

Woelk: Pac-10 move no longer mere rumor

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Boulder Daily Camera

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What has been mostly idle chatter and rumor for years has suddenly grown the legs of distinct possibility.

Don't be surprised if Colorado is a member of the Pac-10 sometime within the next three years. The winds of change are simply too strong to believe it won't happen.

I'm almost ready to bet it will.

Earlier this week, Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said his conference is actively studying the possibility of expansion. Scott made those statements Tuesday during a teleconference that also included his new deputy commissioner, Kevin Weiberg.

That's a wonderful coincidence. Weiberg, the former commissioner of the Big 12, is quite familiar with what Colorado would bring to the table as a conference member.

It's not the first time CU has been connected to the Pac-10. In fact, Colorado came very close to joining the conference in 1994, the same time that CU and Texas were spearheading the formation of the Big 12.

Close enough, anyway, that a Pac-10 invitation was brought to a vote before the CU Board of Regents. By the narrowest of margins -- a 5-4 decision -- the regents voted to stay with the plans of forming the Big 12.

But ever since, CU has cast the occasional longing eye at the Pac-10, and the conference has reciprocated.

Those longing eyes appear ready to develop into a relationship.

Understand that Colorado is by no means unhappy with its current position in the Big 12. It's a lucrative situation for CU, and athletic director Mike Bohn will be the first to say CU has benefited greatly from its membership. And, Bohn has repeatedly said no official contact has been made.

But it also might be time for a change -- and as I've written here before, a Colorado move to the Pac-10 makes too much sense to ignore:

CU's largest and strongest out-of-state alumni base resides on the West Coast. A move to the Pac-10 would greatly enhance CU's visibility there, and thus increase the school's fundraising capabilities among an alumni base waiting to be courted. It's a marketing bonanza begging to be fully tapped.

Colorado's academic standards are much more in line with those of the Pac-10 than the Big 12. I've said for years that CU somehow needs to level the playing field in that regard. A move to the Pac-10 would be a huge step in that direction.

From a competitive financial standpoint, CU is a much better fit with the Pac-10. What's becoming increasingly clear is that the Big 12 is turning into an arms race for the mega-rich. Forbes Magazine's recent list of the 20 most valuable football programs in America included five Big 12 teams. Only one from the Pac-10 -- Southern Cal -- made the list. Colorado fits the Pac-10 profile in that regard.

Big 12 schools "sell" their schools via facilities. Bigger locker rooms, stadium scoreboards, indoor practice facilities -- wherever money can be spent in order to gloss over less-than-ideal locations. ("Welcome to Lincoln. That's not the end of the world out there ... it just looks like it. Hey, want to see our weight room?")

Pac-10 schools are more inclined to sell the campus, the location and academics. Again, CU fits the Pac-10 profile.

Ask yourself this: Seattle or Stillwater? Tempe or Ames? Los Angeles or Lincoln? Tucson or Waco? Bay Area or College

Station?

`Nuff said.

In return, the Pac-10 would be gaining a valuable -- and growing -- television market.

The conference is studying expansion because it's in the process of renegotiating its television contract. It's also possible that the conference may consider starting its own network. Weiberg played a major role in helping the Big Ten do exactly that; there's no doubt he'll be studying the feasibility of a similar venture in Pac-10 territory.

The addition of the Colorado television market would be a huge boost to either a new television contract or a conference network. Utah -- the other school mentioned most prominently with Pac-10 expansion -- would give the conference a virtual Western monopoly from a television standpoint.

Meanwhile, that new television contract could make it a financially viable move for CU. Currently, the Big 12's annual payout is substantially more than the Pac-10's. But a new TV deal might greatly reduce that difference. A substantial increase in West Coast fundraising might also help close that gap.

The nuts and bolts of such a move would be complicated. Big 12 bylaws require institutions to give a two-year notice of withdrawal. The bylaws also say the school that withdraws could lose up to 50 percent of its conference revenue.

Those are financial implications that CU would have to strongly consider.

Still, the feeling here is that a move to the Pac-10 would be the smart move for Colorado in the long run.

