell said. "People are going to drink, they're going to drink either way.

But Project Extra Mile believes it would lead to an increase in under-aged binge drinking and impaired driving.

In a statement, executive director Chris Wagner said "The University's football and volleyball teams have a level of fan support that is truly unparalleled in college sports. We don't need to add alcohol to sell tickets – that's absolutely clear."

Two years ago, former head football coach Tom Osborne told KETV Newswatch 7, "I've always felt that when you throw alcohol into the mix, it changes the nature of the audience. And we've always treated people well at our athletic events. We've always (welcomed) kids and families."

That also has Henry Wellensiek concerned.

"I think it will help with revenue for the school in general, but I think that it comes at a cost of getting rowdy," Wellensiek said.

The plan includes spending part of the revenue on alcohol safety programs.

NU President Dr. Jeffrey Gold said in a statement, "The University of Nebraska has put a great deal of thought and care into how we approach alcohol at our athletic events. I'm very pleased that we have shown we can do this safely, responsibly and in a way that makes sense for our fans, our student-athletes and the institution as a whole. This is the next step as we consider how best to meet our fans' expectations, carefully monitor safety, and at the same time bring Nebraska in line with our peers in today's changing college athletics landscape."

Schafer agrees.

"We're going to do it in a responsible fashion, and we're going to pay attention to what's going on, and we're going to put measures in place to make sure that we try to minimize anything that could go wrong," Schafer said.