My guess is that there are plenty of others who see it the same way -- and it's now much closer to reality than rumor.

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Big move for CU? Pac-10 considering expansion

Denver Post staff & wire reports

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Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott said Tuesday the window for conference expansion is open for the next year as the Pac-10 begins negotiations for a new television deal.

Scott said there have been "no serious discussions" with any schools, but Colorado and Utah have been speculated upon previously as possibilities.

Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said Tuesday that CU has not been contacted by the Pac-10 regarding possible expansion.

Bohn declined to say whether or not Colorado might consider moving to another conference.

"There's so much speculation about what the Pac-10 and other conferences might do, and any type of comment would only fuel that speculation," Bohn said. "We are a proud member of the Big 12 Conference, and we're focused on doing everything we can to be competitive in the

Big 12."

Scott, the former head of the Women's Tennis Association, took over the conference last July. In his less than eight months on the job, he has seen growing interest from the membership over the possibility of adding teams for the first time since Arizona and Arizona State joined the conference in 1978.

"It is really over the next six to 12 months that we'll start having serious analysis and serious evaluations," Scott said.

While there has been major upheaval in conference alignments in recent years, the Pac-10 has remained stable for more than three decades. But with a new commissioner and television deals that expire following the 2011-12 academic year, the time is ripe for a fresh look at the issue.

"To me, the logic if the Pac-10 is going to think about expanding, now is our window," Scott said. "The reason being if you're going to consider a reconstruction of the conference, there's a value proposition associated with that. Given that we're about to have negotiations regarding our media rights, it makes sense that if you're going to do it, to do it when you can monetize it and get value from it commercially." The Pac-10 isn't the only major conference looking at expansion.

The Big Ten said in December that it would explore the possibility of adding a 12th team in the next 12 to 18 months. The SEC, ACC and Big

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THE DENVER POST

12 already have 12 schools, while the Big East has 16 teams for basketball and eight for football.

Scott said there have been "no serious discussions" with any schools. He said the primary factor in the decision will be finding schools that fit into the conference culturally and academically.

"I know that's of paramount importance to our presidents and chancellors," Scott said. "There are other economic and athletic considerations such as increased costs that would be involved, increased travel that would be involved, splitting the pie in more ways. You look at how that is offset against potentially greater revenue, potentially greater exposure into more markets, possible recruiting opportunities, the impact on media negotiations generally. There's a whole analysis you would go through in terms of cost benefit." The conference is also looking at the possibility of starting its own television network. Scott said the priority in the new television deal will be to increase exposure and revenues.

"I always knew that there's a lot of interest in the possibility in a network," he said. "But that's not the only solution to achieve our overall goals." Scott said the conference will undergo a rigorous evaluation of whether to launch a network in the upcoming months. Weiberg, who helped launch the Big Ten network, will play a big role in that process.

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Expansion would boost Pac-10 but leave wake of disruption

Feb. 10, 2010

By **Dennis Dodd**

CBSSports.com Senior Writer

[Tell Dennis your opinion!](#)

Feel the ground shifting, college football? It should be shaking under your feet by now. In fact, it might be a good idea to head to the nearest doorway to avoid falling debris.



Dan Hawkins and the Colorado Buffaloes of the Big 12 are prime candidates to join the Pac-10 Conference. (US Presswire)

Caused by crumbling conferences.

It seems the game, as we know it, is in for another round of expansion earthquakes. With Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott's announcement this week that, "we're looking at [expansion] very seriously," it's clear upheaval is on the horizon again. The Big Ten already is two months into exploring the addition of a 12th team (at least).

It's only been five years since the ACC ripped apart major college athletics when it expanded. But this is bigger. Not since expansion by the SEC and Big 12 in the 90s could the whims of two power conferences impact the sport as much.

Domino effect? By the beginning of the 2011 season, the Big 12 might be looking for two new members. It's still early in the process, but it looks like Missouri (to the Big Ten) and Colorado (to the Pac-10) are prime candidates to leave the Big 12.

"For this round, I think we can expect the Big Ten probably will go to 12 and it sounds like the Pac-10 will go to 12, or at least take a long look at it," said Neal Pilson, a noted sports television consultant and former president of CBS Sports.

That's only the beginning of the process. Such a loss would cause the 14-year-old Big 12 to look for new members from other vulnerable conferences. And so on, and so on down the institutional food chain. When the ACC expanded in 2005, the aftershocks reached all the way down to the Mid-American Conference.

Whatever happens, if the Big Ten and Pac-10 expand and each add championship games, we could officially welcome in the era of the super-conference. Five of the current six BCS leagues would each have 12 teams (at least).

When it all shakes out, the BCS could be a side issue. The real concern would be the consolidation of power and money by a group of elite schools *within* the BCS.

For now, here's the fallout both short and long-term:

How we got here: The SEC and Big Ten drove the latest round of potential conference expansions with their most recent media deals. In July, the SEC finalized a 15-year, \$3 billion deal with ESPN and CBS. The 2½-year-old Big Ten Network was part of a 25-year, \$2.8 million deal in partnership with DirecTV and FOX. There is another 10-year deal with ESPN for \$1 billion.

No other conference measures up.

It was more than notable that on Monday, Pac-10 commissioner Larry Scott hired former Big Ten deputy commissioner and Big 12 commissioner Kevin Weiberg as the Pac-10's chief operating officer. Weiberg spent a decade working with Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany and after eight years with the Big 12, he returned in 2007 to oversee the Big Ten Network start-up.

Analysis



Ray Ratto

The Pac-10 is pondering expansion? No matter which conferences are bitten, it will get messy. [Read more](#)

At the Pac-10, Weiberg will be trying to maximize the Pac-10's TV revenue through a better television package and/or expansion. Having worked for Delany, arguably the most powerful man in college sports, he knows where Big Ten expansion is headed.

"Very rarely does Jim engage in something like this [expansion] without it

Link

Dodd: [More expansion: A proposed new look Pac-10 to look into expansion possibilities](#)

being significant," Weiberg said. "My take is this is a very serious thing."

The most lucrative deal in college sports history puts the SEC in a dominant position, both financially and athletically. As the TV contracts now stand, annual SEC football doormat Vanderbilt makes \$7 million more a year than Big 12 power Texas (\$7 million-\$10 million).

In a down economy, the have nots have to do *something*. It is no coincidence that SEC schools have won the last four consecutive BCS title games.

What it means for everyone else: Playing catch up. The Pac-10's TV deals expire after the 2011-2012 season and it will be in negotiations for a new deal within a year. There has been speculation about a possible Pac-10 network (possibly in partnership with the Big 12 and/or ACC) as well as that expanded league featuring a championship game.

The Big 12's deals are staggered. The current \$480 million agreement with ABC/ESPN goes through 2016. A separate \$78 million deal with FOX goes through 2012. Missouri has been publicly critical of the Big 12's unequal revenue distribution. More ominous for the Big 12, Missouri said it would be receptive to interest from the Big Ten. Syracuse, Pittsburgh and Rutgers also remain possibilities for the Big Ten.

This is the latest round of change brought on by the landmark Supreme Court decision in 1984 that allowed individual conferences (and teams) to negotiate TV contracts on their own.

The shuffling essentially began in 1990 when Notre Dame left the old College Football Association to negotiate its own TV deal. Former SEC commissioner Roy Kramer discovered a loophole in the NCAA rules that allowed his league to invite Arkansas and South Carolina, expand to 12 teams and stage a championship game beginning in 1992.

That move nudged the Southwest Conference and Big Eight to begin talks in the mid-1990s. Apart, the two leagues could not exist financially. The SWC brand already had been damaged by repeated NCAA problems. The Big Eight took in four SWC schools (Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Baylor) to create the Big 12 beginning in 1996.

The Big 12 became the second conference with a championship game. The first contract, \$100 million with ABC and Liberty Media, seems puny by today's standards.

The BCS formed in 1998, further consolidating the earning power of the six power conferences. In subsequent years, the WAC, MAC, Conference USA and ACC added championship games with varying degrees of success. The Mountain West created its own network (The Mtn.) in September of 2006.

Toward the end of his tenure as Big 12 commissioner (1998-2007), Weiberg was a proponent of a Big 12 network, but the subject never got traction within the league.

A network was, "almost overly complicated," to consider but, "strategically for the Big 12, it had value," Weiberg said.

Maybe that's why the Big Ten has the most successful collegiate network. It is in 73 million homes, taking advantage of a "footprint" that includes a quarter of the country's population in the Big Ten region.

"To do a conference network, you really need a success story and you have that with the Big Ten," Pilson said, "which is the most logical conference to start a network given the states they're in and population."

That record SEC deal came together shortly before the economy tanked. Short of a college football playoff (see below), re-positioning itself within the marketplace (expansion, networks, etc.) is the best way for a conference to add value.

However, Pilson warns there is a limit to the rights fees for the 66 schools in the BCS.

"There is a finite number that the networks can pay for college football," Pilson said. "Frankly, television can probably do a nice television package with 30 BCS schools, not 60.

"I think the magic number is probably 30 or 40. The colleges better be careful that they don't get what they're asking for, [which] is complete freedom to make TV deals because TV is basically interested in the big schools. I'm talking about the bigger schools within the big conferences."

How expansion impacts a college football playoff: The Pac-10 and Big Ten are two traditionally conservative leagues tied to the Rose Bowl. The conferences and a bowl are all adamantly opposed to a playoff. With each conference potentially playing a championship game -- a huge step in itself -- it's hard envisioning those conference presidents signing off on a playoff that could expand the season even further.

Short answer: Super conferences are bad for you playoff proponents.

How it will shake out: It's way early but, as mentioned, Missouri to the Big Ten and Colorado to the Pac-10 seem to be the early favorites. Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe already has indicated there wasn't much the conference to do to deter a team from leaving.

That still leaves the Pac-10 with one more team to add, but first, let's eliminate Texas and Notre Dame from the equation. Either school would be a slam dunk for the Big Ten -- if they were interested. But multiple sources say that Notre Dame is committed to its independent status.

Texas was mentioned in the 1990s as a possible Pac-10 addition before the Big 12 was formed. The geographic limitations still exist -- Texas isn't contiguous to any state with a Big Ten or Pac-10 school. Plus, the Big Ten shares its revenue equally. One reason Missouri favors the Big Ten is the Big 12's unbalanced revenue sharing formula. It's also a big reason Texas would favor staying in the Big 12 because as it is on TV more often, Texas makes significantly more than, say, Baylor.

In the Pac-10, Utah, BYU and San Diego State have been mentioned along with Colorado. Both Utah and BYU could deliver the Salt Lake City market. San Diego State is struggling mightily in football but bringing the Pac-10 to the market would create a seamless coverage area for the conference from Seattle to the Mexican border.

Neither Fresno State nor Boise State has the market or earning power of the other four schools to be considered in the Pac-10.

The Big East has been nervous about the loss of any combination of Syracuse/Pittsburgh/Rutgers to the Big Ten. It might be easy to rule out Pittsburgh because the conference already has a presence in Pennsylvania with Penn State. Pilson isn't the only one who says neither Syracuse nor Rutgers deliver the New York market for the Big Ten.

The Big East has financial penalties in place for schools that would leave the conference. However, those are meant more to bolster the existing schools financially than to keep a school from leaving.

That leaves Missouri, in a state that shares a border with Iowa and Illinois, homes of Big Ten schools. In addition, it has been rather public about its academic profile being more of a match for the Big Ten the Big 12. That fact wasn't lost on Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon.

"I'm not going to say anything bad about the Big 12," Nixon was quoted as saying in December, "but when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, I mean, you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at."

That comment could add some rancor to the next Big 12 meeting. There are already tremors rippling through the sport. Have your feet firmly planted. Whether it's the meeting room or the sideline, the ground is about to shake.

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